‘...you too have power over me’: Oppression in the Life and Work of Charlotte Brontë

Annette McLaren

The University of Western Sydney

2011

A thesis presented to the University of Western Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

© Annette McLaren 2011
Dedicated, with love and respect, to my parents - Stan and Melba Porter.
Acknowledgements

I have been fortunate to benefit from the invaluable guidance, patience and support of two principal supervisors. Firstly, Associate Professor Fran De Groen who graciously accommodated the impact of my work life on my research and the writing of this thesis by sacrificing many weekends to meet with me and help me work through my research and writing.

Secondly, I extend great thanks and appreciation to Professor Leon Cantrell who, as my second principal supervisor, helped me achieve a state of clarity and finally complete this thesis.
Amelia Melcher
(Signature)

The work presented in this thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief.

[Signature]
Contents

Chapter One – 1
‘...here I lay again, crushed and trodden on...’: The concept of oppression

Chapter Two – 21
‘...calm comfort and modest hope’: The life of Charlotte Brontë

Chapter Three - 89
‘a picture of passion!’ Oppression, indoctrination, escape and capitulation in Jane Eyre

(i) Rochester as a victim of oppression 90
(ii) The power of Reason and Passion 97
(iii) Positioned for oppression 99
(iv) Charlotte’s own indoctrination 114
(v) Jane’s social boundaries 116
(vi) Educated into a role of oppression 121
(vii) The gaze of society 125
(viii) Female sexuality and limited power 129
(ix) The female collective 137
(x) St John’s drive for power 142

Chapter Four – 152
‘but, reader, it was a hard submission’: Oppression and breakdown in Villette

(i) The development of Lucy Snowe 154
(ii) Lucy as narrator – a question of reliability 159
(iii) Lucy and Polly – competitors for visibility 173
(iv) The challenge to isolation 180
(v) Control and the Gothic 184
(vi) The Victorian family and society – a model of control 188
(vii) Personal restraint and control 193
(viii) Ginevra as a product for exchange 201
(ix) Scrutiny and control 208
(x) Structures of control 216
(xi) Madame Beck’s oppression 220

Chapter Five – 231
‘I am my own mistress’: Conclusion

Bibliography 237
Abstract

The writings of Charlotte Brontë are informed by the oppression that underpinned her society. Within the hierarchically structured society of Victorian England Brontë occupied a space of ‘otherness’ by virtue of her social position and her gender. Her desire to enter into the arena of creative writing, not usually the precinct of women, resulted in Brontë experiencing further backgrounding through her exclusion to this world.

This thesis interrogates Brontë as a victim of oppression through its analysis of her life, particularly the early formative period of childhood and adolescence, and how she translated this oppression in her writings. This thesis confines its textual analysis to Brontë’s most widely known texts, Jane Eyre and Villette. Through the characterisations of not only the heroines and narrators of these novels, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, but also the other characters who inhabit these texts, Brontë consciously and unconsciously explored alienation, disenfranchisement, oppression and control. This thesis examines the way in which Brontë was informed by her world and indoctrinated by the hierarchical structure of her society making her as unaware to the manifestations of oppression in some situations as she was aware to it in others.

The theoretical approach in this thesis is informed by sociologists who engaged in studies of oppression - Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels. In investigating alienation in both Brontë’s life and her work, this thesis also concerns itself with the research of Harry C. Triandis on collectivism and individualism. Central also to the arguments and analysis presented is the work of activist and writer Audre Lorde and her assertion of the ‘mythical norm’.
Chapter One

‘…here I lay again, crushed and trodden on…’¹: The concept of oppression

From Jane’s opening statement to her readers, ‘There was no possibility of taking a walk that day’², it is immediately clear that Jane Eyre will be a tale of restrictions. It is restriction and, as a result, oppression in Charlotte Brontë’s life and work that this thesis interrogates. This thesis will examine the impact of isolation and oppression on Charlotte Brontë’s early life and how these formative experiences impacted on Charlotte’s work specifically her first published and last published novels, Jane Eyre and Villette. With reference to the work of social psychologist Harry C. Triandis on individualism and collectivism this thesis will also assess the collectives which Brontë engaged with, was excluded from or collided with in her early life and the resulting empowerment or disenfranchisement that this inclusion and exclusion produced. The textual analysis of Jane Eyre and Villette will similarly incorporate an assessment of the representation of collectives and collective power within each text.

Oppression haunts all of Brontë’s completed novels and stalks the characters they contain. But within the two texts under examination in this thesis the idea of oppression collides with a multitude of characters, even those whose social positions, would superficially at least, appear to place them beyond the reach of the juggernaut
of oppression. Within Jane Eyre and Villette, Brontë reveals the multifaceted nature and effect of oppression on her characters - the psychological, physical, emotional and financial hardships, symptomatic of living in an oppressed state.

Using strong visual imagery Charlotte creates claustrophobic locales which incorporate the gothic tropes gleaned from her readings of writers such as Ann Radcliffe and the tales of sensation contained in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In *Jane Eyre* she presents Jane as a young child living in circumstances where she is emotionally thoroughly isolated. Jane absorbs this feeling of isolation; it comes to define her, at least to the world observing her. This isolation manifests in Jane’s behavior and her approach to life. Our first introduction to her is as this isolated child, secreted away in the window seat behind the red curtain, oppressed by her carers and choosing to restrict and restrain herself in response to this oppression. Later in the text the actions of the adult Jane will mirror those of her in childhood. She is again positioned behind the curtains, peering out on to the scene taking place, enabling her to observe while remaining, herself, unobserved. Jane looks on at the arrival at Thornfield of Rochester and his party, including her future nemesis, Blanche Ingram. When prevailed upon to attend the evening, albeit only at its margins, Jane again hides in the shadows, this time in the living room at Thornfield while the Ingrams hold court.

Similarly, in *Villette* Charlotte Brontë creates another character who is also vulnerable, orphaned and all but friendless. Lucy Snowe is alone, plain and poor, much the same as Jane. Lucy too is forced to fend for herself in world that offers her little opportunity and many hurdles. When Lucy does attempt to fend for herself, even when she does succeed, she encounters resentment and suspicion. Lucy,
because of her indoctrination by society, also restrains herself. This is something that will be investigated in detail in chapter three. Lucy’s restraint is epitomised by her self-imposed isolation. She sits alone in the darkness of the dormitory, she wanders through the narrow streets of Labassecour and she engages in little society.

Brontë’s heroines embody the oppression, isolation and resulting frustration that played such a formative role in Charlotte’s own life. The environments she created reflect the resulting internal conflicts. These conflicts are experienced not only by her heroines but all of the characters that inhabit her texts who, as this thesis will illustrate, all suffer under some form of oppression. This thesis interrogates the way Brontë directly and indirectly addresses this oppression. It also interrogates Brontë’s omissions in the representation of oppression that occur in her portrayal of the characters who inhabit the space at the peripheries of her texts. Often these characters occupy a position lower down the socio-economic scale than those of her marginalised heroines Jane and Lucy. The discussion around this inequity of implicit representation in the thesis touches on Terry Eagleton’s analysis of Brontë’s support of the social hierarchy of her day in his text Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës. Eagleton’s work is concerned with the nexus between discourses and power and is therefore of particular relevance. In this thesis this discussion of Brontë’s engagement with structured and accepted power questions the possibility that she had the capacity to offer an overt social critique of social stratification, despite the fact that for their contemporary readers, such a critique emerges in their readings of her novels. This questioning of capacity revolves around Brontë’s own level of conditioning, acceptance and therefore indoctrination into the social codes and mores of her day.
As a result, this thesis contends that the literary texts of Charlotte Brontë reveal rather than explore oppression of the individual in relation to the perception that a hierarchically structured society, such as the society of Brontë’s day in Victorian England, will unavoidably disenfranchise and marginalize all of its members, though some will be disenfranchised and marginalized more than others. This unveiling of the occurrence of and response to oppression by Brontë can be viewed through the lens of the Marxist theory of ‘false consciousness’, the premise of which suggests that oppression can be enacted upon the oppressed person without his or her awareness. Although Marx himself did not use the term ‘false consciousness’ he asserted that ‘members of a subordinate class (workers, peasants, serfs) suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically conceal or obscure the realities of subordination, exploitation and domination those relations embody.’ The characters Brontë creates which are read in this thesis as examples of victims of oppression live their lives confined in some way – either by the society they are part of or excluded from, the expectations or absence of family, the availability or lack of resources. In various ways and to varying degrees, through the characters she creates, Charlotte Brontë examines how oppression operates both upon the individual and within society.

Oppression can be defined in a number of ways but, for the purpose of this thesis, it is understood as the subjection of the individual by either others or a hierarchical structure. This thesis draws on the work of social scientists Mary Maynard and
Arthur Brittan and their definition of oppression. Oppression according to Brittan and Maynard is ‘notoriously difficult to define’ and this difficulty of definition plays an important part in the assessment of Brontë’s engagement with oppression. Nevertheless, they define it ‘minimally’ as implying ‘that those who are oppressed are coerced by others. Their freedom of action is limited by the superior power of those who are in a position to ensure their compliance.’ Brittan and Maynard garnered their understanding of oppression primarily from their understanding of sexism and racism but their findings can be used to encompass the numerous causes of oppression. The literary texts under analysis in this thesis reflect the existence of coercion and both novels illustrate that oppression as it is defined by Brittan and Maynard – ‘superior power of those in a position to ensure compliance’ – is suffered by the characters the novels portray. Nonetheless a difficulty in definition exists and in response, the work of Audre Lorde, which questions the possibility of a homogenous experience of oppression, also informs this thesis.

In her essay, ‘Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’, Lorde, a black lesbian single mother, criticises the notions of simplistic dichotomies (eg. male/female, black/white, middle class/working class) which pervade much of western European history. Lorde notes that these oppositions consistently produce ‘some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior’. Lorde draws on the examples from the history of the formation of feminist groups in the United States. Groups or ‘collectives’ that formed to combat gender discrimination welcomed all women (no matter what ethnic, sexual, class identity). Once formed however they tended to marginalise subgroups (eg. lesbians, ethnic minorities, non-middle class groups). Collectives are defined within this thesis as a ‘social pattern consisting
of closely linked individuals’ these individuals may ‘see themselves as parts of one or more collective (family, co-workers, tribe, nation). Members of collectives, are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize the connectedness to members of these collectives.’

Collectives, moreover, which have developed under various banners (eg. single mother’s rights) have required that the individuals in these collectives utilise their individual power to feed the collectives power. This process requires the subordination of individual needs in support of the collective’s goals and this can result in the silencing of specific individual oppression. For example an employed middle class single mother will require different things from the collective than an unemployed black single mother because both women are informed by different experiences of marginalisation and one is more marginalised than the other. It is difficult for one collective to accommodate the needs of all of its members, even within the most apparently homogenous grouping variations of experience exist.

In this way, while collectives can mobilise energy to overcome overarching oppression, they can also produce further disenfranchisement of individuals who must relinquish to the collective their (admittedly limited) individual power which is based on their unique identity. For example a black woman who joins a women’s group may find her blackness (a source of power in a black rights group) subsumed by the white middle class orientation of the women’s group. Represented by the group, an individual may gain access to power but as a unique and solitary entity that same individual may lose it. Lorde noted that ‘traditionally it is the members of
oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to bridge the gap between the actualities of their lives and the consciousness of the oppressor’. This results in the ‘oppressors maintaining their position and evading responsibility for their action’. For example, the orphaned Jane sits outside the Reed family collective. Although she resents the family for its ill treatment and alienation of her, she longs for the inclusion a family collective could provide. Because Jane does not fit with the collective’s overarching identity (i.e. middle class and wealthy) she is excluded.

This of course is reflected in Brontë’s own biography. She was educated and the daughter of a clergyman used to mixing, at Church functions, with the upper end of the social hierarchy. While Brontë saw herself as belonging to one social collective her lack of family connection and wealth meant that her access would always be that of an outsider. The following chapter will further explore how, as a result, Brontë’s family would become her central and most important collective.

Unity among those who share a particular form of oppression is an important factor in their attempt to combat that oppression. It is infinitely more effective to draw attention to injustices perpetrated against a large group of characteristically similar people than against a group of individuals with separate agendas. This enforced homogeneity is what Lorde sees as problematic for the process of representation in collectives. In society differences equate to vulnerability. The ‘mythical norm is where the trappings of power reside’. A new oppressive hierarchical structure is created which continues to disallow individual differences. Those who embody all of the decreed representative attributes of the collective hold power within the collective forming an ‘elite’ within it. Individuals who stand outside the orbit of this
circulation of power in the collective now also lose ownership of, not only their unique identities, but also their uniquely oppressed states.

This thesis aligns itself to Lorde’s assertion that ‘our refusal to recognise differences and deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from ignoring and misnaming those differences’ is one of the drivers of the continued separation of individuals and the perpetuation of oppression. Commonality of experience facilitates communication and this can be seen, in part, as contributing to homogeneity within collectives. If we must, however, disallow a common experience of oppression we may still be able to find a shared experience in the manifestations of this oppression within the psyches of individuals, irrespective of its sources. In focusing on a multitude of characters within selected works of Charlotte Brontë, those traditionally viewed as oppressed as well as those not necessarily previously viewed as occupying that space, this thesis seeks to glean what is common to the psychic experience of oppression. Furthermore, this focus on the psychic experience of oppression requires some consideration of the traces of psychic experiences in the life script of the writer.

The analysis presented utilises the work of social theorists but in no way presumes to position itself in that field. This thesis speaks from the position of literary studies. It is the literary representations of oppression, specifically the ways in which hierarchical power operates and proliferates among the oppressed and their oppressors, as revealed in the novels Jane Eyre and Villette, that this thesis investigates. In order to understand these literary representations of oppression these particular texts have been selected for analysis as two of the key works by Charlotte
Brontë dealing with the multilayered effects of oppression across varying cohorts and collectives of individuals.

Although the analysis of the effects of isolation and marginalisation in Charlotte Brontë's novels is not a new concept, the approach to this analysis offered in this thesis is unique in that it employs for the first time the notion of collectives as a vehicle of inclusion and exclusion both within Brontë’s life and within her texts. The notion of collectives serves as a new window through which we can view the manifestation of isolation and operation of oppression within the texts. Such an investigation concludes that Jane Eyre and Villette reflect a perception of oppression as affecting everyone in society, the privileged as well as the disadvantaged, the powerful as well as the marginalised. Even members of the elite are shown to be constrained and to behave in ways determined by the dominant structure which they must serve to remain in their position of privilege. This thesis will explore the gap between the representation of oppression which Brontë consciously engages with within the two novels under examination and representation of oppression that is embedded within these texts as a result of them being cultural products of their time.

Karl Mannheim used ideology to refer to ‘the outlook inevitably associated with a given historical and social situation’. He also suggested that an individual’s view could be either ‘partially or totally distorted.’ If partially skewed, Mannheim used the phrase the ‘particular conception of ideology’; if the opponent’s attitudes, beliefs and values, for example, are believed to be completely distorted, Mannheim adopted the phrase the ‘total conception of ideology’. In this thesis it will be revealed that Brontë is inescapably informed by the ideological hegemony of her day yet still able to question some of its dictums. By Mannheim’s definition she had a
‘particular conception of ideology’. As a result, any cultural product she created will likewise be similarly informed and this is what we find in the analysis of both Jane Eyre and Villette.

The following chapter, which investigates Brontë’s biography will explore the frustrations and conflicts Brontë experienced as she tried to reconcile the Victorian ideal of the dutiful daughter and gentlewoman with her burning ambitions to create, write and lead a life that, for a woman, was frowned upon by the social hierarchy. Drawing primarily on the biographical treatments by Lyndall Gordon, Juliet Barker and Mrs Gaskell as well as the significant documentation Charlotte herself left behind in the form of letters to friends and family which have been collected into three comprehensive volumes edited by Margaret Smith, this thesis will view Brontë’s life through a new lens informed by social psychology.

Further to the work of Audre Lorde, this thesis takes its theoretical bearings for its assessment of collectives both in Brontë’s own life and within the lives of the character’s she created, as already signaled, from work of social psychologist Harry C. Triandis. Specifically this thesis employs Triandis’ work on collectivism and individualism to bring a new understanding to both Brontë’s texts and a new reading of her life. Triandis explores and compares the behaviour of individuals from collectivist and individualist cultures. His work examines the different modes of behaviour enacted by people informed by these different cultural ways of being. Although Triandis makes his assessment based on cultural difference his conclusions can be applied to various cohorts of people. In this thesis his findings have been applied to Charlotte and the Brontë family as an example of a collectivist culture.
Triandis’ work further investigates ingroups that form within collectives and the way these groups produce inclusion or exclusion. This thesis will reflect on the ingroups which formed within the Brontë family collective and how both the collective and the ingroups to which Charlotte was a member were significant in her personal and artistic development.

The presence of an unavoidable hierarchical power structure which emerges within society, collectives and ingroups is an accepted condition within this thesis. The way in which this structure operates and maintains its power base within Brontë’s society is exposed in the texts she creates from within this stratified society. It is contended that much of what informed her was reflected in her writing. The way in which hierarchal power is reflected forms a central point of discussion as it is this that is a primary driver of oppression that manifests itself in Jane Eyre and Villette and also within Brontë’s life. Jane Eyre explores how power circulates among the wealthy and aristocratic. Rochester’s relationship with first Bertha and then Blanche Ingram shows that wealth and aristocracy can be interchangeable and exchangeable. Rochester marries the wealthy but ‘intemperate’ Bertha and later courts the poor but well connected Blanche. Each character needs something from the other in order to develop their cultural capital and personal power. In doing so they are also supporting the ideology and societal structure which informs them. In this way, power remains in the hands of the designated class.

As already stated this thesis explores Jane Eyre and Villette in relation to the perception that a hierarchically structured society will unavoidably disenfranchise and marginalise all of its members, though some more than others. Organisation,
even in a collectivist movement such as feminist groups, as illustrated by Lorde, results in the formation of a power structure. Work by sociologists working in fields of elitism such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)\textsuperscript{12} and Robert Michels (1876 – 1936)\textsuperscript{13} contended the power structure will eventually be accepted almost without question by those who wield the power and those who suffer under it. The theories of Vilfredo Pareto were most commonly applied in the field of economics, the discipline in which he began his career. Pareto believed that an understanding of economics alone would not produce a state that was truly representative of all of its citizens. His sociological investigations attempted to counter the problems that economics faced when predicted outcomes of the discipline failed to eventuate. Pareto came to believe that all leaders in political parties occupied positions in the elite which he suggested will always constitute a group of twenty percent who will dominate. The remaining eighty percent of the populace will then simply become the ‘masses’. Pareto also distinguished between a ‘broad’ definition of elite (i.e. the small number of individuals in each sphere who have risen to the top of their professions) and the ‘narrow’ definition (the small number who govern the state). This thesis draws upon some of the ideas he developed during this revisionist phase of his career. Of particular relevance to this thesis are Pareto’s ideas about how each social class is governed by particular ‘drives’ that condition psychic states which support the circulation of elites.

Robert Michels was a German sociologist who wrote on the political behavior of intellectual elites. Michels is best known for his book Political Parties, which contains a description of the ‘iron law of oligarchy.’ Michels based this concept on his research and personal experience with various social institutions. Michels
identified that all organisations result in the emergence of an elite. Collectives are another form of organisation. As Robert Michels’ work on oligarchies illustrated, collectives, though often formed in reaction to the oppression, disenfranchisement and powerlessness created by a hierarchy, result in their own hierarchical power structure which again displaces the individuals within the collective.

In Jane Eyre, Jane is oppressed but so too, albeit in different ways, are other characters who belong to the wealthy elite, most obviously Bertha, Jane’s dark double, but also Rochester, Blanche Ingram and Mrs Reed and her daughters. Villette’s Lucy Snowe manifests her feelings of isolation and oppression in an extreme way which, in terms of Brontë’s characters examined here, is only surpassed by Bertha Mason, the representation of whom by Brontë, this thesis will show to be another example of hierarchical oppression. Lucy’s outrage against her social positioning is turned inward; all of her battles are waged against herself. It is in Villette that Brontë most dramatically articulates the frustration felt by a woman such as herself in an age that was unprepared for her and unwilling to accept her. As Brontë’s heroines struggle against oppression they are struggling for what Michael Vander Weele classes as ‘self-assertion’.

In exploring the connections between the writer’s life and her literary works Triandis’ work is crucial. His examinations of and comparisons among collectivist and non-collectivist cultures include examination of the behaviour patterns of people within collectives. This attention to the psychological dimension of collectives relates to the investigation of oppression reported in the life of Brontë. She came
from a unique cultural background. If we can believe the biographical studies, she suffered oppression and also witnessed acts of oppression, albeit unique to her cultural circumstances. These experiences, despite being individually inflected, nevertheless appear to have registered in her writing, though whether consciously or not it is difficult to ascertain. Arguably however, one example of this response to oppression emerges in her interest in and exploration of the gothic mode. The central characters within her texts are all trapped in some way whether physically or psychically. Brontë often placed her characters in environments where their psychic and emotional entrapment is represented by their physical environment and the spaces they are allowed to inhabit. This physical representation of entrapment is exhibited in the texts regularly. It is as evident in young Jane’s confinement in the ‘redroom’ as it is in Jane’s allocation of her room at Thornfield. In both places her limitations of access are clearly defined. Lucy Snowe is confined in the solitary dormitory but she is equally confined on the streets of Villette because for her they are both isolating environments. Jane Eyre and Villette both significantly feature oppression of the protagonists as well as the characters that surround them. All depict at some point within the action of the text claustrophobic atmospheres and locales which represent the states of psychological oppression experienced by the characters. In both novels the oppressive worlds presented are configured by clusters of conventions associated with the gothic genre. The use of gothic trappings owes much to Brontë’s reading and familiarity with writers such as Ann Radcliffe and her reading of journals such as Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine with its short story selection, The Sensations.¹⁵

But it is not this alone that inspires the use of these conventions. This thesis will
incorporate an understanding of how the use of the gothic helped reflect the entrapment and frustrations of many of Brontë’s characters while at the same time reflecting her own sense of confinement.

Writing on Victorian Gothic Alexander Warwick notes that a Gothic revival began in the 1840s. He suggests that a shift took place from the Gothic form which preceded it in the eighteenth century:

The shift can be summarised as the translation of Gothic to new locations; first to a bourgeois domestic setting, and second to the urban environment. Of principal importance in the former is the work of the Brontë sisters which draws on their childhood and adolescent reading of Blackwood’s Magazine...The characters are frequently versions of those found in late eighteenth-century models; the confined threatened woman; the ambivalent figure of a dynamic anti-hero; the weak and ineffectual hero…the Brontë’s distinctive contribution is to create claustrophobic psychological dramas that represent sadomasochistic relations between men and women.16

This thesis will also explore the ways in which Charlotte Brontë employed gothic tropes to develop the oppressed states of her characters and what the use of these devices indicates in relation to the hierarchical power structures scrutinized by her texts.

The ownership of individual oppression by the individual who is oppressed is an important step in reinstating identity and, therefore, reclaiming power. The act of writing oppression can be viewed as a way in which power is reclaimed at least on a psychological level. Stating that Brontë’s writing incorporates the gothic is not to say that each text follows the same stylistic framework but rather that she variously employs devices such as suspension of disbelief, use of the fantastic, the grotesque
and claustrophobic atmospheres to enhance her work. It can well be argued that utilising these gothic trappings is a way in which oppression either manifests itself in Brontë’s works or her means of escape from oppression.

In his essay 'The Uncanny' Freud suggested that the ‘uncanny is a return of the familiar in an unfamiliar form or indeed, as remembering not recognised as a remembering of that which has been repressed’. Repression is a form of oppression ‘which acts to contain natural feelings’, the gothic can be viewed as an explosion of these repressed feelings. ‘Repression may be seen as a process in which people are encouraged to deny their feelings, sexuality, and desires, it operates to ensure the human body is protected from its desires.’ Accordingly, society views repression as essential because it ‘needs to repress the natural reservoir of instinct in human beings in order to maintain a viable civilized existence.’ The gothic trappings employed by Brontë are manifestations of repression while at the same time acting as vehicles of escape from it. Knowledge by the individual of their oppression does not translate to release. Moreover this ‘could be the grounds for inactivity and a debilitating pessimism. A heightened consciousness of the limits and bounds of one's oppression may result in surrender to the awesome power of one's oppressors.’ Charlotte Brontë, however, engages with her psychological responses to her oppressed state, either by choice or spontaneous effect, in her portrayal of oppressed characters.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Each chapter will engage with the aforementioned notions of power in their textual analysis of the selected works and examination of Brontë’s biography. The biographical analysis will also draw on Triandis’ work on collectives and how the
collectives that Brontë was a part of relate to the creation and content of the texts under examination. The second chapter investigates Brontë’s life, based on biographical representations, and the collectives that were part of this – both those she was a member of and those from which she was excluded. The chapters following, which offer textual analysis, will treat the two texts under examination in this thesis in chronological order providing an analysis of each, chapter three addressing Jane Eyre and chapter four addressing Villette. Key works of criticism on Charlotte Brontë’s writing inform the explorations of these texts. As mentioned, the work of Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton will be a point of reference as it provides an important connection for the textual analysis presented in this thesis. Christine Alexander’s important investigations into Charlotte’s juvenilia, The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, have helped shape the understanding of Charlotte’s and her sibling’s early engagement with creative practice and the resulting writings. Similarly The Oxford Companion to the Brontës, edited by Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, has been a vital point of reference. Sandra M. Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s path-breaking work on Jane Eyre, The Madwoman in the Attic, provides another essential source of reference for the manifestation of power in Brontë’s work. Gilbert’s and Gubar’s analysis of the oppression of Bertha Mason opened a new dialogue in the criticism of Jane Eyre when it was first published in 1979 and changed the understanding of the issue of disenfranchisement for future critics of this novel. Heather Glen’s writings and collected editions of criticism on Charlotte’s work have also been an invaluable source of reference. Current relevant scholarship is also referred to including recent essays by Karen Cubie Henck, Anne Longmuir and numerous others. It is not suggested that this thesis engages with unexplored themes in the scholarship on Charlotte Brontë. Instead it continues with these
established themes of exploration in a new way. Although, in exploring power and oppression, the chapters offering textual analysis explore themes which have been identified previously, this thesis nonetheless adds to the body of scholarship by conducting explorations informed by new perspectives.

Theorists outside the arena of Victorian studies and also those outside the field of literary studies play an essential part in the thesis. Theorists and commentators in sociology, psychology and power relations such as Kate Millett, Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard, Barbara Caine, Jane Castle, V. Kiernan, Kathleen L. Komar, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan and Roderick J Watts are a sampling of the theorists and commentators upon whose work this thesis has drawn. The works of these theorists are important to the thesis as they offer insights into varying aspects of oppression, its portrayal and how it is enacted, which are applied to the textual analysis presented in the following chapters. Also touched upon is the work of Sigmund Freud, particularly in relation to notions of the uncanny.

While the reported biography of Charlotte Brontë will be examined this thesis does not aim to present a psycho-analytic analysis of her. The biography needs to be understood in order to ascertain the collectives she was involved in as well as the ones she was excluded from. This is necessary to gain an understanding of her approach to collectivism and collective power. It is not the aim of this thesis to add to the already large body of biographical treatments on Brontë.

While, as stated, it is not the first time that an investigation into the treatment of oppression has been explored in the works of Charlotte Brontë it is, to my
knowledge, the first time that the theories of social theorists such as Harry C. Triandis have been applied to these investigations. Audre Lorde’s discussions of differences also, as noted, provide a new lens with which to view Brontë’s representations of oppression. Lorde’s work on differences offers a complementary dialogue to the work of Triandis for the purposes of this thesis. By using an approach which incorporates a multiplicity of voices from varying disciplines this thesis aims to glean a new understanding of Brontë’s relationship to the society she inhabited and the image of that society which her work captured.
1 Daniel Little, ‘False consciousness: A brief explanation of Marx’s conception of false consciousness; some of the ways in which later Marxist thinkers have used the concept.’ [http://www.personal.umd.umd.edu/~delittle/ess%20false%20consciousness%20V2.htm](http://www.personal.umd.umd.edu/~delittle/ess%20false%20consciousness%20V2.htm)
5 Lorde, p. 633
6 Ibid, p.630
7 Ibid, p. 631
8 Ibid, p. 631
9 Ibid, p. 631
13 Michael Vander Weele, ‘Jane Eyre and the tradition of self assertion; Or, Brontë’s socialization of Schiller’s ‘play aesthetic’.’ Renascence, Fall 2004, Vol. 57, Issue. 1, p.5
14 Lyndall Gordon, Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life, 2nd rev. ed., (London: Virago, 2008), p. 105. In her biography Gordon notes that all the Brontë children read Blackwood’s Magazine, which their father held a subscription to. Later both Charlotte and Branwell would seek Hartley Coleridge’s opinion. Gordon tells us that, Coleridge, the editor of Blackwood’s, was more suited to Branwell than Charlotte. Despite hiding her sex with the use of a pen name Charlotte did not garner praise from Coleridge who was ‘far from enthralled’. Branwell however was to eventually gain success in this journal with ‘much praised sonnets’ published in the magazine in 1833’.
18 Brittan and Maynard, p. 87
Chapter Two

‘…calm comfort and modest hope’: The life of Charlotte Brontë

The life of Charlotte Brontë and the lives of the Brontë family have been examined and stirred speculation since the nineteenth century with the release of Elizabeth Gaskell’s gentle, though now commonly regarded as inaccurate, biographical treatment of Charlotte which appeared in March 1857. Since then a plethora of biographical texts have emerged on the individual Brontë sisters, brother Branwell, the Brontë family and life at Parsonage at Haworth. In truth, the lives of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, as the sisters were originally known for publication purposes, stirred intrigue for both critics and biographers from 1847 with the publication in October of that year of Jane Eyre followed in December by Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey.

This thesis does not attempt to add to this already substantial and thorough biographical body of work. Instead this chapter will deal with aspects of Charlotte Brontë’s biography throughout her early life and its formative period as they relate to the intent of this thesis; that is the examination of oppression and power in Charlotte Brontë’s life and work. Rather than a biographical analysis, of which there are many excellent texts available, it offers insight into her childhood development, losses and influences as well as her place in society. The chapter will focus on particular details of the life of Charlotte, drawing upon a rich selection of sources, the main intent is to
illuminate the aspects of Charlotte’s biography which align to her treatment of and response to the manifestations of power within the world she inhabited. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the idea of collectives as both a tool of, and a means for escape from, oppression is central to the investigations into power. As such, the collectives which included and excluded Charlotte throughout her life will be a central focus of this chapter. This chapter will also specifically investigate the collectives that informed Charlotte in childhood and youth and helped form the woman and author she was to become.

The education from which Charlotte Brontë benefited developed her awareness of power. Her father Patrick Brontë was a man interested in the affairs of the world around him. As a result, the Brontë library housed many journals, including Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, which inspired his children to broaden their views. Blackwood’s ‘political leanings were Tory, but as a monthly miscellany it offered more variety in its materials.’ Because of this broadened awareness, Charlotte’s writings were informed by multiple themes, issues and styles. This access to literature would later inform Charlotte’s representation of desire and sexuality in own work according to John Maynard. He asserts that, ‘If it is the corruption of Evangelical youth to be awakened to the sexual fundamentals of life, then there can be no better proof of the power of literature to work such corruption than the influence of books on Charlotte Brontë.’ Maynard notes however that Charlotte, quite rightly, ‘did not consider the effect of her very wide childhood and adolescent reading corruption.’

As a result of her own reading, Charlotte’s writings reflect the issues, history and cultural dialogues of their day as well as creating passionate characters. Charlotte’s work was positioned in an age and society that left it bound to
confront the operations of power directly. Often this confrontation occurs through the use of her characters and their negotiations of interpersonal relationship. These relationships become an expression of the manifestation of this power being enacted. Neither could the works of Charlotte avoid being influenced by the machinery of power operating within the society in which they were created. This chapter will examine how she was affected by the machinery of power. It will also explore the ways in which her writings inscribed the operations of this power. The chapters to follow, which offer a textual analysis of Jane Eyre and Villette, will be informed by this understanding of the impact of the construction and operations of power on Charlotte and how this resonates in her writing.

The Brontë family was unusual in many ways. It was not only the Brontë children’s level of education that set them apart. The uniqueness of the family preceded the literary endeavours of Charlotte, Emily and Anne. Its source can be traced to their father Patrick and his approach to life, work and family. Juliet Barker quotes the Brontë patriarch as stating that one’s lot in life ‘depended, under providence, not on Family descent, but our own exertions’.\(^5\) Patrick’s belief that success could be achieved through hard work and intellectual application was imbibed by Charlotte in particular. As this chapter will illustrate, her success, like her father’s before her, was the result of significant intellectual gifts, hard work and, perhaps overwhelmingly, determination.

Because this chapter assesses how Charlotte was informed by the collectives in her world, both those she was a part of and those she was denied access to, it is essential to analyse the collective that was the most significant for her literary development -

23
her family. Patrick Brontë’s attitude, exemplified in his awareness of his independent ‘exertions’, provides some insight into the psychological underpinnings of the Brontë family collective. It is apparent that Patrick believed through work he could meet the challenge of his aspirations. What Patrick achieved in his own lifetime was remarkable given the socio-economic status into which he was born and his nationality. Patrick’s achievements were an example to his children. His life illustrated to them that it was possible for one to better oneself socially and economically and to rise within the social order – to a degree. It is unsurprising therefore, that Charlotte, who was without doubt the most tenacious of his children to reach adulthood, followed his example.

There is little that is known of Patrick Brontë’s life in Ireland, his country of birth. Even the Brontë name is something that underwent metamorphoses, evident in its variant spellings. It is believed to have originally been Brunty and was changed to Brontë but there are several versions of the name including Prunty. As Juliet Barker has noted, it is as if Patrick’s life began for him only when ‘he shook the dust of Ireland from his feet and was admitted to Cambridge’. This in itself was a remarkable achievement. It seems that, with the same determination that Charlotte would later exhibit, Patrick was determined to advance himself in life.

Born in 1777 in Drumballyroney, County Down, Patrick grew up in a family that was not affluent but neither was it altogether impoverished. Making their livelihood as farmers, the Brontës were successful enough for Patrick, the oldest of ten children, to stay at school for much longer than was usually the case at that time. This signals
that the family was managing on its income, if not comfortably then at the very least adequately.

Patrick did well at school and it may have been this that inspired him in 1793, at the age of sixteen, to establish his own school. Little is known about Patrick’s school not even the location but, in 1798, Patrick decided to quit his school to take on the role of tutor for the children of Thomas Tighe. Juliet Barker suggests that the reason for this may lie in the Irish Rebellion of 1798 which resulted in the formation of the Society of United Irishmen who ‘dedicated themselves to the violent overthrow of the Anglican ruling minority and the establishment in Ireland of social and political reforms along French lines’. Attempts to crush the group resulted in revolt, much of which took place in County Down where the Brontës had their home. These events informed Patrick’s later views and, according to Barker, he sided with the colonial authorities and became a strong supporter of the 1801 Act of Union which quashed Ireland’s independent parliament and administration and transferred all the executive power to London.7

Patrick’s new employer, Thomas Tighe, had been the vicar of Drumballyroney since 1778. Although he was a member of the Anglican Church of Ireland, which remained the official state church until it was disestablished in 1871, he was staunchly Evangelical. It was Thomas Tighe who aided Patrick in achieving his dream of university education. Tighe recognised Patrick’s potential and was eager to support him becoming a clergyman particularly if he was to be an Evangelical one. In Tighe Patrick had an important supporter, Tighe’s father was an MP and he had two half-brothers who were members of the Irish Parliament. Not only was Tighe well
connected in the colonial administration but he was committed enough to Patrick’s future to apparently instruct him in Greek and Latin, a pre-requisite for matriculation and something that had not been part of his previous schooling. Once Patrick had been instructed in the classics, letters from Tighe of support and recommendation enabled his entry into St John’s College at Cambridge. St John’s had been Tighe’s College and it also had strong Evangelical connections both of which made it the most obvious choice for Patrick. Perhaps even more importantly, St John’s had the largest funds available for poorer students, enabling them to become sizars and therefore receive financial support throughout their undergraduate years.

In July 1802 Patrick entered Cambridge, he graduated in 1806. His time there must have been both difficult and rewarding and it allowed him to realise his ambitions of entering the clergy. Juliet Barker believes there is little doubt that there were times when Patrick was the victim of ‘elitism and snobbery’. If this was the case, this no doubt informed his, and as a result his children’s, views of the world. Cambridge was not only an example of a hierarchically structured collective but it was a small slice of the upper echelons of English society. Patrick may have entered the perimeter of the collective but no amount of education would allow him to penetrate the core. This is an important point and something which would have bearing on the Brontë children and, most specifically, Charlotte.

In July 1812 Patrick met Maria Branwell. Maria was twenty nine years old and was ‘petite and elegant though not pretty; pious…but also of a bright and witty disposition’. Her father, Thomas Branwell, had died in 1808. He had been successful as a property-owning tea merchant and green grocer. Maria’s mother,
Anne Carne, had died in 1809. Maria’s background was quite different from Patrick’s, she had enjoyed far greater affluence and, among the society that surrounded her at the Cornish peninsula seaport of Penzance, her family was of some importance. After the death of her parents Maria and her two sisters, Elizabeth and Charlotte, remained in the family home despite the fact that ownership of the house had passed on to their uncle, their father’s brother Richard, upon their father’s death. In 1811, however, Uncle Richard’s son Thomas, a navy lieutenant, was drowned at sea. Soon after Uncle Richard also died and it appears the family broke up as a result. It was this that led Maria to leave Penzance and go to Yorkshire to live with her aunt and uncle Fennell.

John Fennell was a friend of Patrick Brontë’s and he had recently been promoted to head of a newly opened boarding school for Methodist Minister’s sons at Woodhouse Grove. It was probably the friendship that Patrick shared with Maria’s aunt and uncle that allowed their courtship to proceed at a pace which was more rapid than the norm. On the 29 December 1812 Maria and Patrick were married. Barker notes that it was a ‘momentous year’ in which there riots in England as she fought two wars, in France and America. These historical events were important in informing the Brontë children and certainly influenced the writings of Charlotte, particularly Shirley and her Juvenilia, but her difficult relationship with France, which has been noted by many critics, is very apparent in Jane Eyre and Villette.

The first of the Brontë children, Maria, was born in 1814. Maria’s birth was followed by Elizabeth in 1815, Charlotte in 1816, Patrick Branwell in 1817, Emily in 1818 and Anne in 1820. 1820 was also the year that the Brontë family moved to
Haworth, the Parsonage that would be most closely associated with them, when Patrick was awarded the post of Perpetual Curate. Haworth is close to the border of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The chapelry of Haworth covered villages, farms, cottages and hamlets in an area of 10,540 acres which lay outside the parameters of the nearest towns. The towns included some of the major manufacturing areas of Northern England; Bradford, Halifax and West Riding.\(^\text{12}\) ‘The Parsonage was amongst the largest houses in Haworth, though in comparison with the homes of clergymen in more affluent areas of Britain, it would have been considered small.’ Patrick Brontë’s annual income was £200, twenty times that of the average domestic servant but compared to wealthy landowners and aristocrats, whose incomes could be more than £10,000 to £20,000, the Brontës were poor. As Ann Dinsdale and Kathryn White point out, ‘in the early nineteenth century, the class system was a much more rigid structure than today.’\(^\text{13}\) The influence of the society which surrounded the Brontës would be clearly apparent in all of the sister’s creative work but, most especially, in Charlotte’s.

At this point it is probably important to note that Patrick Brontë was, by education, a man who could fit easily into the social milieu of upper middle class society. His wife Maria was similarly informed by her family and background which, as we have seen, was not without means. These facts and the influence that this would have on the Brontë children, their education and upbringing are important points to bear in mind as we examine the collectives that Charlotte formed, belonged to and, perhaps most especially, desired to belong to throughout her life.
Despite the natural beauty that surrounded Haworth it was affected by the presence of industry. There was a high mortality rate and, as the population of the town grew as a result of increased industry, the census returns show that the mortality rate more than doubled in the period from 1801 to 1850, rising from 3,164 p.a to 6,848 p.a.\(^\text{14}\)

The township could boast only 1 privy to every 4.5 houses, the sewerage system consisted of open channels that ran down the Main Street. The water supply was poor and contaminated’ by seepage from the graveyard above the village, the privies, and the overflowing midden heaps which littered the streets.\(^\text{15}\) Given this, it is not as surprising as many believe that the Brontë family suffered from early deaths and illnesses, ‘the average age of death in Haworth was twenty-five.’\(^\text{16}\) In 1821 the family suffered its first loss with the death of Charlotte’s mother Maria. It was a harsh death from cancer which she endured for seven and a half months. It was during Maria’s illness that her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, arrived to assist the family.

This family backdrop is important for understanding Charlotte’s life and writing. Many accounts have mythologised her and the Brontë family, romanticising or exaggerating aspects of her childhood and upbringing. Contemporary scholarship has revealed this to be particularly true of Elizabeth Gaskell’s The Life of Charlotte Brontë, which represented Charlotte as a lonely, isolated genius and her father as harsh, unreasonable and dominating his children. The emphasis of this chapter is to draw on the biography of Charlotte Brontë as a foundation for her understanding of oppression in her life and her response in her writings to this perceived oppression.

By the nineteenth century education for women, at least women who were daughters of the middle class and intellectuals, had become widespread. This development
commenced in the mid-eighteenth century and, by 1778, was common enough to
draw comment from Dr Johnson who noted that ‘our ladies read now’. 17 According to
Eva Figes, by the end of the eighteenth century there ‘was a consensus of opinion on
the ideal education for women from the landed classes and upper
bourgeoisie...She was sufficiently well-informed to make an agreeable companion for
her husband and to educate her young children in the early years’. 18 Men could further
their own cultural capital by marrying an accomplished woman since the attributes a
wife possessed (including personal attributes) in the eighteenth century became the
attributes of her husband. Women may have enjoyed the opportunity to gain an
education but society viewed the education of women as value adding for the marriage
market. In the nineteenth-century’ as the most formal part of‘breeding’ as well as the
most prominent source of cultural capital, education played an important role in
constructing a sensibility appropriate to one’s class aspirations.’ 19 Jenni Calder
notes that ‘it was not until the end of the 1850s that serious attention was paid to single
women who had to find a way of supporting themselves in an acceptable fashion.’ 20
This was of course Charlotte’s position.

His own educational background made Patrick aware of how essential is was to
ensure his children were educated. Patrick knew that his daughters would need to be
equipped to support themselves. After his wife’s death her life-annuity which
supplemented Patrick’s income returned to the Branwells. No offers of help were
forthcoming from them and it seems as if ties between the families eroded. As his
daughters would be portionless their chances of marrying were slim so they would
need to earn a living. 21 Education would give the children a site of personal power
but, as had been the case for Patrick, this power would be limited. Although
education was more accessible and, as a result of Patrick’s education the Brontës occupied a position of limited social standing within their community. As such education was a double edged sword. The Brontës were educated to a level that could be regarded as equivalent to the upper middle class and the gentry but that alone would never be enough for them to gain entry into that collective. Lyndall Gordon suggests that during this period 'clergy women were apt to be sensitive about their status. From the eighteenth century, clergymen in the Church of England were acquiring new dignity and leadership in the community as they came under less patronage.' She notes that, as the Perpetual Curate of Haworth, Patrick Brontë ‘mixed at church parties with the best families and was listed alongside the gentry as one of the first gentlemen of the county. This was despite the fact that Mr Brontë never earned more than £200 a year. His daughters were raised with him above the status where birth and income would once have left them. Gordon notes that the Brontë ‘sisters seldom turned into Haworth. Mr Brontë did not wish his family to mix with the factory hands.’

An attitude that, though never articulated within Charlotte’s texts, is implicit nonetheless. This thesis will interrogate Brontë’s apparent lines of demarcation among the middle, lower middle class and working class as they manifest in Jane Eyre. It suffices to state at this point that Charlotte’s representation of those outside the middle class was informed by her own lived experience and family influences. Although not to the extent as was portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography of Charlotte, the Brontë children were also outside the collective of that which would constitute the ‘local’ of West-Riding. Their outsider status to this collective was due to what Phyllis Bentley describes as their being what West Riders term as ‘off-comed-uns’, that is, ‘persons not native’ to West Riding and also because their educations exceeded those of many of their peers. As Maynard states, ‘A great deal
of wool has gathered over the relations between the Brontë children, mostly because of their isolated upbringing and early loss of their mother.’ He indicates that critics can and have read into these relationships including ‘incest patterns, lesbian or heterosexual.’ Reading the children’s relationships with each other in this way is a failure at both recognising and appreciating the way in which their unique collective unit formed and the importance of this collective to each of the Brontë children.

Gordon believes that Charlotte’s life ‘presents an experiment in which a woman, isolated with her sisters from society, used her isolation to explore hidden aspects of character.’ In searching for the most significant collectives in Charlotte’s childhood it is apparent that her family was the central collective of which she was a part. Later in youth her collective extended to include her lifelong friends Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, both of whom she would meet at Roe Head, the second school she was to attend.

Given that the Brontë children had little else that was regarded as cultural capital of the day (though significantly more than some) it is unsurprising that education was so highly valued. With an education Patrick, like most parents, hoped that his children could be independent and better their position in life. It was this hope that informed his decision in 1824 to send his four eldest daughters to the Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire. The school seemed ideal for the family’s needs. Patrick’s income was modest, he could not afford to send his daughter’s to a school that did not offer some kind of fee support. Because the school was run as a charity the annual fee for Cowan Bridge was only £14. Maria and Elizabeth arrived at Cowan Bridge on 21 July 1824, Charlotte enrolled on the 10
August of the same year and Emily on the 25 November. Even Charlotte’s and Emily’s first exposure to school involved part of the family collective.

A great deal has been written about the physical conditions of the school. As has been noted the health conditions of the area were overall poor. Robert Keefe notes that on Patrick Brontë’s ‘short visits to the school he had not seen anything wrong. But the physical conditions of the school, its bad and insufficient food, unhealthy location, inadequate sanitation, were fatal’.26 As Juliet Barker points out ‘the Brontës were unfortunate to be at the Clergy Daughters School during its difficult early years. On the other hand, even then the school was no worse than many of its renowned and much praised contemporaries and in certain instances it was actually better’.27

Lyndall Gordon notes however that the school’s ‘unhealthiness was compounded by poor sanitation and a meagre, sometimes inedible diet, largely composed of dry bread, burnt porridge, and bakes of dingy odds and ends from a dirty kitchen.’28

Although the school may have been better than some others of the day there is little doubt that the conditions were harsh. It is widely recognised that Charlotte drew on her experiences at Cowan Bridge for her portrayal of Lowood in Jane Eyre; certainly the Cowan Bridge menu is revisited by Charlotte in the text. Given the traumatic consequence of the Brontë sisters’ time at the school, this is hardly surprising that her lived experiences informed her creation of the depressing and isolated world of Lowood.

Maria and Elizabeth had experienced boarding school before but it was difficult for eight year old Charlotte to deal with the change in her situation. Although part of her most important collective was with her at the school, it offered little compensation. Even by this early age her unique identity in the Brontë collective was developing
and, as with all members of collective, she was comfortable within the boundaries of
the collective by which she had been informed. Prior to her entrance into the formal
school system Charlotte and Emily had been tutored at home by Aunt Branwell and
her father, the cultural shift was therefore significant.

The shift from this closed society to the large school community must have been
disconcerting. All members of collectives are indoctrinated, either covertly or overtly,
into the collective’s consciousness. This is not to suggest anything sinister in
the operations of a collective such as a family unit, only that how each of us operates
within the collectives we inhabit is learned within the scope of that collective. Harry
C. Triandis cites studies by D. Sinha on the changing roles of contemporary families
in urban environments noting that:

> Although the traditional extended family puts stress on members by having
them conform to authoritarian older adults, to freedom-confining norms, and
to unpleasant expectations, it provides a sense of belonging that can be
important, especially during life crises.²⁹

The loss of their mother was a central loss in the family collective which was
compounded by the early deaths of sisters Maria and Elizabeth. These losses of
significant and maternal identities reduced the scope of Charlotte’s ‘sense of
belonging’. Stevie Davies suggests that, ‘Mother-loss, endured in early
childhood, was compounded by the suffering of the two elder sisters, Maria and
Elizabeth, brought home by their father from the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan
Bridge to die in 1825. They had stood to the youngest children in a maternal
posture. Leaving home would always seem perilous to the survivors.’³⁰ Davies’
point is validated by the considerable homesickness each of the surviving
Brontë sisters suffered in adulthood when they found it necessary to leave home for employment. The importance of the family collective for Charlotte was central to her early life but with each loss it would become more so.

To be removed from an early age from the only collective she knew how to respond appropriately to must certainly have been traumatic for Charlotte. As noted, her older sisters’ previous boarding school experience meant they had already dealt with this hurdle and knew how to respond within this new social group. This is perhaps why it was an older girl at Cowan Bridge rather than Maria or Elizabeth who took on the task of sheltering Charlotte from the older girls who attempted to bully her. \(^{31}\)

The extent of Charlotte’s indoctrination into the Brontë family collective is exposed in Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography. Although the biography romanticises Charlotte’s life and was responsible for creating a damning misconception about her father, who has since been rescued from his role as the dominant and distant patriarch by Juliet Barker, it remains as an important and essential text. Gaskell comments on Charlotte’s interest at an early age in politics suggesting it as an indication of a remarkable character. But she credits youthful ability too much at the expense of what was perhaps more obviously the case, the early indoctrination by the children’s father into his own belief processes. Gaskell’s paraphrase of a comment from a school friend of Charlotte’s illustrates the way in which Patrick Brontë influenced his children’s opinions:

She said she had taken an interest in politics ever since she was five years old. She did not get her opinions from her father – that is, not directly – but from the papers, &c., he preferred. \(^{32}\)
Clearly the natural censorship, even if it was unintentional, helped to form the belief system in his children in Patrick Brontë’s own likeness. Charlotte’s, along with her siblings’ views were molded by the circumstances of their upbringing. This included the literature which surrounded them and the conservative opinions which their father espoused. An example of the influence of Patrick on his children can be seen in Charlotte’s adulation for the Duke of Wellington. Her appreciation of him is well documented. He was to become a significant character in her juvenilia and the admiration for him continued throughout her life. Christine Alexander notes that ‘Charlotte’s early enthusiasm for Wellington was inspired by her father’s own hero worship of the Duke, a fellow Irishman and Tory statesman whose military career Mr Brontë had followed in detail.’

Again, this is perhaps no different from the way any other child forms his or her opinions. The difference lay, as mentioned, in the fact that information that might offer an alternative viewpoint from other collectives was not accessible to the Brontë children as readily as it may have been for others.

In December 1824 Maria, the eldest of the Brontë children, displayed the early signs of the tuberculosis that would lead to her death. By the time Patrick Brontë was notified by the school in February 1825 Maria’s condition was severe. Patrick collected his eldest daughter and took her back to Haworth. By this stage there was little that could be done and, on May 6, Maria died. The deep and long lasting affection Charlotte held for her eldest sister in particular was revealed many years later in a letter to W.S Williams in which she explained that her own time at Cowan Bridge school was brief and unremarkable but considers it entirely possible that her sister Maria will still be remembered by other ‘Cowan Bridge girls’.
I wonder who that former school fellow of mine was that told Mr Lewes, or how she had been enabled to identify Currer Bell with C. Brontë. She could not have been a Cowan Bridge girl, none of them can possibly remember me. They might remember my eldest sister Maria; her prematurely-developed and remarkable intellect, as well as the mildness, wisdom, and fortitude of her character might have left an indelible impression on some observant mind amongst her companions.  

The already close relationship that Charlotte shared with her older sisters was no doubt intensified by the death of her mother and the dynamic of the relationship between Maria and her younger siblings no doubt changed. Triandis notes that ‘collectivists are socially more cohesive and are more likely to provide social support when unpleasant life events occur.’ The loss and grief was not yet over for the family however. Elizabeth had also developed tuberculosis and, three weeks after the death of Maria, Patrick returned the Cowan Bridge to bring his second daughter home the Haworth where she died on June 15. By the summer of 1825 Patrick had brought both Charlotte and Emily home as well. Their education resumed its form prior to their time at Cowan Bridge, with the children being tutored by Aunt Branwell and their father.

The loss of Maria and Elizabeth was obviously hard for the entire Brontë family. Juliet Barker stresses that not only did the Brontë children lose two much loved sisters they lost their two eldest sisters. Analysing this loss in terms of the family collective the added dynamic of the loss become manifest. In a household which had already lost its mother, the younger children would turn naturally to older siblings. Patrick Brontë may not have been the domineering patriarch depicted by Elizabeth Gaskell but he was still a man of his time and was ‘not partial to little
ones…and made it clear to them that he…must not be disturbed.’ With the loss of a mother there would be an obvious reliance on female siblings to fill some of the voids left by the maternal absence. The loss for the young Charlotte of Maria would have been heightened because of the pivotal role the eldest sister would necessarily have played in supporting the family during and after the loss of their mother. This would make her death resonate for a long time to come - partly because it was the loss of an eldest and beloved sister and also because it revisited the early loss of their mother on the children. As a result for the Brontë children, the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth must have been in some ways similar to the death of their mother all over again. The deaths of the eldest children saw the family re-establish the collective and, possibly unconsciously, marked a change in the individual roles for each family member. As she was now the eldest daughter, the change in the hierarchical structure of the collective proved greatly significant for Charlotte. This realignment in the collective body, as much as the deaths of her mother and sisters, helped to shape the woman she would become.

Prior to the fateful time at Cowan Bridge, the Brontë children entertained themselves at Haworth with play acting and creating stories. Once the surviving children were together again this entertainment intensified and the production of the juvenilia commenced. As Carol Bock comments ‘writing was a refuge from reality for Charlotte, and we have good reason to believe that it served the same purpose for Branwell, Emily and Anne as well’. Within the family collective an ingroup was formed. Triandis tells us that ‘social behaviour, especially during leisure time, occurs in small groups with greater
frequency among collectivists’. The story behind the Brontë children’s early writings is so well known that it provides another series of stories that sit alongside the writings themselves in terms of interest and a source of illumination on the lives of the Brontë children’s creative world. On June 5 1826, Patrick Brontë gave presents to each of his children. Anne received a dancing doll, Emily a toy village, Branwell a box of wooden soldiers and Charlotte a set of ninepins. The toy soldiers were the item that most captured the children’s imaginations. Each child selected a toy soldier, naming it after a public figure. Though according to Stevie Davies, ‘What Charlotte remembered as a snatch-and-grab raid, Branwell recalled as a two-stage legitimate allocation’ Branwell having the ‘disposal of them’ as he desired. The newly christened toy soldiers would then become characters in the plays the children began to construct.

As the oldest children, and as such leaders of the ingroup, Branwell and Charlotte established, probably unintentionally, the pattern of the game. Of all of the journals that Patrick Brontë subscribed to it was Blackwood’s Magazine that had the greatest influence. The impact of this journal is demonstrated in Charlotte’s childhood creations. In 1829 she produced ‘the tiny (measuring thirty-six by fifty-five millimeters)’ "Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine," [this had been written by Charlotte and bound up between 20 August and 25 August 1829]. Validation for the prior claim that Patrick had, unintentionally, indoctrinated his children into his belief system can be found in the children’s love of Blackwood’s. It was a journal that would continue to have great importance to them and one they would later seek acceptance from for their own works. Christine Alexander notes that the Brontë children would’ devour’ the contents of Blackwood’s’ as each new issue
arrived at the parsonage for their father.⁴³ Branwell named his soldier after Napoleon and Charlotte, naturally, after the Duke of Wellington. Anne and Emily eventually named their soldiers after two Arctic explorers. All these people were reported on in Blackwood’s and therefore were part of the children’s area of knowledge. Charlotte’s ninepins were used to represent African characters in a story about colonialism and empire. Again, this choice is a telling one. Depicting the African characters through the vehicle of the nine pins, homogeneous in nature and lacking human form, marks a division in the representation from the characters of the Empire, who are represented by the human like toy soldiers, and characters of the colonies. Childish and innocent those this game may well have been, the same aspects of characterisation will later emerge in Jane Eyre. Here the colonies will be backgrounded and disenfranchised through their lack of voice and their representation only through characterisations of madness and base animal instincts. The backdrop of colonialism would be part of Charlotte’s texts throughout her career and it is this theme that is perhaps most manifest in Jane Eyre. That which informed her as a child continued to do so into her adult life. Given the insular nature of the Brontë collective this is unsurprising.

The games became the written tales of Glass Town, the children’s imaginary world that was nevertheless coloured by the reality of the world outside and Christine Alexander points out that Charlotte’s ‘early writing reveals the formative influences on the later novelist.’⁴⁴ The facts about the world beyond the Parsonage continued to be gleaned from Blackwood’s and other journals and also, no doubt, their father’s conversation and sermons. This small ingroup divided yet again and by 1831, as the children were entering young adulthood, Anne and Emily were
writing their own tales about ‘Parry’s Land’ and ‘Ross’s Land’ which later became the kingdom of Gondal. Branwell and Charlotte continued to collaborate on their kingdom which, in approximately 1833, became Angria.⁴⁵

The collaborative nature of the children’s early writings may go some way toward explaining why Charlotte felt it appropriate to send Emily’s manuscript of Wuthering Heights to publishers despite Emily’s objections. There were certainly other issues involved in Charlotte’s decision but, if we understand the collectivist nature of the Brontë children, a new perspective becomes apparent. Within a family collective there will be obvious homogeneity, particularly so when the collective is exposed only superficially to other collectives or outside agents. ‘Homogeneity…leads to tightness and collectivism. Where there is much sharing of beliefs and values, but a distinct hierarchy, the probability of vertical collectivism is high’.⁴⁶ Families in the period directly preceding and during the Victorian period were hierarchically structured with the father firmly positioned as head of the household. The hierarchy within the Brontë household will be elaborated on further as this chapter progresses. At this point, however, it is useful to note that Charlotte was now the oldest daughter in the family and as such was required to undertake a specific role in relation to her siblings. She carried throughout her life greater responsibility but also greater power within the family than Emily or Anne.

The writings of all the children would prove to be part of Brontë literary history but they are also representative of the children’s educational experience. Charlotte continued to write her tales of Angria into womanhood, still doing so at twenty three. That she chose to hold on to this practice as an adult indicates the extent of the
security she gained from her small family writing collective. The writings were fantasy, imagined worlds and conflicts, but they were based on reality or, at first, the childish interpretation of reality filtered through the media of the day. As Christine Alexander points out the politics and business world of Angria were created largely by Branwell. Charlotte was more intrigued by the romances she could create in this world. The affairs and intrigues she created for her characters were inspired in part by the exploits of Byron, whose affairs she followed in newspaper gossip.47

From the period of her juvenilia interest in the personal, the romantic and passionate as opposed to the (overtly) political is interesting to note. In her adult writings, particularly Jane Eyre and Villette, the tension between passion and reason is manifest. These early collaborations with Branwell and the differing focus of brother and sister in their creative works no doubt informed Charlotte’s later work on a number of levels. The writing partnerships, the games the children engaged in, the texts they read and discussed all played a part in the education of Charlotte. For Charlotte and her sisters an education that would make them self sufficient was essential. Although from an early age Charlotte dreamed of writing she was still practical enough to realise that she needed another means of support, no matter how objectionable she would find the life of either a teacher or governess. This shows another marked difference between her and Branwell. Though he engaged in the more practical aspects of life and politics in his juvenilia, as an adult, as will be further detailed, he struggled to shoulder the burden of work and life and ultimately undone by both.

In January 1831 Charlotte was removed again from the Brontë family collective
when she was sent to school for a second time at Miss Wooler’s school at Roe Head in Mirfield. Charlotte spent a year and half as a pupil at Roe Head though she would later return to Miss Wooler and her school as a teacher. Lyndall Gordon notes that ‘Charlotte, acutely aware of her responsibilities as the eldest child, told Miss Wooler’s pupils that she must use every moment to fit herself to earn her living.’ Charlotte was attending the school through the generosity of her godmother Mrs Atkinson who, during a severe illness suffered by Patrick Brontë in 1830, was made aware that his children were precariously positioned.

Christine Alexander tells us that Charlotte was ‘homesick at school’ and the writing of her juvenilia, specifically the Glass Town Saga, ‘ceased’. According to Alexander Charlotte ‘found relief in daydreams’ which ‘she committed to paper almost immediately on her return home.’ Despite her homesickness Charlotte gained more than an education at Roe Head; it was here that she met Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. Her friendships with Ellen and Mary were significant ones, the three school friends would form lifelong friendships and Ellen and Mary would become Charlotte’s principal correspondents despite the fact that in 1845 Mary migrated to New Zealand. Charlotte’s affection for her friends was deep and intense; this is particularly true of her relationship with Ellen. The devoted friend that Charlotte was in youth foreshadow the depth of emotion that she would later display in both her writing and her feelings for Constantin Heger. Charlotte’s first letter to Ellen was dated January 13 1832; her mode of address to the recipient was simply ‘Dear Ellen’. By July 21 of the same year Charlotte was addressing her letters to ‘My dearest Ellen’. Charlotte did not hesitate to express her affection for her friends. In a letter from Roe Head where she was teaching in 1836, Charlotte tells Ellen,
‘Don’t deceive yourself by imagining that I have a bit of real goodness about me. My Darling if I were like you I should have my face Zion-ward though prejudice and error may occasionally fling a mist over the glorious vision before me.’ Charlotte’s love and admiration for Ellen is apparent in this letter as is the playful nature of their correspondence. She signs of with a minute postscript which reads ‘don’t think me mad this is a silly letter.’ As John Maynard points out however, these endearments are not, as may be read in ‘a modern context’, passionate vows of homosexual lovers’ but instead the ‘affectionate gush of Victorian schoolgirls.’

Although her early life was dominated by the family unit as her sole collective, as Charlotte matured her friendships were obviously important to her. It must have been a relief to step beyond the central collective and the Brontë family and find comfort and companionship outside. The Brontë children engaged in learning, play and creative expression very much within a silo. Their exposure to others was limited. That the central and earliest exposure of collectives is the family unit is not in itself vastly different from any other childhood but other children within the village had greater exposure to collectives outside the family unit. For Charlotte and her siblings, because they lacked the characteristics required for membership to the other collectives which surrounded them, their family collective would stand as their central collective for considerably longer. When Charlotte met Ellen and Mary at Roe Head she was fourteen years old and ‘she came upon a closed-in society and a way of life entirely new to her: a tight network of visiting families, like the Nusseys, with their deeply rooted sense of place.’ Lyndall Gordon comments that the girls she met at Roe Head ‘changed their dress three or four times a day in the course of their social rounds.’ They ridiculed Charlotte’s dress sense, style and physical
appear.\textsuperscript{52} Charlotte was also informed by Mary Taylor when they first met at the school that she was ugly.\textsuperscript{53} By stepping beyond the family collective Charlotte faced both new opportunities and new challenges.

Charlotte was engaging in a world where the role for women of her socio-economic group was undergoing significant change. By the nineteenth century the role of the educated woman had shifted. While many educated women were financially secure by virtue of either personal wealth or marriage, the decreasing marriage rates and the need to secure a livelihood meant it was now necessary for many middle class women to earn their own living. Victorians saw ‘childrearing as a matter for specialists - not necessarily trained professionals, as teachers and childcare workers retained a certain amateur quality until comparatively late in the century, but certainly individuals who devoted all of their time to the effort.’\textsuperscript{54} It was at this time that the role of teacher and governess became common examples of socially acceptable professional pursuits for middle class educated women of ‘good families’ devoid of wealth. Governesses were employed to teach the daughters of the aristocracy and the new rich the accomplishments that would enable them to find a suitable husband. They were not viewed as academic instructors, though it was something they were nevertheless required to provide. Their ‘non-academic’ role further disenfranchised them within the households where they were employed and where they were ‘often treated with contempt’.\textsuperscript{55} Kathryn Hughes states that:

While the governess was not a new figure in the British social landscape – the aristocracy had been using her services since medieval days – her employment in middle class families dated back only to the end of the eighteenth century. Her appearance at their table was a direct consequence of
the increased wealth of the nation, epitomised by the success of industrialists and financiers, but shared by a growing middle class.\textsuperscript{56}

Charlotte viewed the life of a governess as an onerous one. Her depiction of Jane Eyre's lot in life is clearly illustrative of her opinion. On May 12, 1848 Charlotte offered the following comments to her publisher William Smith Williams:

I have seen an ignorant nursery-maid who could scarcely read or write by dint of an excellent, serviceable sanguine-phlegmatic ‘temperament’…manage with comparative ease a large family of spoilt children, while their Governess lived amongst them a life of inexpressible misery; tyrannized over, finding her efforts to please and teach utterly vain, chagrined, distressed, worried - so badgered, so trodden-on, that she ceased almost at last to know herself, and wondered in what despicable, trembling frame her oppressed mind was imprisoned…\textsuperscript{57}

These socially acceptable roles, such as governess, for women like Charlotte who were educated but without means, may have afforded them a limited degree of increased financial security but they did little to significantly enhance the personal power base of these women. Psychologists working in the area of social dominance, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto point out that:

…while the proximal forces constructing and maintaining oppressive systems are complex and multifaceted, they are also expressions of human will, agency, and mind…SDO [social dominance orientation] is defined as a very general individual differences orientation expressing the value that people place on nonegalitarian and hierarchically structured relationships among social groups. It expresses general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups over other socially constructed regardless of the manner in which these groups are defined….The [social] groups most likely to be the targets of social dominance drivers will be those groups that are the most salient and define the sharpest power differential within any given society at any given time. Social class defined the primary continuum
for social stratification for much of modern European history, and therefore has been the group distinction most likely to engage social dominance drives...  

Within a society so divided by class and wealth as that of Victorian England the governess became a focal point of these social dominance drives. Their existence within the households of those who believed themselves dominant and who in fact were higher up the social hierarchy, made the lesser status of the governess more apparent. The impact the changing economic environment had on women in positions similar to Charlotte’s own, was not lost on her. The inequities suffered by the gentle working woman was, by the time of the publication of Jane Eyre, a question of debate by government and the populace. It was a question Charlotte herself had no answer to, despite recognising and identifying in her writing the oppressed state of women of her social milieu. In an addendum to the above quoted letter to William Smith Williams Charlotte made the following observations of ‘condition of women question’:

I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question – but it is one respecting which so much ‘cant’ has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked – but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also – but are not their present occupants and candidates more than numerous enough to answer every demand? Is there room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, more female artists, more authoresses? One can see where the evil lies – but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident – when her destiny isolates her – I suppose she must do what she can – live as she can – complain as little – bear as much – work as well as possible. ...I believe it is sound practice – good to put into execution while the philosophers and legislators ponder over the better ordering of the Social System. ...I conceive that when Patience has done its utmost and Industry its best, whether in the case of Women or Operatives, and when both are baffled and Pain and Want
This was the role to which the Brontë sisters found they were assigned but this was not the life to which Charlotte aspired. The prescribed and socially acceptable roles for women were abhorrent to her, as they were for many women of the day. This is not to suggest that Charlotte engaged in any overt rebellion against the life to which she was relegated. Her resistance to her world did not manifest itself in a way that would be visible to those outside. Charlotte adopted no poses and engaged in no behavior that would raise questions from either her family or society, until the publication of Jane Eyre at least. As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, Charlotte endeavoured to ‘negotiate passionate self-fulfilment on terms which preserve[d] the social and moral conventions intact, and so preserve[d] intact the submissive, enduring, everyday self which adhere[d] to them.’ Instead she sought a modicum of independence through writing. She sought to free herself from the controlled world she inhabited by challenging it through writing, and she fought to free herself from the subservient position she occupied as woman of her class and time. Charlotte desired not only to create but also to attain the freedom through her creativity which allowed her to pursue only her writing.

Although, as we will see, Charlotte feared rejection, when it came to writing she did not suffer from self doubt, she was quite sure of her abilities. When in April 1846 Charlotte’s first manuscript for The Professor accompanied by Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey was rejected by publishers Aylott & Jones she believed the fault lay with the reader rather than the writers. Charlotte and her siblings wrote obsessively...
throughout their lives. This may have been a way by which they could escape the realities of their existence or an attempt to assert some modicum of power into lives that were otherwise devoid of any significant independence. ‘Throughout their adolescence, Charlotte and the others bent over their pens, fearing that if they stopped the rest of the world might tumble down.’

The level of industry all the Brontë children demonstrated might be further understood by reflecting on the family’s immigrant background. Their father, Patrick Brontë, was, as we have seen, an Irish immigrant without money and pursuing an education and a station in life when he arrived in England. Patrick’s education and the power and the security it provided cannot be overlooked when considering his children. It is not surprising then that Charlotte’s heroines were educated women and, though their rivals might be beautiful, they were invariably ignorant or superficially informed. Often they were ignorant of their own ignorance.

Writing was the one way that Charlotte could demonstrate her intelligence publicly and therefore access power. She was confident as a writer because she was confident of her intelligence. Ellen Nussey recalled Charlotte from their days together at Roe Head as ‘a laughing girl who showed no timidity in the presence of other girls, who was bold, clever and outspoken’ and Mary Taylor remembered her knowing ‘things that were out of our range altogether’.

It follows that, if Charlotte did feel confident in her abilities as a writer, writing was a way of avoiding something that she feared throughout her life – rejection. Robert Keefe has noted that Charlotte suffered nightmares throughout her life about rejection ‘which would recur in varying forms’. As we have seen, the Brontë family income was modest. Although
they were educated, coming from their socio-economic position, the chances of the
Brontë sisters marrying into financial security could not be guaranteed. It seems
somewhat naive to attempt to hide from rejection by pursuing an occupation that
invites just that, particularly for women. Although Charlotte had offers of marriage
she believed that she would never be married and said as much to her closest friends.
In 1839 after receiving a proposal from a visiting curate, David Pryce, Charlotte gave
an account of his visit and subsequent offer to Ellen after which she closed her letter
as follows:

I’m certainly doomed to be an old maid Ellen – I can’t expect another chance
– never mind I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years
old.64

The ‘explicit and idealised characterisation as marriage as the total subordination
of wife to husband’ was still in circulation in 1857 and espoused by journals such
as Chamber’s Journal. This ideal remained despite the recognition that it was ‘an
ideal to be longed for but granted to few: throughout the nineteenth century there
were many more men than women…The general consensus, in fiction as in
journalism, was that marriage was the core of social life and social aspiration, and
that the onus was on the wife to make the marriage a success.’65 Charlotte’s belief
that she would end up an ‘old-maid’ was therefore possibly informed not only by
her realistic assessment of her opportunities given her position in life but also by
her obvious resistance to make a match, and potentially become further oppressed,
simply to escape that status. Pursuing the profession of teacher or governess was perhaps a pursuit formed less from naivety than desperation, for Charlotte believed she would always need to be self sufficient and there were few desirable avenues open to the educated woman requiring an income. Nevertheless, it reinforces the contention that Charlotte had faith in her abilities as a writer. In essays she composed for Monsieur Constantin Georges Romain Heger, whose intelligence and attentions as a teacher aroused in her an almost obsessive passion and who became her inspiration for The Professor, Charlotte revealed her belief that ‘the nature of genius is like that of instinct…the man of genius produces, without labour and as if by a single effort, results which men without genius, however knowledgeable, however preserving, could never attain.’ As a writer she faced rejection, sometimes from those whom she most admired including Robert Southey to whom, in 1836, she sent some of her verse for critique. Being a man of his time, Southey warned Charlotte against the pursuit of a life of letters, stating in his response that ‘Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be.’ Charlotte was not dissuaded permanently from her desire to be a writer by the Poet Laureate’s comments, though she was rebuffed enough to avoid seeking comment or critique on her work for six years. ‘In literature…Charlotte was a Calvinist: she had no doubt she was one of the elect who possessed genius…’ It was not until her much discussed friendship and infatuation with Constantin Heger in Brussels that she found the courage to again seek criticism. Though this relationship gave Charlotte the impulse to confront her fear of criticism it brought her a new form of rejection, romantic rejection. Charlotte would however continue to invite criticism from others regarding her work even after the success of Jane Eyre. Often this would be requested from her publisher William Smith
Williams. When submitting the first volume of Shirley to him in February 1849 Charlotte wrote in her accompanying letter ‘I shall be glad of another censor - and if a severe one, so much the better, provided he is also just. I court the keenest criticism: far rather would I never publish more than publish anything inferior to my first effort.’

Charlotte was only five when her mother died and it was a mere four years later in 1825 when Maria and Elizabeth died. These losses had a natural and significant impact on the psychological development of Charlotte. The absence of maternal approval, encouragement and, most significantly, affection from such an early stage in her life may go some way toward explaining her fear of rejection. It is unsurprising that Charlotte sought approval for her work from those whom she admired for their knowledge and talent and who she saw as role models. By all accounts Heger possessed ‘potent intelligence and passion for literature’, it is unsurprising that Charlotte was drawn to him given it would have been the first time a man outside her family whose intellectual capacities she respected paid her attention and appeared, through his attentive teaching, to recognise her intellectual capacities in return. It is also unsurprising that she easily fell into an infatuation with the first man who supported her dream of becoming a writer. But in this situation, as we will see, the need to hide from rejection would actually result in Charlotte being subjected to it. Her romantic attachment to Heger provided Charlotte with an experience of angst and passion she would need to later inform her work, particularly Jane Eyre and Villette.
Within Charlotte’s novels it is the master/pupil relationship that is romantically idealised. Karen Chase points out its appeal for Brontë:

The force of the master-pupil arrangement derives, no doubt, from its simultaneous satisfaction of… the demand for romance and the demand for autonomy.  

This notion correlates with Hegel’s concept of the master/slave relationship. The pupil sees his or herself reflected in the eyes of the master, this becomes the major point of access to the self for the pupil. The pupil’s desire to please the master allows the pupil an increasingly positive self-reflection.

When Charlotte sought Southey’s approval in late 1836 it was, therefore, a natural choice if she was seeking ‘affection’ in the form of approval from an educator. Admiring his work, she sought his advice underwritten by her idealised notion of the master/pupil relationship. It provides considerable insight into Charlotte’s disposition that, although Southey sought to dissuade her from writing, she remained grateful to him for the criticism, which was based largely upon the fact that she was a woman. Charlotte was incapable of protesting against criticism of this nature, she was indoctrinated by her society and therefore a product of it, disliking but nevertheless accepting her place. Nonetheless, it was not until 1842 as a pupil at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels that she would again dare to show her work to someone outside her collective.

Charlotte viewed Southey as teacher and critic in a purely non-romantic way. Her relationship with Constantin Heger, however, lacked this professional distance, at
least in Charlotte’s mind. The infatuation that Charlotte developed for the Belgian teacher has been well documented, as has the impact of the relationship on her life. Certainly there seems little evidence to indicate that Heger, a married man of thirty-three, offered Charlotte any romantic encouragement. He attempted to get the best from Charlotte as a student but he offered affectionate responses to her that were typical of his teacher to pupil relationships with other students – encouraging her work and offering assistance. Heger had a reputation as a skilled and dedicated teacher who went to great lengths to ensure his pupils were instructed to a high standard. He offered Charlotte’s sincere recognition now and then for her unusual talents, gifts of books, and a promotion to English teacher for the career-starved energies of his pupil. Heger’s obituary notice said he had ‘a precious gift, a sort of intellectual magnetism, by virtue of which he entered the mind of the student exciting its curiosity.’ For Charlotte however, who had spent her childhood losing one source of affection after another and who prized the master/pupil dynamic, Heger’s attentions took on greater significance. John Maynard notes that Heger’s ‘position can hardly be known for certain’ and points to the gift of ‘a rather extraordinary cadeau, a piece of the coffin of Napoleon that Heger had himself been given by a friend.’ It cannot be conjectured what a gift such as this may have meant however and, in the absence of Heger’s letters to Charlotte, there is little to suggest that the teacher harboured any romantic feelings for his pupil. Brontë has likewise presented Heger with significant gifts leaving the manuscript for her Glass Town tale High Life in Verdopolis as well as several with him in Brussels when she returned home to Haworth in 1844. The unpublished manuscript of High Life in Verdopolis was found in a second hand book shop in Brussels in 1892 and was not published until 1991.
The degree of subordination which Charlotte was prepared to endure, and in fact offered Heger, is demonstrated by the letters she wrote to him after her return to Haworth. It seems astounding that Charlotte, who concerned herself with propriety in so many ways, could write letters which contained such thinly veiled passion:

I have not prayed you to write me soon, for I fear to importune you – but you are too kind to forget that I want it just the same – yes – I want it very much…once more adieu monsieur it hurts to say adieu even in a letter – Oh I shall certainly see you again one day – it surely must be…

Despite his failure to reply, Charlotte continued to write impassioned letters to Heger. While this might reflect her difficulties coping with rejection, it also exposes her desperation for approval and affection. The irony is that through her insistent pursuit of affection from an inappropriate source, Charlotte invited rejection, for the circumstances of her misplaced affection made this rejection inevitable. Charlotte’s letters to Heger demonstrate the ambiguous aspect of her nature. It is an ambiguity similar to that which Eagleton has pointed to in her characters.

It can be argued that the characters of both Rochester and M. Paul are reflections of Charlotte’s idealized version of masculinity and romantic interest. Certainly it suggests that a large part of her attraction to Heger lay in his intellectual authority over her. His encouragement of her own writing enhanced this attraction as it offered her validation. The encouragement Heger provided amounted to, in her mind at least, a form of permission to again pursue writing after that permission had been previously denied by another idealized male – Southey.
According to Alfred Adler, the notion of overcoming 'is supported by the struggle for self-preservation ... by bodily and mental growth, and by the striving for perfection.' In her world, Charlotte felt she was constantly placed in the position of needing to overcome her situation. After taking up a new post as governess in March 1841 with the White family at Upperwood House in Rawdon, Charlotte expressed her feelings in a letter to Ellen Nussey:

If I can but feel I am giving satisfaction, and at the same time I can keep my health, I shall, I hope be moderately happy. But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess’s life is for me – for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are to the employment. Do not think I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity of children. I find it so difficult to ask either servants or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it.

The feelings expressed to her friend Ellen were not new to Charlotte, they were the progression of the feelings that she experienced as a child at Cowan Bridge. Ill at ease outside the collective of her family or few close friends, living with strangers must have been extremely difficult for her. Her situation was brought about not only because she lived within a hierarchical structure designed to privilege men and wealth at the expense and backgrounding of women and those in lower socio-economic brackets. Charlotte’s unhappiness would have been magnified by her view of herself as different to those outside the Brontë family. Again in a letter to Ellen, this time from Brussels in 1843 where, at which time, Charlotte was also very unhappy, she states ‘I am not like you.’ Clearly Charlotte recognised herself as being different even from those of a similar socio-economic background. The view
she held of herself, which was revealed in her essays to Constantin Heger, as a genius could only have furthered Charlotte’s discontent in her subservient roles as governess and teacher. The literary talent she was confident she possessed could only be stifled by the duties of employment. These facts combined with Charlotte’s further difficulties of losing so many of her female role models, most specifically her mother, in childhood and her relatively cloistered upbringing, all presented barriers which, throughout her life, she would find the need to face time and again. These losses were apparent in Charlotte’s work and, as Christine Alexander suggests, ‘the unhealed wound of motherlessness made its mark on her life and writings.’

It is not extraordinary, therefore, that Charlotte created heroines somewhat in her own image, or the image she perceived of herself. Jane and Lucy are women lower down the socio-economic pecking order. Unlike Charlotte, they are further disenfranchised by the absence of a support network or collective through which they are able to access even a modicum of power. Charlotte had her siblings to fill the role of the collective, at least for the greater part of her life, as well as enjoying lifelong friendships with Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. It is interesting that Charlotte elected to depict women who are unable to access any form of support of a collectivist nature. Charlotte was more fortunate than the heroines she created. She had a collective unit which consistently supported her choices even when they were not in the best interests of the collective. When Charlotte returned from Brussels for example, she had given up employment and an income with no strategy in place for future employment. But to be fair to Charlotte, when she returned home from Brussels in January 1844 she found her collective unit under threat, her father’s eyesight was rapidly deteriorating. Given his profession, the loss of eyesight could
have been ruinous for Patrick. Throughout the rest of her life Charlotte would increasingly take on the role of reader and scribe for her father as his eyesight continued to diminish. This is another example of her role in the collective. Within a collective when situations or opportunities arise that may inconvenience many other people the person for whom the opportunity has arisen may decide not to pursue it.\textsuperscript{82}

Charlotte, Emily and Anne held an ambition of establishing their own school, something the three had determined to do in 1841. Due to the change in circumstances of the Brontë family because of Patrick’s visual impairment however, the school that the Brontë sisters were intending to establish, once Charlotte had acquired the added tuition under Monsieur Heger, was attempted in what appears to be a rather half-hearted way out of Haworth Parsonage in July 1844. Failure to attract pupils to the remote location seems to have signaled the end of the scheme. Charlotte had suffered so much emotional stress during her second visit as a teacher at the pensionnat Heger that the idea of again teaching and being away from home was overwhelming for her. Juliet Barker tells us that Charlotte’s increasing resentment of teaching in Brussels followed a familiar pattern. Her initial happiness in each of her work roles was steadily replaced by disdain for the work and the people surrounding her.\textsuperscript{83} In the case of Brussels this disdain extended to all but Constantin Heger.

Although the support she received from her family indicates that Charlotte had a strong collective around her, she also knew what it was like to be outside the collective. Whether it was through her own disposition or not, when she was teaching or in the role of governess and taken away from the security of her own collective, Charlotte felt isolated. Her letters from her time in Brussels, where she had few
friends, reflect the intensity of her loneliness and the resulting depression she suffered. In August 1843 Charlotte wrote to Ellen that she was ‘in low spirits and that Earth and Heaven seem dreary and empty’. The school vacations were about to commence and Charlotte, who was not returning home for the vacation, said ‘It is the first time in my life that I have really dreaded the vacation….Alas, I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight in my heart – and I do so wish I could go home.’ Part of the reason that Charlotte’s collective ties were so few again comes back to her position in society. Juliet Barker claims that Charlotte’s ‘education and inclination both led her to want a life of leisured luxury in which she could pursue her reading and writing at will. The necessity of earning her own living thus produced a gnawing resentment which had poisoned her relations with her employers…’ As previously noted, in comparison to the parishioners of Haworth the Brontës were comfortable. These circumstances added to Charlotte’s difficulties in extending her collective. She did not fit in with those around her but the collectives to which she would like to belong were closed to her. This is particularly true of the literary establishment which, according to what she had been told by Southey, was beyond her reach. Believing herself to possess literary genius this exclusion must have been dreadful for Charlotte. If the description of William Thackeray’s daughter Anne is to be believed, after Jane Eyre was published creating a sensation and Charlotte gained access to the literary circle she aspired to, she found, despite the recognition of her talent, she still was not part of the collective:

…my father invited some of his friends in the evening to meet Miss Brontë - for everybody was interested and anxious to see her. Miss Brontë retired to the sofa in the study, and murmured a low word now and then to our kind governess, Miss Truelock. The room looked very dark, the lamp began to smoke a little, the conversation grew dimmer and more dim, the ladies sat
round still expectant, my father was too much perturbed by the gloom and the silence to be able to cope with it all.86

By the time Charlotte was able to gain access to the collective she felt she belonged to the time had passed – she had been fully positioned within the structure of society and her access, although granted, would always be as the outsider.

Charlotte eventually became the eldest child in the family due to the tragedy of premature death rather than birth positioning. Charlotte’s role as the eldest was something that she had to adapt to at the age of nine, somewhat late in childhood development. This offers insight into why she chose to create her characters of Lucy and Jane what can only be described as sober and serious in their childhoods. In Villette in the face of Polly’s emotional decline, Lucy asserts:

I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination…when of moonlight nights, on waking, I beheld her [Polly’s] figure, white and conspicuous in its night-dress, kneeling upright in bed and praying like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast – some precocious fanatic or untimely saint – I scarcely know what thoughts I had; but they ran the risk of being hardly more rational and healthy than that child’s mind must have been.87

The obvious assertion of the independent voice reverberates through both Villette and Jane Eyre. ‘I, Lucy Snowe’ echoes constantly within Villette, Charlotte’s last published novel, in much the same way as ‘I am Jane Eyre’ does within Charlotte’s first published text. Although both women have little claim to power, they instinctively cling to the power of identity. The assertion of an individual identity runs contrary to the dominant group’s hegemonic position. The heroines of
Charlotte’s texts are challenging the hegemony simply by asserting themselves as individuals. Sidanius and Pratto note that ‘social hegemony is more efficiently and safely maintained by the exercise of power over ideology and discourse.’ Charlotte portrays the characteristics of Victorian England’s hegemony’s socially acceptable female types in the characters of Ginevra, Blanche and indeed Polly – these are all types she rejects with her assertion of the nonconformist identities of Jane and Lucy. The reiteration of the self by both these heroines becomes a rejection of the ideology women of that class were supposed to embrace. The claim of the independent self may be a fictitious one for Jane and Lucy, they are still confined by their circumstances and their positioning within their society’s hierarchy, but it is still one of the few assertions to uniqueness and independence that they are free to make.

Relegated to the designated roles as teachers and governesses for women of their social standing and limited finances, both Lucy and Jane recognise that, as they adopt these roles, they further relinquish power. Charlotte no doubt recognised this as a truth in her own life and the lives of her sisters. It was not only in Brussels that Charlotte felt desperate. As a teacher at Roe Head in 1835 her entries in her personal diary reflect her discontent:

The thought came over me am I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness the apathy and the hyperbolical and most asinine stupidity of those fat-headed oafs and on compulsion assuming an air of kindness patience and assiduity?…I felt as if I could have written gloriously – I longed to write…But just then a Dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited.
The vehemence in her description is surprising suggesting that it may have been at Roe Head that Charlotte unconsciously registered that, by taking on the role of teacher, she was locking herself into her appropriate position within the hierarchy. Certainly in Villette the resentment of the subordination and dependence forced upon women in Charlotte’s position comes through, more so than is the case in Jane Eyre. It is in Villette that the nervous depression that she suffered during her second period in Brussels is reflected in the text. This may well have been because, as Keefe suggests, by the time of writing Villette Charlotte had undergone even more personal loss with the deaths of Branwell, Emily and Anne in rapid succession.

No doubt the losses throughout her life played a large part in the development of Charlotte as a writer but, if we again consider the theories of Adler, we can see that Charlotte exemplified his notions of responses to feelings of inferiority:

In the struggle for perfection man is always in a state of psychical agitation and feels his incapacity before the goal of perfection. It is only when he feels that he has reached a satisfying stage in his upward struggle that he has a sense of rest, of value and of happiness. In the next moment his goal draws him farther on, so that it becomes clear that to be a human being means the possession of a feeling of inferiority that is constantly pressing on towards its own conquest.  

In Adler’s view, feelings of inferiority are part of the human condition. His theories espouse that ‘the historical movement of humanity is to be regarded as the history of its feeling of inferiority and of its efforts to find a solution of its problems’. Progression, particularly unexpected progression, is a response to feelings of inferiority firstly in the individual and, correspondingly, in society. Through her writing Charlotte could progress towards her goal for at least creative perfection.
Charlotte’s overwhelming desire to write and resentment at the occupations that she was required to undertake and which resulted in keeping her from that desire was, therefore, quite natural. She was aware of her positioning within society and wished to progress beyond its bounds. This is no doubt why the idea of a school run by the Brontë sisters initially seemed appealing. By running her own school, Charlotte could escape some level of oppression and move further along the hierarchical structure of the day, teaching would never see her fully transcend her oppressed state. In reality nothing would achieve this but we must bear in mind that Charlotte, being already indoctrinated into this hierarchy, was unable to clearly view the extent of her oppression. Nevertheless, Charlotte was well aware that her position could be improved upon, her portrayal of characters such as Blanche and Ginevra are indicative of that fact. She was also aware that the only way to improve her position was to find a way through which she could progress financially. What Charlotte could clearly see, and what her doubling of the femme fatales of her texts and the intelligent but plain heroine illustrates, is that any attempt to access power that is only by association is fruitless. Blanche and Ginevra may have been beautiful and may have been in positions where they could attain wealth but they would never have the independence of Jane or Lucy. Blanche and Ginevra knowingly colluded with the power structure because they could. Jane and Lucy may have ultimately adhered to it but it is an unintentional observance of societal mores.

Nevertheless, the idea of progression through the association with a suitable man was not wholly discounted. Certainly, as her feelings for Heger attest, Charlotte was capable of finding attraction in a man who she regarded as intelligent and
stimulating. The man in whom the Brontë sisters initially placed their hopes and expectations, however, was not a romantic interest but their brother, Branwell. Branwell would prove to be a poor choice as either leader or saviour. He demonstrated all the intentions of progressing but consistently failed in his endeavours – often through self-sabotage. A trait that would become increasingly difficult to witness for both his sisters and his father and, once the tragedy of the situation was accepted, become increasingly frustrating for Charlotte who, above all of family, harboured hopes of betterment.

Branwell’s first employment was as a portrait painter. In mid 1838 under the patronage of Reverend William Morgan, a friend of his father, Branwell was set up in a studio at Bradford. As a portrait painter Branwell faced considerable competition and sustaining himself with this profession soon proved impossible. Although it is thought that Branwell gave up the studio and returned home in May 1839, Juliet Barker states that it was possibly as early as February of that year that he returned to Haworth. Although Branwell may well have engaged in some drinking and socializing while at Bradford, it would appear that the failure of his studio was due mainly to competition from more established artists.

It was later in 1839 that Branwell, while on a trip to Liverpool with his old friend Michael Merrall, is first documented as having taken opium. By this time Branwell was already given to drinking to excess with his friends and engaging in wild nights out. These habits did not stop him in December 1839, however, from taking up the post of tutor to the two sons of Robert Postlethwaite in the Lakes District at the town of Broughten-in-Furness. Judging by the path he had started to travel, it appears that
Branwell aspired to be part of more than one collective. Among his friends and drinking companions his letters reflect a persona that was lewd and debauched. He was able to lose this persona when it suited him though and could portray himself in an entirely different light to employers or those outside the collective of his friends. It may be that, like Charlotte, Branwell did not want to be relegated to the collective determined by his socio-economic standing. Drinking and dissipation were behaviours for those who had money and did not need to earn a living. Branwell’s excesses may well have been assertion of what he felt was his more appropriate social position.

In 1840, after six months as a tutor for the Postlethwaite’s, Branwell was dismissed. The reasons for his dismissal are unclear but a number of suggestions have been made including being found drunk and unfit for duty and another that he impregnated one of the daughters or servants of the house. Despite losing his position, Branwell was optimistic upon his return to Haworth as he believed that at last a literary career might be within his reach. While he had been in the Lakes district Branwell had met with the poet and son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge. Coleridge, to whom Branwell had sent his poem ‘At dead of midnight – drearily –’ for criticism, invited Branwell to his home and encouraged Branwell in his literary pursuits.

In this positive mindset Branwell worked on a translation of Horace’s Odes which he then sent to Coleridge for his opinion. Regrettably Coleridge did not respond to Branwell, though Juliet Barker cites a later discovered very positive draft response to Branwell from Coleridge as evidence of Branwell’s talent. Still requiring employment, in the second half of 1840 Branwell took up the position of railway
clerk with the Leeds and Manchester Railway. In a short time Branwell was promoted and took up the position of clerk-in-charge at Luddenden Foot. He continued his writing and achieved some success having thirteen poems published in the Halifax Guardian. Much has been said about Branwell’s drunkenness during his time in Luddenden but, according to some biographers, much of this is derived from the myths created about his life long after his death.\textsuperscript{94} Given the intensity of his writing and his creative output at the time there seems to be much to support this theory.

Nevertheless, in March 1842 Branwell was dismissed from his position. Audits on the accounts for the station revealed a discrepancy for which Branwell, as clerk-in-charge, was responsible. Although no one accused him of a crime or seems to have believed that it was theft, the loss still reflected negligence of his duties. It was Branwell’s next appointment as a tutor at Thorp Green to Edmund Robinson however, that would add further weight to his reputation as a scoundrel.

In 1843 Branwell took up the appointment as tutor in the Robinson household where Anne Brontë was already acting as governess. In July 1845 Branwell was dismissed from this position. The circumstances surrounding the dismissal are not entirely clear though the most likely reason, despite a seventeen year age difference, seems to be an affair between himself and Mrs Robinson which was discovered by her husband. It was after these events that Branwell began drinking and perhaps even indulging in opiates more regularly.
Branwell applied unsuccessfully in October 1845 for a position on the Leeds and Bradford Railway. Despite his ongoing failures it appears he consistently endeavoured to gain employment. There is little doubt that the passion Branwell felt for Mrs Robinson was genuine for, on the death of her husband in 1846, when the marriage that he imagined between them was not realised and proved to be his desire alone, he was grief stricken. Branwell’s drinking became more intense and Charlotte’s annoyance at his behaviour became increasingly pronounced in letters to her friends. By this stage Branwell’s drinking and resulting loss of control had become so extreme that the family feared he would be unsafe in his own room, in consequence upon his return to Haworth in now shared a bedroom with his father. This allowed Patrick to ensure that his son did not do himself a mischief or cause an accident when he was under the influence. A story recounted by the early biographer claimed that Branwell had once accidentally set his bed on fire while drunk and was rescued by Emily.95

Branwell’s professional positions, ambitions and decline are recounted in some detail here because they are of such significance to the family collective. In a collective a ‘group fights to improve its conditions’96 While the dreams of establishing a school of their own, or of Branwell making a success of his life professionally, were in currency this collective battle toward improvement was one to which all the siblings subscribed. But first the notion of and then the commitment to the school dissipated and then Branwell proved himself unable to shoulder the burden of the family’s expectations. The loss of these dreams and expectations meant Charlotte again had to reassess her position. For Charlotte and her sisters, Branwell’s failures acted as a further displacement for them in the social structure. His descent into
alcoholism had the potential to not only impact on his reputation but also to diminish the entire family. As he was the only son, Charlotte and her sisters were required to make sacrifices to help ensure Branwell’s aspirations. Although these aspirations were never of course realised, sacrifices had been made nonetheless.

It is natural that Charlotte was, as biographers and critics claim, weary of Branwell’s dissipation by the time of his death. In a letter to Ellen Nussey in January 1846 Charlotte wrote, ‘…no changes take place here – Branwell offers no prospect of hope – he professes to be too ill to think of seeking employment – he makes comfort scant at home.’ The phrasing that Charlotte selects to describe Branwell’s condition and the impact it had on the family are subtle yet they betray the underlying annoyance his behaviour gave rise to. That he ‘professes’ to be too ill rather than being too ill suggests that by this stage Charlotte had grown tired of his foibles. For Branwell his sisters were each, in their own way, important to him. Winifred Gérin contends, however, that Maria was the closest to him before her death. The collaboration between Branwell and Charlotte became closer after Maria’s death. This lends yet another dimension to the changing role of Charlotte with the loss of her mother then elder siblings, these deaths altered the brother-sister relationship for her and Branwell as well as altering her role in the household and shifting the eldest sibling obligations on to her.

Reflecting again on the qualities of collectivist cultures noted by Triandis, the collective shares the successes as well as the failure of individuals within the collective. Effort is made by the individuals within collectives to ensure the welfare of the collective as a whole rather than of the individual. For the Brontë sisters
therefore, Branwell’s failure was like a failure of their own. This was true not only because his success was required as an aid to their own financial security, but also because, from childhood, they had been a unique collective unit. In collectivist cultures it is also true that a hierarchy will emerge. In the small Brontë collective this fact was verified. Branwell was, in every respect, occupying the position of dominance within the collective in youth. In adulthood and dissipation he still managed to dominate the family collective. This served, as does the creation of the elites within any contemporary collective, to further disenfranchise others within the collective – the Brontë sisters.

The disadvantages of collectivism include:

…less willingness to cut the bonds with the family when it is required…There is evidence of high levels of homesickness when a collectivist is away from the family…

Validation for these disadvantages being part of Charlotte’s life are evidenced by how impossible cutting the bonds with Branwell proved to be for any of the family, no matter how alarming or frightening his actions became. The experience of homesickness struck all of the sisters when they were away from Haworth and their family. Proof of the intense loneliness and feelings of isolation Charlotte suffered as a result of any absences away from her family, though not to the extent of Emily who eventually stayed at Haworth to manage the household, can be found in her letters to family and friends which document at various times her complete despondency and depression aroused by her remote state. Once she had returned from Brussels, Charlotte was reluctant to enter into a new position that would mean she would again
need to leave Haworth. Although Charlotte berated Branwell in letters to her friends for his lack of employment, neither could she boast of actively seeking a position. The collective had sacrificed for Branwell in order for him to support the collective but perhaps Charlotte failed to see the similarities of their positions.

One of the more detrimental aspects of collectivism on children is its tendency to ‘undermine the self-esteem of the child…The lower levels of happiness and well-being reported by collectivists…probably reflect, in part, dissatisfaction with the burdens of doing one’s duty and the suppression of striving towards self-actualization.’ Upon her return from Brussels Charlotte appears to have shaken off any sense of obligation she had previously felt to pursue employment which would entail her leaving her family and result in her again feeling as alienated and lonely as she had in Brussels.

Like other collectivists, Charlotte was dubious of collectives outside her own. As Pauline Nestor states:

She was hesitant to see that the comfort in friendship …extended to the possibilities of support in communities. Generally, she mistrusted communities, wary of the dynamic of any collection of individuals.

Failing to recognise that she was part of a collective indicates the level to which she was immersed into collectivist behaviours and patterns which emerged in her own behaviour. Although the Brontë collective was not formed consciously, their behaviour patterns were such that made deviation from the collective agenda impossible. This coupled with the difficulties posed by some degree of social isolation made the emergence of a collective inevitable.
Although Charlotte appears to have been the most ambitious in her pursuit of a literary career, initially she was, as indicated, by no means the individual within the Brontë collective with the greatest power. That place had to be reserved, in line with the overriding social hierarchy of the day, for Branwell. Times must have emerged where Charlotte was obliged, as Triandis states, to suppress her own self-actualization to help enable Branwell’s, even when she was well aware her sacrifices were useless. In a letter to Margaret Wooler shortly after her missive to Ellen Nussey, Charlotte states:

You ask about Branwell; he never seeks employment and I begin to fear that he has rendered himself incapable of filling any respectable station in life, besides, if money were at his disposal he would use it only to his own injury – the faculty of self-government is, I fear almost destroyed in him.

Branwell never attained his goals, and the collective endeavours to enable him to do so were futile. For Charlotte, driven by a desire to grasp some modicum of difference and freedom in a life otherwise dictated by society, Branwell’s perceived indolence must have caused more than disappointment. Her desire to escape from subservient role of governess and her increasing desire to remain at home could not be realised if Branwell failed the role he had been assigned – to help ensure his sisters’ welfare. The letters to her friends highlight the anger that her brother’s behaviour provoked. By 1846 Branwell’s ruin was disturbing the comfort Charlotte gained from her home and being with her family. Writing to Ellen Nussey in September of that year she comments’ unhappily home is not now a place of complete rest - it is sad to think
how it is disquieted by the constant phantom, or rather two-Sin and Suffering.\textsuperscript{103}

Charlotte had commenced writing Jane Eyre by this time and perhaps this was in part driven by her awareness that she must determine to achieve success by her own means. As we have seen, collectivist groups keep information pertaining to the collective or individuals within the collective’s arena. That Charlotte chose to discuss her brother’s deterioration with others outside the family suggests she felt there was not even ‘comfort at home’ within her usually secure collective. All that had been hoped for from Branwell had vanished by the time of his death.

Branwell died on September 24 1848. In a letter to W.S. Williams on October 2 of the same year Charlotte made the relationship, both as it had been and as it was at the time of his death, clear, ‘It is not permitted for us to grieve for him who is gone as others grieve for those they lose; the removal of our only brother must necessarily be regarded by us rather in the light of mercy than chastisement. Branwell was his Father’s and his sisters’ pride and hope in boyhood, but since Manhood the case has been otherwise.’\textsuperscript{104}

That Charlotte tolerated the life she led, largely without question, apart from in a deflected sense in her writings, supports the previous assertion that the general assessment of her life and work runs contrary to the notion that she can be classed as a predominantly feminist voice. The way in which Charlotte Brontë led her own life, the codes and mores she observed, offers counter evidence to purely feminist readings. While her texts may have portrayed strong women suffering within the social constructs of their day, they all ultimately close with the heroines finding what they have always been seeking – acceptance within the very social structure which
had previously disenfranchised them. This conformity to society’s dictums may well be why in Villette the novel fails to give a definitive close and as readers we can assume M. Paul has perished, ultimately he must. Keeping in mind the anti-Catholicism that flowed through Villette it is unlikely that Charlotte could step away from that which she had been so fully indoctrinated and see Lucy Snowe enter into such a union. Although in the text Lucy tells us that, ‘All Rome could not put into him [M. Paul] bigotry, nor Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit.’ This provides Charlotte with a useful out, she can allow Lucy to love a Catholic but she must stress that he is not really a Catholic in the ‘worst sense’ of the word. Lucy’s account of Paul Emanuel’s faith makes him appear more misguided in his religious beliefs than he is devout. Even early criticism of Charlotte’s work notes her contempt for Catholicism. In 1877 Leslie Stephen suggested that ‘If at times she felt the aesthetic charm of the Catholic system, she was but more convinced that it was a poison, dangerous in proportion to its sweetness’.

Although Patrick Brontë’s religious beliefs were informed by Evangelicalism, he seems to have allowed his children to follow their own religious inclinations - as long as they were Protestant ones. This supports the idea that Patrick was quite different from the harsh representations of the Evangelical Mr Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre. It appears that Patrick adopted a similar attitude to the religious development of his children as he did to their intellectual development, guiding but not dominating.

Charlotte believed strongly in upholding God’s law according to her belief system and this is reflected in her texts. Rochester suffers the consequences of erring against
this belief system. Similarly, given his religion, Paul Emmanuel and Lucy Snowe can never be united. Charlotte’s overriding distrust of the Catholic Church and its proponents was something she held onto throughout her life, despite her increasing exposure to more diverse society after the success of Jane Eyre. In 1851 in a letter to Patrick, Charlotte described her visit to a meeting of the Roman Catholic Society. Her depiction of the presiding Cardinal and the attending priests reflects considerable bigotry:

…he [the Cardinal] has a very large mouth with oily lips, and looks as if he would relish a good dinner and a bottle of wine after it. He came swimming into the room smiling, simpering and bowing like a fat old lady, and sat down very demure in his chair and looked the picture of a sleek hypocrite. …A bevy of inferior priests surrounded him, many of them very dark looking and sinister men. The Cardinal spoke in a very smooth whining manner, just like a canting Methodist preacher. The audience seemed to look up to him as to a god.  

It may have been this perceived hierarchical power that added to Charlotte’s intense distrust of Catholicism. In her assessment of the Angria tales, Karen Chase proffers that ‘Perhaps the simplest psychological relation is that between a desire and its object, and perhaps the simplest narrative in history is that of a gratified desire.’ In Charlotte’s writing desire is always present and, although her heroines focus their desires on the male ‘object’ in the text, ultimately their desires prove greater than even they envisaged. Lucy and Jane reflect the desires of their creator - the desire for a site of personal power and a degree of autonomy. Even as Charlotte made sacrifices to facilitate Branwell’s advancement there was hope that this would result in an increase in her own level of personal freedom. In a letter to a friend, written while
Charlotte was still with the Hegers in Brussels, she commented that ‘…as you well know, if one is not rich one cannot always stay at home: one must go out into the world and endeavour, with diligence and with industry, to earn that independence which Fate has denied.’ Although she was fulfilling the role designated for her by the social structure of her day, Charlotte all the while recognised that there was greater freedom to be attained than the limited freedom into which she had been born.

Further evidence that it is a mistake to assume that Charlotte was deliberately championing the cause of women is evidenced by the resolutions to her novels, these resolutions do not equate to emancipation. Charlotte’s expressions in her writings of entrapment, of powerlessness and invisibility can be seen as reflections of her own life. Villette, more than any of her other texts, has been read as autobiography. Certainly Charlotte’s experiences in Brussels as well as her feelings for Constantin Heger play a part in this text but Villette ultimately poses the same questions as her other writings – how is independence and, as a result, freedom attained?

Although Charlotte was indoctrinated into her social role and she was unable to see the full possibilities of a liberated life, she was not ignorant of the fact that there were many within her world who lived a more privileged and freer life than she could ever hope to attain. The idea that there were those in society who suffered disenfranchisement so that others within the upper echelons could have their desires accommodated was very obviously part of her understanding of and what she resented about her world. This understanding and resentment is present in her texts. Even though she was indoctrinated into accepting the power structure of her day at a
subconscious level, this power structure still grated and caused unease. Beneath the surface Charlotte wanted the reader to know that this inequality was of concern to her. The notion of power and those who wield it is, after all, central to all of her work. Even the juvenilia centres on power and, for the most part, the great men who control it. The plotlines of Villette and Jane Eyre focus on the power of the individual to control one’s own destiny in quite overt ways.

There are subtleties in the texts which suggest that Charlotte was very much aware that she was offering a social critique in her writing and that she wanted to alert her readers to this. Her texts are self conscious and engage in considerable dialogue with her readers. The assertion of the ‘I’ is ever present in both Villette and Jane Eyre, occurring early in both novels. More discrete clues are present however. Jane, as she escapes to the window seat to hide from the bullying of John Reed, amuses herself with Thomas Beckwith’s book on birds. Charlotte goes into great detail about the text, vividly describing Beckwith’s illustrations. Beckwith was something of a radical who was greatly concerned in the welfare of Britain’s poor. The selection of Beckwith’s text allows Charlotte to merge two of the elements central to the novel.

Troubling in Charlotte’s writings are the limits to her notions of egalitarianism. From her writings they appear to extend to a certain social level and not beyond that point. Her novels are peopled with female characters from socio-economic brackets lower than those of her heroines or, for that matter, her own. The hardships and deprivations are significantly greater than Charlotte was exposed to in her own life and far more dire than the hardships endured by Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe. Charlotte
fails to turn her literary microscope on the plight of these women; she seems to accept their invisibility within society. The lack of compassion exhibited in Jane Eyre for Rochester’s first wife Bertha who, though she is from a higher socio-economic bracket than Jane is displaced because of race, passion and mental illness, has been thoroughly dealt with, particularly by Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert. Also, since Jane’s is the narrative voice of the text and Bertha is her rival, it is not surprising that she is portrayed with little sympathy. It is the other women in her texts, the ones who in nineteenth century Britain were subservient to the women such as Brontë’s heroines who Brontë did not simply fail to adequately represent, but further marginalised within the world of her texts. These are the women such as Grace Poole, Bessie and, perhaps most especially, Lucy’s students from lower down the hierarchical scale in Villette:

To do all parties justice, the honest aboriginal Labassecouriennes had an hypocrisy of their own too; but it was of a coarse order, such as could deceive few. Whenever a lie was necessary for their occasions, they brought it out with a careless ease and breath altogether untroubled by the rebuke of conscience.

In lines such as these Brontë clearly demonstrates how thoroughly the belief system of the day was instilled in her – particularly those beliefs that privileged England over ‘foreign’ lands and peoples. If the characters of Lucy and Jane are reflections of Charlotte’s own ideal then it can be said that she was very much the colonialist. The incidences of such racial and class focused slights or, indeed attacks, are not uncommon in Villette, her last novel. These oversights in representation and
incidents of ‘otherness’ created in both Jane Eyre and Villette will be further elaborated in the following chapters.

It could be argued that it is only in her third novel, Shirley, that Brontë addresses the oppression suffered by those further down the social structure. In Shirley she attempts to represent the disenfranchised mill workers’ desperation. In this novel however Brontë is drawing on historical events and endeavouring to give voice to all players. Heather Glen suggests Shirley has a ‘sense of social cacophony’112 This all inclusive representation leads Brontë to create characters who cannot be judged in the same way the reader can judge the characters in Jane Eyre and Villette. Brontë creates distance in Shirley through the omniscient narrative voice. In both Jane Eyre and Villette the reader’s sympathies are directed through the first person narrative voice of the oppressed figures at the centre of the textual action – Jane and Lucy. In Shirley Brontë creates characters who are less easily categorised, the boundaries between good and bad are blurred in the attempt to present historical realism. The representation of those outside her own social sphere is key to this endeavour.

It is perhaps a symptom of oppression that those who are oppressed become so ground down by their own level of powerlessness that they are unable to see powerlessness in others, even when it is to a greater degree. If, as in Jane Eyre, Charlotte simply failed to recognise the oppression of the working class women whose portraits she was painting this case could be argued. By the time of Villette however, she displays more than ignorance, she displays prejudice towards the non English identities in the text. In her defense it is clear and logical that Charlotte was not consciously aware that what she was depicting was in any way wrong – her
society would have informed her that her views were appropriate. Again this was a truth that was constructed by the oligarchy in an effort to further its aims and cement its power:

Chief among Britons’ incentives to develop a working concept of British national identity was lasting conflict with Catholic France, which had sponsored that 1745 attempt to reinstate the Stuart line in Britain and which, more than any other country, served well into the nineteenth century as Britain’s defining opposite. …Britons’ image of their nation as the preeminent defender of Protestantism – and its vaunted freedom of conscience and individual rights – had come to depend upon their conception of France as a priest-ridden, backward, and autocratic country…

Whether this was because it was Victoria’s Britain or if it was driven by any other individual or branch of the ruling elite is inconsequential. It is the fact that this attitude was absorbed, accepted and regurgitated by the populace that is of both interest and importance to our understanding of it for this thesis. Any claim that Charlotte is a representative voice of the oppressed woman is somewhat tenuous one. Certainly her texts reveal the level of oppression that the women of her day and situation experienced but the revelations are limited and perhaps not entirely intentional. Charlotte’s world is such that the only oppression she can recognise is her own and that of her immediate family. The only heroines she predominantly created were those who inhabited her own social sphere. It seems that for Charlotte these may have been either the women worthy of attention or the ones of which she could draw the most accurate sketch or perhaps a combination of both factors.

This is not so much a reflection on Charlotte Brontë but a reflection on the oligarchy in place and the unrecognised power it exerted over the individuals it controlled. ‘Everywhere there exists a governing class, even in despotism. In absolute
governments, there is only one figure on stage – the sovereign; in so-called
democratic governments, it is the parliament….Whether universal suffrage prevails
or not, always it is an oligarchy that governs.¹¹⁴ By witnessing the dynamics of
her own family and within the society she inhabited, Charlotte became aware that it
was a power always beyond her own that governed her world and her life.
Understanding that the power to decide her own ultimate life path lay beyond her
grasp and would always do so was something Charlotte was conditioned to accept.
This does not mean that an underlying resentment of and reaction against such
oppression did not manifest itself in subtle ways.

In her own life she displayed times of extreme self-containment as well as times that
approached a level of abandonment (as exampled in her letters to M. Heger). As the
following chapters will explore, in Lucy and Jane Charlotte created heroines who
could survive on very frugal allocations. Small amounts of food, infrequent
engagement with others, limited numbers of people in their lives to whom they were
close. Charlotte shared these frugal aspects of their natures. She could easily survive
on very little food, her appetite being described as ‘birdlike’. It has been suggested
that it was her inability to eat during her (possible) pregnancy due to hyperemesis
gravidarum that has been cited as being responsible for her death. As Robert Keefe
notes however, ‘she has always described the need for affection in terms of
hunger…In her novels, hunger is a recurrent metaphor for loneliness or
rejection…The linguistic concentration on the analogy between physical and
psychological undernourishment does not seem surprising in a woman who lost her
mother…at an early age. In Shirley Caroline Helstone, already slim and fragile in appearance, pines away becoming increasingly wan and thin after suffering what she believes to be the permanent loss of the man she loves, Robert Moore.

There are other however influences on Charlotte that see her manifest a spartan approach to food, and that is that in denying sustenance power is asserted. In a life which we have clearly seen was driven in no small degree by the needs of others and the social hierarchy, there were few areas where individual power could be asserted. Power over the body, at least in the form of nourishment, is one of the few sites of control. This is a theme that will be further developed in the analysis of Villette in chapter four of this thesis.

Alfred Adler labelled the refusal of food as a form of ‘distancing’. People safeguard themselves through distancing from the ‘expected action or decision’ and, in Charlotte’s situation, it could be argued, anticipated control. Refusal of food is termed as ‘moving backward’ by Adler who claimed that through this action someone could, ‘on the positive side, enforce his own will, and on the negative side, remain victorious over the normal social obligations’. Whether or not, in the case of Charlotte, we view her ‘victory’ over social obligations as a negative is questionable. In a world where social obligations dictated much of her life, overcoming them becomes a triumph. The only triumph she could ultimately enact remained, however, one that impacted upon herself most dramatically and to her own detriment.
Isolation and loneliness were perhaps the forms of oppression that Charlotte more readily and consciously recognised. Although her texts highlight the plight of sections of society under the oligarchy of her day, they do so in a way that does not suggest rebellion is a feasible notion or even a conscious thought on the part of the central characters of the texts or, for that matter, Charlotte herself. That Charlotte’s need for affection was strong is apparent from her intense feelings for Constantin Heger and the letters that she wrote to her close friends, particularly Ellen Nussey. She imparts this need to both Lucy and Jane. The overwhelming passion that rises up in these novels is a manifestation of her heroines’ needs as well as Charlotte’s own.

In 1838 during Charlotte’s time teaching at Miss Wooler’s school, first at Roe Head and later at Dewsbury Moor\textsuperscript{117}, she began to suffer what has been described as a ‘nervous depression’. This unhappy mental state was exacerbated by the absence of Ellen Nussey from home for an extended period as she visited first London then Bath. In August of that year Charlotte wrote to Ellen asking, ‘When will you come home?’ Charlotte is eager for and insistent of her friend’s return, ‘Make haste you have been at Bath long enough for all purposes...I am getting really tired of your absence Saturday after Saturday comes round and I have no hope of hearing your knock and then being told ‘Miss Ellen Nussey is come’. ‘Rumour of Ellen extending her trip still further prompts Charlotte to warn,’I heard something from your Sister Mercy about Mr and Mrs. Joshua wishing you to stay over the Winter don’t be persuaded by them Ellen you’ve been from home long enough. Come back...’\textsuperscript{118}

Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith state that ‘Charlotte’s fondness for Ellen Nussey became extreme’ during her period at Roe Head. ‘She hated to be separated from her and longed for her return when she went away to visit relatives.’\textsuperscript{119}
Soon after the loss of Branwell, Charlotte suffered the complete breakdown of the collective that had been integral to her life. Emily’s death from tuberculosis on December 19 1848 and shortly thereafter on May 28 1849 Anne’s death from the same condition meant that Charlotte had now lost most of her family, her collaborators and her companions. Describing the overwhelming isolation she now felt to W.S. Smith, ‘I am now again at home – where I returned last Thursday. I call it home still – much as London would be called London if an earthquake should shake its streets to ruin’, Charlotte continues ‘Haworth parsonage is still a home for me, and not quite ruined or desolate home either. Papa is there – and two most affectionate and faithful servants – and two old dogs, in their way as faithful and affectionate.’ Charlotte attempts to create a collective out of the remnants of her family but her letter reveals the true state of her emotions and the loss of companionship and affection she is enduring, ‘something in my heart revolts against the burden of solitude – the sense of loss and want grows almost too much for me.’

Chapter XV of Villette, ’The Long Vacation’, illustrates how dangerous Charlotte felt the absence of affection could be on both the mind and body. Drawn from her own experience of the feelings of isolation she endured in Brussels, Charlotte presents Lucy as slipping into delirium:

A goad thrust me on, a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine. I often walked all day, through the burning noon and the arid afternoon, and the dusk evening, and came back with moonrise.
Charlotte’s depiction of Lucy’s relentless wanderings read almost like a quest. As with all quests, finding the object of desire is not only difficult but also perilous. In the same way that Jane’s time in the wilderness indicated, loneliness threatens more than just the emotions – it becomes a threat to life. While Charlotte was undergoing the same feelings of isolation that she has drawn upon in her representation of Lucy’s plight, she too sought out a Priest in desperation and her need for communication. It is no small indication of the extent of the dejection that Charlotte felt given her views on and biases against the Catholic Church. That she chose to use this very personal situation, which she asked friends never to repeat to her father, highlights the importance she places on lack of affection, it appears to be one of the most significant aspects of oppression in the text.

Outside of the literary circles that she now had access to with the death of her siblings Charlotte’s world narrowed. In June 1854 Charlotte married Arthur Nicholls, one of her father’s curates. After initially refusing the offer of marriage she finally accepted Arthur’s proposal. Charlotte softened to him and became convinced of his depth of feeling when he persisted in pursuing her. Charlotte also reconciled her father, who was initially against the marriage, to the match. Charlotte’s marriage to Arthur meant her collective could start to rebuild. Her pregnancy offered hope that this could be extended still further but this would not be the case for Charlotte died on March 31 1855, less than a year after she was married to the man she described in letters with respect and affection.
For Charlotte Brontë oppression, power and control were realities of life. Lack of personal power, submission to hierarchical power and the resulting oppression was not unique to Charlotte, for a woman of the Victorian period there was little space available to them in which they could assert the self. What was unique in Charlotte’s circumstances was that she wrote out her oppression and, in so doing, wrote out the oppression of many other women. As we have seen, this was not an altogether conscious assault on the powers of the day. Rather, her work was a subconscious manifestation of rebellion against the situation in which she found herself. Charlotte, it must be remembered, was not disenfranchised purely because of gender or socio-economic positioning. Her situation was compounded by the losses she endured in childhood and the resulting psychological responses to them. This was further compounded by the responsibilities that, to some extent, these losses had helped to create and with which she found herself burdened in later life. Charlotte wrote out of the need to write and the desire to create. Her writing was also her greatest hope of financial security and a modicum of independence, not only for herself but also for her family.

In the following chapters this thesis will interrogate her first and last published novels Jane Eyre and Villette, investigating the spaces that Charlotte carved out within her texts, both consciously and unconsciously, for those who are oppressed to realise, vocalise and either resist or conform to their oppressed states.
Juliet Barker notes that a seventeen year old girl named Mellany Hane took Charlotte ‘under her wing’. This was fortunate for Charlotte who at eight was not only one of the youngest girls at the school but also quite small for her age.

2 Among the important biographical treatments of Brontë’s life utilised in this thesis are: Juliet Barker, The Brontës, Lyndall Gordon, Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life, The Brontë Museum’s Collection’s Manager, Anne Dinsdale’s ongoing work on Charlotte’s and the Brontë family’s history.
6 Ibid, p. 2
7 Ibid, p. 3-4
8 Ibid, p. 7
9 Ibid, p. 48
10 Ibid, p. 56-57
One example of Brontë’s antipathy for France is highlighted by Alain Lescart who argues that in Villette all women are represented as grisettes and that, to Brontë, the ‘French grisette is the immoral mistress, opposed to the well behaved English woman.’
14 Ibid, p.18
15 Dinsdale and White, p.9
17 Eva Figes, Sex and Subterfuge: Women Novelists to 1850, (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 3
18 Ibid, p. 4
21 Gordon., pp 23
22 Ibid., p. 17
23 Phyllis Bentley and John Ogden, ‘Haworth of the Brontës’, (Lavenham: Terence Dalton Ltd, 1977), p15
24 Maynard., p.12
25 Gordon., p. 20
27 Barker, The Brontës, p. 127
28 Gordon., p. 23
31 Barker, The Brontës, p. 123

85
35 Triandis, p. 134
36 Barker, The Brontës, p. 138
37 Gordon, p. 15
39 Triandis, p. 76
40 Davies, p. 107
41 Brock, p. 35
42 Davies, p. 107
45 Ibid., p. 36
46 Triandis, p.57
50 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, p. 144
51 Maynard, p.17
52 Gordon, p. 48
53 Maynard, p. 15
57 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, p. 65
59 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, p. 66
62 Gordon, p. 49
63 Ibid., p. 11
65 Calder, p. 59
66 Charlotte Brontë, in Barker, p. 414
67 Ibid., p. 15
68 Barker, p. 415
69 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, p. 177
72 Biographers including Juliet Barker and Lyndall Gordon have detailed the impact of Charlotte’s experience in Brussels and her attraction to Constantin Heger and critics such as John Maynard have drawn on this period in Charlotte’s life in their analysis of her work. The characters of Rochester and Paul Emmanuel have been noted to embody some of the aspects of Charlotte’s perception of Heger’s personality. Charlotte’s own letters support the suggestion that her feelings for her teacher
transcended the teacher/pupil relationship and that she did harbour romantic feelings for Heger.

74 Brontë, The Belgian Essays, p.xxvii
75 Maynard, p. 19
77 Keefe, p. 24
78 Adler, p. 71
80 Charlotte Brontë in Barker, p. 417
81 Alexander and Smith, p. 80
82 Triandis, p. 66-67
83 Barker, p. 420
84 Brontë, Letters Vol. One, p.327
85 Barker, p. 448
86 Anne Thackery in, Letters Vol. Two, p. 755
87 Brontë, Villette, p. 64
88 Sidanius and Pratto, pp 103
89 Keefe, p. 12-13
90 Adler, p. 72-73
91 Ibid., p. 97
92 Barker, p. 302
93 Barker, p. 336
94 Barker, p. 367 - 374
95 Dinsdale and White, p. 32
96 Triandis, p. 111
97 Brontë, Letters Volume One, p. 444
100 Ibid., p. 175
102 Brontë, Letters Volume One, p. 446
103 Ibid., pp, 497
104 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, p. 122
105 Brontë, Villette, p. 546
107 Brontë, Letters Vol. Two, pp 640 - 641
109 Brontë, Letters Volume One, p. 323
111 Brontë, Villette, p. 134
115 Keefe., p. 43
117 Miss Wooler’s school relocated from Roe’s Head to Dewsbury Moor in around February or March 1938.
Critics are divided on Charlotte’s pregnancy. Biographer Lyndall Gordon and Christine Alexander suggest she was pregnant while John Maynard claims pregnancy was unlikely.
Chapter Three

‘a picture of passion!’¹ – Oppression, indoctrination, escape and capitulation in Jane Eyre

Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard argue that repression is a form of oppression, operating ‘to ensure the human body is protected from its desires’.² This definition of repression underpins the works of Charlotte Brontë. For the purpose of this thesis, this chapter will examine Jane Eyre, a novel in which the existence of repression is hard to deny. Repression is exposed in this novel not only through the characters at the centre of the text, Jane and Rochester, but also those who play a part in their story Bertha, St John Rivers, Miss Temple and Helen Burns. It is easy to view the position of Jane, the central female character, as oppressed and the reader can ascertain similar circumstances surrounding all of the female characters in the novel. But it is not only the poor, plain and friendless Jane who suffers under the constraints of a society that allots her a place to exist rather than allowing her the freedom to create that place for herself. Although superficially it may seem otherwise, the beautiful and befriended Blanche is also designated her place, a more comfortable one to be sure but still one that is prescribed for her. This thesis does not, however, suggest that it is only the women in Jane Eyre who suffer under oppression. This chapter will enlarge on a suggestion previously made by Terry Eagleton³ that it is not only the female characters inhabiting this text who live
their lives according to such direction. The male characters are also confined, less claustrophobically than the women certainly, but restricted nonetheless. Rochester's pursuit of Jane, for example, can be read as a symptom of his straining first, against the boundaries that have been placed around him by the requirement that he marry, and then by the marriage itself to Bertha which is orchestrated by both families for their mutual benefit rather than the benefit of either the bride or groom.

Brittan and Maynard contend that there are two faces to oppression - primary and secondary. Primary 'refers to those direct consequences of the unequal possession of biological capacities, and/or economic, cultural, and social resources.' Secondary is described as ‘always something other than it appears to be to the naïve consciousness of the oppressed person.’

Certainly it is easy to view the primary oppression enacted upon Jane and, for that matter, all of the female characters in the text, particularly from a twenty-first century perspective. Less easily discernible are the incidents of secondary oppression which occur throughout the text especially as they relate to the characters other than those who have come to be read as the traditional victims.

(i) - Rochester as a victim of oppression

With this in mind the examination of Jane Eyre will begin with an investigation into the oppression by which Rochester is constrained. It is more common for Rochester to be viewed as an agent of oppression rather than its victim, but the world of Jane Eyre is filled with characters who do not have the freedom to pursue a self chosen path in life and must live a prescribed existence. Hegel's formula of the master/slave relationship is enacted in the relationship of Jane and Rochester yet defining it only in these terms
would be an over simplification. Since ‘the meaning of one’s existence is relational, and in every respect we are dependent upon others for our identity’ the master/slave dichotomy being played out within the text see-saws constantly between Jane and Rochester. This is particularly true when we consider that Jane, as narrator, remains the master of not only her story but Rochester’s also. Rochester is empowered socially by both his gender and financial position but the idea that these are mantles that can afford the wearer power is not lost on Brontë. In Jane Eyre, as Sally Shuttleworth notes, ‘The drama of social ascent and erotic exchange is once more focused on the activities of reading and surveillance.’ The power of disguise or costume is directly addressed in the text in the fortunetelling incident. Here Brontë reveals an entirely sceptical Jane, who relies on her reason to keep her in check, being drawn into Rochester’s masquerade as she endeavours not to be read but feels herself unavoidably so. Jane tells us that the gipsy’s ‘strange talk, voice, manner’ had ‘wrapped me in a kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from her lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart watching its workings and recording every pulse.’

The power Rochester holds in his real life is as tenuous as the power he fleetingly wields as a gipsy fortuneteller and it is bestowed by the same means as his power as a fortuneteller - through the interpretation of his character by others. This interpretation is further defined via the narration of the text: Rochester has no voice of his own, we gain access to his identity only through Jane. Although it can appear that Rochester occupies an elite position in his world, he does so only in comparison to others further down the social hierarchy. He is not part of the ruling elite, for Rochester, like those of his milieu,
has limited self-determination. His life path, like his marriage, has been determined for him. While there are elites within the text they are elite only within their social sphere – they cannot control the world they inhabit. Although their position allows them the opportunity to oppress others, Brocklehurst for example can oppress the young women under his care, they cannot determine the rules or social mores of society though they can use these rules to their own advantage. We can see within the world of Jane Eyre that there are layers of authority and control, what this chapter will examine are the nuances within these layers.

Rochester's actions - confining Bertha, his deception of Jane, and his courting of Blanche - are all efforts to retain the power which is his only by virtue of what has been bestowed upon him by society. He must enact the role of oppressor if he is himself to avoid further oppression. Resentment arises, according to Hegel, because we are dependent upon others to give meaning to who we are; which, in turn, leads to alienation.⁸ The world that Rochester and Jane inhabit is a structured one requiring the individuals it is comprised of conform to that structure. This is the premise suggested by Robert Michels. In reference to organisation and democratic representation Michels states that:

Originally the chief is merely the servant of the mass. The organization is based upon the absolute equality of all its members. Equally it is here understood in its most general sense as an equality of like men...At the outset, the attempt is made to depart as little as possible from pure democracy by subordinating the delegates altogether to the will of the mass...Gradually, however, the delegates’ duties become more complicated; some individual ability becomes essential, a certain oratorical gift and a considerable amount of objective knowledge.⁹
The notion that a select group of elites will always emerge from within any social structure holds true for the text, Rochester’s behaviour differentiates him from those around him.\textsuperscript{10}

Accompanying the idea of the emergence of elites, assuring this groups’ ascendency and retention of power is Audre Lorde’s assertion of the ‘mythical norm’. Lorde contends that in modern America the ‘mythical norm’ is defined as ‘white, thin male, young, heterosexual and financially secure.’\textsuperscript{11} The mythical norm of Victorian England was not vastly different - although the idea of parentage and family connections also played a significant role. For Victorian England, a society that recognised and accepted the notion of social stratification, there was a shift from the idealised mythical norm of the leisured aristocrat of the eighteenth century to the industrious ‘middle class ideals of manhood’\textsuperscript{12} in the nineteenth century. Brontë equips Jane with some of the qualities of the mythical norm of her age in making her self sufficient. As Shuttleworth notes she thereby ‘avoids the taint of upper-class idleness’\textsuperscript{13}. This idleness is something she witnesses when Rochester invites his party to Thornfield and something she will see result in the ruin of John Reed.

The establishment of acceptance by the masses of the characteristics of this ‘norm’ is of course a form of social control – anyone outside this norm is alien and therefore isolated. Through his ill fated marriage and his past life, now a secret in the attic, Rochester has been cut off from a number of the qualities that would allow him to sit comfortably within the Victorian ‘mythical norm’. This estrangement from his previous position
of authority is not common knowledge to his cohort though he does live with the discomfort of knowing that there are those who have access to his secrets – Grace Poole and Mr Mason. Nevertheless Rochester’s secrets have meant that he has modified his life and, by keeping away from the world of privilege with which he previously engaged, he has become less enfranchised than his birthright would suggest was his entitlement. It is in this state of alienation that Jane first encounters Rochester and this will become her reading and translation of him to the readers of her narrative.

It is immediately apparent that Jane is reading and objectifying Rochester for the purpose of her text. In chapter fourteen Jane and Rochester battle for control of the gaze and Jane describes Rochester as having ‘caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy’. Running in direct contrast to Rochester’s initial intentions of seating Jane where he could examine her, Jane’s act of returning the gaze results in a challenge being laid down by Rochester as he attempts to prevent his power being usurped. Rochester’s undisguised scrutiny of Jane commenced at their initial meeting when, unaware of who he is, Jane reveals herself as a resident of Thornfield Hall:

‘You are not a servant at the hall, of course. You are – ‘He stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which, as usual, was quite simple: a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of them half fine enough for a lady’s-maid. He seemed puzzled to decide what I was: I helped him.’ I am the governess.’
‘Ah, the governess!’ he repeated; ‘deuce take me, if I had not forgotten! The governess!’ and again my raiment underwent scrutiny.14

In their first encounter Rochester increases his power through his anonymity. Not only can he scrutinize Jane’s appearance but he has knowledge of who she is so is able to
socially position her. Jane has nothing other than her initial impressions of Rochester’s appearance and manners upon which to draw. Given he is not, as she relates to the reader, ‘a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman’ Jane reads Rochester incorrectly. Had he been handsome she would not have ‘dared’ to question him ‘against his will’.

This is the first and possibly the last time in the text that Rochester has the upper hand in the battle of the gaze and this is because he benefits from his ability in this encounter to keep his identity concealed. The more exposed he becomes as the text progresses the more his power diminishes. His masquerade as a gipsy revisits this initial anonymity – where he can scrutinize without scrutiny.

Since Jane remains in control of the text and therefore also has the ever-present gaze, the battle for its control is redundant. She will always hold the penultimate position of power within the world of her tale. This position allows her access to the power she has otherwise been denied. Jane's narrative provides her with a vehicle that allows her to invert her own state of objectification and powerlessness because through the narrative she is able to invert the gaze. Jane casts her gaze and more importantly the reader’s gaze over those who have denied her subjective existence.

If, in life, Jane is the victim of multifaceted oppression, within her novel at least she can break through the restrictions imposed upon her. We know she is not ignorant of this access to power as she engages with the reader directly throughout the text. There is an aspect of confidentiality and a conspiratorial nature to these engagements which suggests that Jane has an awareness of the inversion of power that is taking place. The flaw, however, with this attempt to achieve power is Jane’s inability to view her success.
Because one sees one's self in the other 'no self-consciousness exists alone, but each
exists for the other.' For Jane to access the power she establishes for herself as narrator,
she must see it reflected in the reader as those who inhabit the text are unaware of the
inversion taking place. As this is impossible, she must seek other avenues by which she
can assert power over herself in a world which is largely closed to her. It is this search
for power that drives the action in the text. The assertion 'I am Jane Eyre' resounds
constantly as this search takes place.

Through Jane, Brontë reflected her own access to limited power:

…writing became a channel for and a sublimation of the passions and desires
that her culture denied her, a vehicle both to diffuse and legitimate her
frustrations. In this way, writing provided Brontë access to a limited control over
her environment…

It is therefore logical that the heroine of her tale writes her own story; in this way Jane is
also enjoying ‘limited control over her environment’. The ‘limits’ of this control mean
a strange duality encircles Jane’s position. To those within the text she remains
predominantly controlled by them but, to the reader beyond the text’s boundaries, she
occupies the godlike role of narrator and is therefore controlling those who suppose they
control her. This creates an almost schizoid aspect to Jane’s character. This aspect of her
nature has often been noted as manifesting itself within the text in the physical
environment. The red bedroom Jane fears as a child encapsulates her passionate nature
but it is the stark, snowy world of St John Rivers that Jane flees to when she is
attempting to escape, not only Rochester, but her own desires. Numerous critics have
pointed to the fact that the ongoing battle Jane wages between is symbolised in the text by these contrasting environments of heat and cold. Jill Matus notes that:

Jane Eyre shares with Wuthering Heights the use of several romance strategies. In both novels, for example, nature, landscape and weather carry strong symbolic significance. On the night when Rochester proposes to Jane, a storm rages and lightning strikes the great chestnut tree in the orchard; nature alerts us that all is not right with the union.¹⁷

(ii) – The power of Reason and Passion

After Jane’s natural passions are revealed in childhood she battles to control them in adulthood. At Thornfield passion is manifest. Bertha may point to passion’s danger but Rochester reflects passion’s lure. Terry Eagleton points out how Rochester and St John are the embodiment of Passion and Reason. Both offer Jane a union but ‘Rivers must of course be rejected, as reason rather than feeling is his guide.’¹⁸

Karen Chase notes that ‘Brontë had before her the Enlightenment tradition of philosophical psychology which had represented the human mind in terms of a few leading faculties: reason, judgement, conscience, memory, feeling, imagination….They display the discursive scaffolding of the novel; when explanation is in order, these terms come forth to explain’.¹⁹ Chase argues that these faculties are called on whenever explanation is required creating a ‘Romantic dualism’ as passion and reason, feeling and judgement compete.
The continuous battle that rages within Jane herself between these faculties does more than simply create this Romantic dualism. The battle also clearly illustrates Jane’s consistently repressed state. Jane uses reason and judgement as tools with which she can keep her true desires repressed, a technique she has been indoctrinated into since childhood. The employment of these tools is called for when Bertha makes her first attempt to burn down Thornfield. After rousing Rochester during the fire in his chamber and returning to her own room Jane has difficulty sleeping. It is neither fear nor curiosity that maintains her alert state of mind however. Instead it is the sense of a growing intimacy between herself and Rochester. The romantic aspects of Jane’s nature assert control over her consciousness. Jane has no intention of allowing her desire to overtake her:

Sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion. Too feverish to rest, I rose as soon as day dawned.20

Jane’s use of sense and judgment to quell her growing attraction to Rochester acts as a self-prescribed remedy to her more instinctive nature. It is a reflex psychological response; she has been trained to respond this way since childhood. The application of sense over emotion is what Jane used to survive the abuse at both Mrs Reed’s and Lowood. Had emotion been her guide always in these environments then Jane would surely have perished. Now in her emotional engagement with Rochester Jane sees sense (which in her mind is being aware of her social positioning and not attempting to step beyond these boundaries) as the required response. Because of Jane’s social standing, poverty and plain demeanor there would appear to be little hope in her capturing
Rochester’s interest. All that Jane has traversed in life thus far has prepared her for her place in the world. Her early childhood with Mrs Reed, her time at Lowood and now her role as Governess are spaces she is allowed to inhabit; entertaining the notion of exceeding that social sphere does not match the hierarchical structure of society that she has been conditioned to accept. Yet all the while Jane accepts her lot in life there is a part of her, the passionate child she once was, that rails against the injustice of her world.

(iii) – Positioned for oppression

Jane’s place in the world is designated by the hierarchical structure, the same hierarchical structure that confines Rochester. The doubts and hopes she harboured in youth concerning her social positioning are addressed by those who preside over her, first at Gateshead then later at Lowood. On her first encounter with Mr Brocklehurst at Lowood Jane witnesses society’s double standard. Brocklehurst’s horror at seeing some of the Lowood inmates with abundant, even curly hair gives rise to his lecturing of Miss Temple:

‘...my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven...’

Brocklehurst’s diatribe is interrupted by the entrance of his wife and daughters, whose opulent dress and hair styling is depicted in detail. Although Brontë’s ploy in using the comparison reads somewhat obviously, the entrance at that very moment of the Brocklehurst women appearing overly contrived; it serves the purpose intended of
illustrating social stratification and society’s hypocrisy. This incident also reaffirms in Jane her understanding of her position in relation to such stratification and it is part of her indoctrination into that belief system. Nancy Armstrong notes that

Victorian authors evidently found it rather easy to place proper English women in situations where the wrong kind of men were in charge. Jane is surrounded by bad relatives, bad teachers, bad suitors, and, more generally, a bad class of people who systematically remove her from respectable company, confine her to various rooms, and deprecate her value as a woman...The Victorian heroine's value is threatened, and threatened just as surely, by the very kind of people among whom she rightly belongs, the heads of households and modern institutions. The class in power is her class - often her relatives - and yet this is the very group who confines and abuses her.22

There is also truth in this seemingly contrived incident as Lowood was, as we are aware, based on the lived experiences of Brontë at Cowan Bridge.

The notion of the circulation of elites is one of the hooks that Jane’s society rests its hat upon; it is impossible for someone from Jane’s position to quit her sphere and move up in this hierarchy. This impossibility is evidenced by Mrs Fairfax’s response to the engagement of Jane and Rochester. Noting that ‘Equality of position and fortune are often advisable in such cases…’ , Mrs Fairfax struggles to come to terms with the idea of the union. Jane’s annoyance at Mrs Fairfax’s response is tempered by her own similar thoughts. After first learning of Blanche Ingram’s existence and determining to control her growing attraction to Rochester, Jane issues warnings to herself:
He is not of your order: keep to your caste; and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such gifts are not wanted and would be despised.23

Both Jane and Mrs Fairfax recognise their positions within society. Although Jane may be annoyed at Mrs Fairfax’s lack of enthusiasm for her engagement, she refers to her as her ‘monitress’ a term which indicates that Jane realises there is some validity in Mrs Fairfax’s concerns. Jane has previously monitored herself, her constant reference to her Judgment and Reason have sustained her within her ‘caste’ up until this point in her life and even talks of the ‘monitor on her shoulder’. She has been harder on herself than Mrs Fairfax could ever be. When learning of Blanche Ingram’s existence Jane uses self-deprecating talk and goes so far as to sketch her own portrait and to create an ivory miniature of the beauty she imagines Blanche to be, in order to provide her with a constant reminder in the differences between them. The concept of monitoring actions and emotions is therefore not new to Jane. Similarly, the notion of being monitored by another woman is also not new to her. Elaine Showalter has commented that Jane has had a series of women ‘guiding’ her behaviour by administering punishment throughout her life.

Whipping girls to subdue unruly flesh and the rebellious spirit was a routine punishment for the Victorians, as well as a potent sexual fantasy...It is interesting here to note that sexual discipline is administered to women by other women, as agents for men. 24
Showalter cites Bessie and Miss Abbott in response to Jane’s arguments with John Reed and then Miss Temple acting on Mr Brocklehurst’s instructions. When Jane arrives at Thornfield Grace Poole physically subdues Bertha. Showalter notes that there are few examples of genuine ‘sisterhood’ in the text.

Of course Mrs Fairfax’s intervention is not physical but she is not working as Rochester’s agent in this case but rather as the agent of society. Although she resents the negativity Mrs Fairfax displays when discussing her engagement, Jane can also see its appropriateness for she is only too aware how her society functions. After Mrs Fairfax’s first warnings to her, Jane determines to keep Rochester at arm’s length until they are married. She maintains a prickly and unaffectation attitude, unwavering in her stance. This behaviour, Jane is satisfied to note, is one that satisfies society’s mores and therefore her current monitoress, ‘Mrs Fairfax, I saw approved me: her anxiety on my account vanquished; therefore I was certain I did well.’

Jane’s attitude with which she ‘thwarted and afflicted’ Rochester and drew from him ‘no such honeyed terms as ‘love and ‘darling’…’ but instead the ‘best words’ at ‘her service’ were ‘provoking puppet… ‘malicious elf’, ‘sprite’, ’changeling’, &c.’ is adopted for reasons beyond her awareness of her monitoress’ scrutiny. Jane’s overriding need for independence is expressed soon after her initial realisation of the implications of Rochester’s love. Laurence Lerner correctly asserts that ‘we need to divest ourselves of our egalitarian passion for informality to see how necessary it is for Jane to continue calling [Rochester] ‘Sir’. It protects her individuality, enabling her identity as an employee who has chosen to marry her employer, rather than a doll or Danaë for whom
only one kind of relationship is now possible. This continued demarcation in their relationship is evidenced on their first expedition as a couple into the town of Millcote. Jane becomes oppressed by Rochester’s insistence on purchasing the fabrics he believes Jane should wear. Eventually dissuading Rochester he begrudgingly gives way with the stipulation that ‘he yet see me [Jane] glittering like a parterre.’ In response Jane thinks what a ‘relief’ it would be to have ‘ever so small an independency’, foreshadowing the changes in fortune to come.

Brontë draws the reader’s attention to the inequities within her own society through Jane, yet such is the nature of the indoctrination process that has been enacted upon Brontë, that she finds herself supporting the machinations of these inequities in the text with the depiction of the events that follow on from Jane’s engagement. The notion that Jane requires wealth in order to be treated as an equal in a union with Rochester offers support to the hierarchical structure of Brontë’s day. The text undercuts any objective Brontë may have had of highlighting social inequity by seemingly supporting it in the final resolution of the text. Therefore Jane ‘attempts to transgress social boundaries whilst remaining within an accepted social framework’ Brontë could not have supported any other means.

Many critics have noted this problematic aspect of the novel. Jina Politi finds that ‘Jane Eyre come to celebrate the very ethos upon which bourgeois capitalism and its patriarchal ideology rest’. Although Brontë draws the reader’s attention to the machinations of power within her society and the disenfranchisement endured by women and those without wealth she falls into the trap of her oppressors by
inadvertently supporting their doctrine. Brontë has not been immune to the indoctrination process. Her view of the world and how it must operate have been informed by the society she inhabits and this is eventually displayed within the text. Instinctively Brontë reasserts the dogma of the elite by providing a happy resolution for Jane only when she has access to some of the qualities of the power group and Rochester has had some of them removed. Once Jane uncovers her family heritage and gains access to money she has eradicated two of the obstacles blocking her admittance to the higher echelons of society. This is the same society Jane lashed out against as a child and found intolerable. Once Jane has a place, no matter how minor, within that society her attacks subside. This raises the question of what has angered Jane the greatest – society’s inequity or her exclusion from society? A similar question can be asked concerning Brontë herself. Social theorists examining the operations of power note that ‘those who control rewards or punishment for others have power over them, derived from others’ dependence on them for obtaining things they desire or avoiding things they dislike.’

As their relationship develops the power oscillates between Jane and Rochester as they both have the ability to withhold or grant the reward of affection to each other. But as we will see it is Jane who ultimately wins this battle as she is the one who eventually withholds the reward of herself to Rochester until it appears he has atoned for his actions against both Jane and society to an extent that he is now deserving of her.

There are degrees of oppression in Jane’s world. At the commencement of the novel it could be argued that Jane is many more degrees away from accessing power than she is at the novel’s close. The source of her oppression, for a great part, is derived from her
gender. The barrier to power that gender can sometimes still impose today was unquestionably stronger in 19th century England but then, as now, this barrier was more rigid for some than others. As stated earlier, the oppression Blanche Ingram suffers due to gender is not as great as the oppression under which Jane exists. Although the text makes it clear that Blanche, like Jane, does not have wealth she does have means of accessing wealth through marriage by virtue of her beauty and place in society. Without family or the possession of those physical features deemed attractive for the day, Jane has no such escape route.

Maynard and Brittan argue against the notion that women constitute a class, finding ‘difficulty with the implied homogeneity in the use of such a term’. They utilise the example of a black female domestic worker in South Africa to validate their point, believing that ‘she would be triply oppressed by her gender, her ‘race’ and her economic position’. 31 This is also the stance taken by Audre Lorde in her assessment of the feminist movement as she notes that ‘As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define women in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become the ‘other’. 32 Jane is more oppressed than Blanche but not as oppressed as Grace Poole who in turn is less oppressed than Bertha or at least the Bertha in the novel, the women she was before marriage to Rochester exists only in his recollections about her to Jane. The Bertha we have access to as readers is the ‘madwoman’ Bertha Rochester locked in the attic rather than in the role into which she was born. She is invested with a multitude of qualities that combine to position her as an ‘other’. Bertha is ‘mad’, a woman of colour, a sexualised female, a dark aggressive and strong ‘foreigner’ in a society that tolerated none of these points of difference.
The representation of Bertha’s ‘otherness’ is informed by and captures the gothic tradition integrated in the text. ‘From The Italian in 1797 to Zofloya in 1806 to Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights in the late 1840s to The Woman in White in 1860, representations of Gothic villainy progress from religious and national categories of otherness metonymically associated with black as color designating evil, through a category of otherness that conflates enslaved, sexualized dark people with the damning allure of the Prince of Darkness himself, and finally towards conceptions of a dark, sexual, bestial, racial Other that reflect the triumph of biological racism.’ In Bertha Brontë creates an embodiment of all of these qualities associating her with the other gothic elements with which the text engages. This invests the powerless first Mrs Rochester with power but only the power of the unfamiliar or ‘uncanny’, indeed, the ‘other’. The woman Bertha Mason is within this text is revealed to us only through a narrative voice once removed - Rochester’s tale retold by Jane. The integrity of Bertha Mason’s story is, at least, questionable, her portrayal dubious. Both Jane and Bertha, however, suffer under their own forms of oppression as it is dictated by the hierarchical power structure of the day. This social stratification which manifests itself even within the ranks of those at the lowest end of the power structure effectively makes the notion of collectively attacking the structure impossible.

Jane’s psyche is the only one we have genuine access to and her obvious resentment of her powerless state makes it apparent that she would be unwilling to relinquish the modicum of power she possesses. If this is Jane’s viewpoint we can safely assume that it is also the viewpoint held by Blanche and the other women in the text. To form a
true collective that endeavours to find equality, if only for those of the same gender, then those with some power, however minute, would have to relinquish this power and speak from the vantage point of the most thoroughly oppressed among their ranks. If this is not the case the collective becomes yet another hierarchical structure and will simply further disenfranchise those it is supposed to be assisting. Lorde’s analyses of the feminist movement notes that ‘As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those differences which exist between men and women.’

Lorde’s assertion that white women cannot comprehend the oppression endured by women of Colour can also be identified in Jane Eyre where there is no recognition of the ways in which oppression operates on those to whom Jane cannot relate. Even had she not been labeled as mad, as a Creole Bertha embodies an identity which is totally alien and incomprehensible to Jane who, as a white woman, ‘faces the pitfall of joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power.’ The very image of Bertha is alien to Jane. As Jane recounts her encounter with Bertha on the eve of her wedding to Rochester she describes her as ‘Fearful and ghastly to me – oh, sir I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face.’ The inclusion of non-human qualities in the representation of Bertha, investing her with the ability to metamorphose from human to something almost animal is another gothic trope employed by Brontë. Kelly Hurley tells us that, ‘images of a grotesquely metamorphic body are…common to Gothic horror, albeit in a less comic, more uncanny register.’

Certainly Bertha appearing before Jane just as Jane was awakening from fitful dreams would have made her appear terrifying and threatening. But it is her darkness, her ‘savage face’, an appearance that is so removed from those which usually surround Jane
that positions Bertha as an ‘other’ in Jane’s mind. Bertha’s story and eventual tragic demise can conveniently be marginalised by Brontë and Jane in the telling of her tale because there is something subhuman in the writing and reading of her character by both creator and narrator.

The fear that those who are oppressed harbor of losing the small space of power they may possess is a way by which the power structure remains free from threat by usurpers. What stops those who are disenfranchised risking what may be perhaps a temporary loss of power in an effort to access more power in the long term for not only themselves but those around them is largely the process of indoctrination. This prevents insurgents attacking those within the higher reaches of authority. This is the same indoctrination process which sees Brontë create a conclusion for Jane Eyre which supports the structure that her young heroine had once attacked.

It is this indoctrination process which Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar recognise in the relationships between the women in the text. ‘Women in Jane’s world, acting as agents for men, may be the keepers of other women. But both keepers and prisoners are bound by the same chains’.38 This is most obviously apparent in the Grace Poole/Bertha Mason relationship but it is by no means the only relationship in the text that manifests itself in that way. Mrs Fairfax’s censure of Jane’s engagement to Rochester causes Jane concern precisely because she is, to a degree, one of Jane’s ‘keepers’. As narrator, however, it is Jane herself who most comfortably takes on the role of keeper. It is her perspective through which we view all other women.
As has been previously stated, Jane’s access to power exists in her narration of the text. Jane’s disapproval of the shallowness of women such as Blanche and Lady Ingram is clear in not only her depiction of their characters but also in her references to their physical attributes. Lady Ingram’s ‘Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar’ were not only ‘inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride’. As Anna Krugovoy Silver remarks, ‘the licentious women in Brontë’s novels – Bertha Mason, Blanche Ingram, Ginevra Fanshawe – are all plump.’ Jane also notes her ‘fierce and hard eye’ which reminds her of one of her first female keepers, Mrs Reed. As for Blanche, ‘her face is like her mother’s’ although youthful suggesting that the contempt Jane feels for the mother can be easily shared with the daughter.

The hardness and self controlled natures of these women create feelings greater in intensity than mere dislike in Jane; her depiction alludes to a corruption in their characters. It is the self control and self confidence that these women exude that draws out these responses from Jane. As a child Jane saw these traits similarly manifested in Mrs Reed and her aversion to such characteristics is, therefore, natural. As the controlling voice of the text, however, Jane can usurp the power from these women just as her own independence and power was usurped by Mrs Reed as a child. While women such as the Ingrams and Mrs Reed act as keepers to Jane in society, within the world of her text, she becomes their keeper. In a moral sense she also is their keeper for, while society esteems the handsomeness of these women Jane believes, and suggests to the reader, that their characters fall short of such praise. Ronald Thomas quite rightly notes that ‘Throughout her story, Jane insists on being the only source of truth about herself.’ She also insists on being the only source of truth for everyone else and guides her
reader towards the same moral standpoint and value system as her own. As a narrator Jane pulls few punches in her assessments of people. Describing Blanche Ingram as a ‘mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling…She was very showy, but she was not genuine, she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature; nothing bloomed spontaneously in that soil…’ Given her vantage point from the periphery and the short duration she had in which to assess Blanche Ingram, Jane’s understanding of her appears too comprehensive to be regarded as exact and without bias.

In her depiction of female stereotypes Brontë unconsciously endorses the perspective of the controlling elite of her day. Bertha is the example of what can befall a woman who resists control; who allows herself to be governed by her emotions and her base senses alone. As Jane strives to maintain control in a world where little control is afforded her, Bertha acts, according to Gilbert and Gubar, as ‘Jane’s dark double…every one of Bertha’s appearances…has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane’s part.’ Being Jane’s dark double does not mean, however, that Jane or, for that matter, Brontë condones the Bertha’s wild behaviour. Jane may unconsciously recognise that oppression has led Bertha to the attic but there is little to suggest that Jane can see anyone at fault except Bertha for her own fate. The text is rampant with evidence that the adult Jane is incapable of understanding what the child Jane could – that is, lack of control.

By the time Jane reaches adulthood she has been successfully indoctrinated. When the fear of losing control, of stepping too far out of the mode cast for her by the controlling
hierarchy of the day seems likely Jane turns to ‘reason’ to reinstate herself in her prescribed place. Reasoning with herself in an attempt to eradicate her growing attraction to Rochester Jane draws on what society has taught her:

It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, ignis-fatuus-like, into miry worlds whence there is no extraction.43

Jane has been taught her place in the world; those who step out of their places face ‘madness’, those who step out become Bertha.

Eliane Showalter suggests that in Jane Eyre Brontë’s most’profound innovation…is the division of the Victorian female psyche into its extreme components of mind and body, which she externalises as two characters, Helen Burns and Bertha Mason.44 The early death of Helen Burns and the violent demise of Bertha reflect Brontë’s recognition and distrust of these extreme states of consciousness. According to Showalter:

Both Helen and Bertha function at realistic levels in the narrative and present implied and explicit connections to Victorian sexual ideology, but they also operate in an archetypal dimension of the story. Brontë gives us not one but three faces of Jane, and she resolves her heroine’s psychic dilemma by literally and metaphorically destroying the two polar personalities to make way for the full strength and development of the central consciousness, for the integration of the spirit and body.45
Throughout her childhood Jane’s ‘keepers’ have attempted to quash the extremes in her nature. Her childhood at Gateshead and her adolescence in Lowood have seen Jane admonished, beaten and finally controlled. By the time Jane arrives at Thornfield she has been trained to keep her passions in check.

Michel Foucault believed the way in which the individual is assigned his or her place in society and the corresponding expectations society has of that individual are achieved through a process of training and indoctrination. ‘All activity of the disciplined individual must be punctuated and sustained by injunctions whose efficacy rests on brevity and clarity; the order does not need to be explained or formulated; it must trigger off the required behaviour and that is enough’. Through the text Jane is constantly assigned to her place. Jane’s place is the window seat at Mrs Reed’s and then Lowood School where there is the expectation that Jane will retain her place as a teacher after her schooling is complete. Jane escapes from this particular assigned place and, at Thornfield, is assigned another. At Thornfield Jane is initially denied access to places she would choose to enter of her own volition. Mrs Fairfax, who as we have seen acts as a monitor of Jane, assigns a new place to her - the small apartment alongside her own, a fitting location through which to monitor her.

Since childhood Jane has been taught to accept her place in society by being assigned the physical space she is permitted to inhabit by the ruling elites of society. When she gains an indication at Lowood that her place there has been decided for her and is fixed she rebels but her rebellion is weak:
A new servitude! There is something in that….I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet; it is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: delightful sounds truly; but no more than sounds for me….But Servitude! That must be a matter of fact…47

Jane may rebel against her physical space at Lowood but she cannot rebel against her place in society, she is too much a product of her world. Although for the first time in her life she gains a small taste of freedom by choosing for herself when she accepts her new place at Thornfield, with her current social standing she can never be in the position to define entirely either her place in society or the physical space she inhabits. Rather, Jane offers herself to servitude to be positioned any way those in control of the social hierarchy deem fit.

Although Jane recognises that her access to deciding her own destiny is limited, she fails to see the full implications of such limitations. While she realises that the lack of choice she has in the physical space she inhabits is the result of her social status she does not comprehend that this imposed restriction plays a large part in ensuring she remains there. Similarly, Jane fails to understand that she has been indoctrinated to accept the fate dealt to her:

‘What do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances: I want this because it is of no use wanting anything better’.48
Jane does not desire a new home; it is only a ‘new place’ for which she asks. The term place instead of another word such as home or even position is telling. It illustrates the absence of awareness which surrounds, not only Jane’s position but also the class of women Jane is representative of, and the manipulation of these women by the social hierarchy.

(iv) – Charlotte’s own indoctrination

Brontë was also unaware of the extent of the indoctrination and manipulation she was illustrating in the text. Her own indoctrination into this power structure left her blind to its full workings. While the novel points out the inequities class barriers and gender impose, the novel’s resolution would still appear to accept them. Brontë wrote a tale in which the heroine does not break down the barriers but instead finds a socially acceptable means of circumventing them. This was still the case in Brontë’s subsequent novel Shirley where, despite its appearance at the end of the ‘Hungry Forties’ and its setting during the Luddite riots, the novel is resolved similarly to Jane Eyre with a resolution that sits comfortably with Charlotte’s own social conditioning.

In his text The Brontës and their Background Tom Winnifrith contends that ‘the Brontës again and again reveal themselves woefully ignorant of some of the classes they are attempting to differentiate’. There is significant justification for this claim since, as has been previously noted, the characters who inhabit the social space beneath Jane are mere sketches rather than full bodied characters. This is not however due to ignorance or an inability to illustrate these classes adequately but appears more likely due to Brontë’s lack of interest in representing in the text the classes beneath that of her heroine.
Winnifrith also suggests that ‘the Brontës...at times appeared to accept that class distinctions were divinely ordained.’ 50 This second assertion rings true when we consider the characterisation of Bertha and the servants within the text, none of who are granted the feelings of indignation at their social positioning that Jane is allowed to display. If we consider Grace Poole’s lot in life for example, we know that most of her waking moments must have been spent locked away in the same way as those of her patient/prisoner Bertha were. Although she is well paid, according to gossip that Jane overhears between the servants, Grace has no more freedom than Bertha, her sole enjoyment in life her ‘pint of porter’ and, fatefuly, ‘her private bottle of gin’. It does not occur to Jane to ever question why Grace remains at Thornfield only why Rochester continues to allow her to do so. Even though the account that Jane has been given of Grace’s role at the house, to carry out a little mending, does not alert her to the truly alienated state of Grace’s existence, Jane witnesses Grace as always solitary, inhabiting dark and remote spaces and with little comfort. It is a way of life that Jane herself would be unable to tolerate, so why does she not question Grace’s capacity to do so? Again Grace is of a different caste to Jane. When Jane recognises Rochester as being’not of her caste’ she is revealing her acceptance of this caste system – at least for those that fall beneath her.

Terry Eagleton points to Jane’s indignation at the Rivers' servant mistaking Jane's place within the social order because she comes to the Rivers' home in a state of utter dejection. He notes that Jane is ‘priggishly quick to point out...that she may be a beggar but at least she is a high-class one...The snobbish Hannah must be given an object lesson in social equality, taught not to judge by appearances, so Jane reveals how superior sheis to the old woman. Even in beggary class counts...’51 Brontë’s rebellion against the
injustice she sees in society is constantly tempered with her adherence to the social order of the day. There is a continued tension within Jane Eyre between Brontë’s rebellion against and compliance with this social structure.

(v) – Jane’s social boundaries

This compliance with the social structure and lack of representation of those beyond Jane’s social sphere extends to Jane’s charge at Thornfield, Adele. Like Jane herself, Adele is an orphan. She has been placed in the home of a guardian who, while not cruel to her, is rarely present, makes little effort to engage with her and is easily annoyed by her normal childish behavior. While it is true that Rochester shows consideration of Adele by presenting her with gifts whenever he returns to Thornfield, for the most part the little girl is shut away with a maid and an elderly housekeeper and, once Jane arrives, her governess. Jane inadvertently endorses the backgrounding of the orphaned Adele.

Although this backgrounding is not of the same order as that which was suffered by Jane, which included intentional cruelty, Adele’s position in Rochester’s home and in Rochester’s life is nonetheless tenuous. She is a reminder of his sordid entanglements in Europe and his attempt to escape from his past. As Anne Longmuir notes, ‘When Jane rejects Rochester’s offer to become his mistress, she explicitly rejects a Continental way of life in favor of an English one.’ After his proposal to Jane, Rochester determines to send the little girl away to school, echoing Jane’s own experience – though there is little doubt the school would provide far greater comfort than Jane experienced at Lowood. Why does Brontë depict the young Jane, occupying a similarly friendless state, with sympathy but neglects to turn an equally sympathetic eye on Adele?
A number of forces motivate this apparent oversight in the representation of the other orphan in the text. That Adele is an ‘other’ is central to this. Anne Longmuir suggests that:

Brontë clearly had a personal investment in a cultural, rather than geographic or ethnic, definition of Englishness, given that her father was Irish, while her mother came from Cornwall, part of Britain’s Celtic fringe.

Adele in no way resembles the ideal of ‘Englishness’ that Brontë identifies with and of which Jane is a symbol. But Jane does hold affection for Adele. As she flees Thornfield and Rochester, Jane passing the child’s door, says ‘Farewell, my darling Adele!’ and regrets that she cannot claim a last embrace from her charge. Adele however, as a child, could never be Jane’s child. The differences, the assertion of the ‘other’ in the representation of Adele are too pronounced to allow it. After showing Jane’s portfolio to his dinner guests, Rochester summons Jane and Adele to his presence. Jane ‘brushed Adele’s hair and made her neat’. As to herself she ‘ascertained that I was in my usual Quaker trim, where there was nothing to retouch – all being too close and plain, braided locks included, to admit disarrangement.’ There are frequent references to Adele’s fondness for clothes, ornament and all forms of adornments whenever she is referred to in the text. Upon her opening the present that he has given Adele, Rochester informs Jane that ‘she [Adele] pulled out of her box, about ten minutes ago, a little pink silk frock; rapture lit her face as she unfolded it: coquetry runs in her blood, blends with her brains, and seasons the marrow of her bones.’
Adele is under Jane’s tutelage in order to be indoctrinated herself. She is to be converted, transformed from that which is presumed by both Rochester and Jane to be her natural disposition and reshaped to become an example of ‘Englishness’. Longmuir correctly observes that, ‘a conflict between British and Continental, especially French, values dominates Brontë’s fiction.’ This is apparent in Jane’s assessment of Adele when the pair of them are requested to attend, for the first time, Rochester’s after dinner party in the drawing room. Jane wearing her ‘best’ dress is nonetheless plainly attired. Adele has been dressed by Sophie in a ‘pink satin frock’ with her ‘curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters’. Still requesting further adornment the little girl seeks permission from Jane, who is wearing her ‘sole ornament ‘the pearl brooch’, to take a flower. Jane obliges her but admonishes the child with ‘You think too much of your toilette, Adele’ and relates to her readers how ‘there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne’s earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress.’

Karen Cubie Henck argues that Brontë’s preference for plain and simple dress, which was the style favoured by herself and her sisters, was informed by the Wesleyan influence in the Brontë household. The idea of lack of adornment and plain attire was, according to Henck, not necessarily driven by modesty on the part of the Brontës’ but was instead a way of asserting their identity and independence. Dress in the style of Blanche Ingram, Rosamund Oliver and, potentially, Adele Varens is a means by which women can enter into the marriage, or mistress, market place. Brontë’s heroines eschew this path, choosing instead to assert themselves unadorned to the world and their potential companions and thereby achieve a level of equality that would otherwise escape them. Her representation of Adele combines both Brontë’s notion of the ideal of
Englishness and her views on the simplicity of attire. In both Jane Eyre and Villette Brontë reflects ‘the workings of the marriage market, of the standards of upper-class society in selecting mates and making marriages, are seen through the eyes of outsiders for whom there is no possibility, indeed no desire, in becoming involved.’ According to Lyndall Gordon, Brontë’s publisher George Smith saw in Charlotte in his first meetings with her ‘a woeful lack of feminine charm’ and he ‘could not imagine that she did not crave this above all things.’ Charlotte is nonplussed by her lack of style and dowdy appearance when she and Mary first met with Smith and his ‘elegant’ family, almost laughing in her sleeve at the image she was sure the pair of them created within the group. In a letter to Mary Taylor she stated ‘to take up in their fine carriage a couple of odd-looking country-women – to see their elegant, handsome son & brother treating with scrupulous politeness these insignificant spinsters – must have puzzled them [the Smith family] thoroughly.’

Adele is at last indoctrinated into the social order and its accompanying codes and mores that Jane, and Brontë, support. She eventually becomes one who Jane is comfortable to call her own. Brought home to Ferndean from a school that Jane finds too ‘strict’ and too ‘severe’, a new school with a ‘more indulgent’ system is found for her. Here the young Adele is modified by a ‘sound English education’ which ‘corrected in great measure her French defects.’ Jane tells her readers that she found in this re-educated Adele ‘a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good tempered and well-principled’ a version, in fact, of Jane herself.
This representation of Adele further asserts that despite her obvious disdain for some of
the social mores of her day and her challenges to them Brontë was still a product of her
age. Although the indoctrination of Brontë into her society has been explored in chapter
two of this thesis some reference to it and how it relates to the textual analysis is
required at this point. Brontë’s own indoctrination process within her society made it
impossible for her to create any other conclusion to Jane’s tale than the one offered
in Jane Eyre. The spaces which Brontë was permitted to inhabit have been, similarly
to Jane’s, prescribed for her by those who controlled her world. Her experiences at
Cowan Bridge School have been widely recognised as providing Brontë with the nucleus
for Lowood. Though the privations suffered by Brontë and her sisters were not as
extreme as the ones depicted in Jane Eyre, they were stringent enough to instill in Brontë
the notion of where she fitted in the social order. Brontë believed that her sisters Maria
and Elizabeth were destroyed by the school and that ‘she herself was marked ever after in
mind and body by what happened there’.\textsuperscript{64} The rules of Cowan Bridge School articulate
clearly that the institution sees itself, as Jane Eyre’s Lowood did, as being one which
grooms its charges for their future paths in life. These paths are decided for them,
depending on their wealth and social standing:

\begin{center}
Rule 3\textsuperscript{rd} requests that the friends will state the line of education desired in the
case of every pupil, having a prospective regard for her future prospects.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{center}

Patrick Brontë had already decided the future roles that his children should fulfill in their
lives and this guided his decision to send his daughters to Cowan Bridge. Patrick knew
his daughters would need to earn their livings and the most usual role for ‘impoverished
ladies was that of governess’. Cowan Bridge appeared to offer a suitable training ground for this profession. Patrick’s belief in his ability to assess his daughters’ future potential at such an early age is indicative of the power of patriarchy within both the society Charlotte inhabited and within the household in which she was raised. So certain was Patrick of his ability to assess and determine his daughters’ future that he concluded his second eldest daughter Elizabeth should be educated at a ‘lower standard’ than her sisters and he deemed her designed for a life as a housekeeper.\textsuperscript{66} This may be why Charlotte chose to refrain from providing extensive detail to her father regarding the success of Jane Eyre. Writing to her publisher she explained ‘But on one point do I now feel vulnerable-I should grieve to see my father’s peace of mind perturbed on my account: for which reason I keep my author’s existence as much as possible out of his way-I have always given him a carefully diluted and modified account of the success of ‘Jane Eyre’.’\textsuperscript{67}

**(vi) – Educated into a role of oppression**

The concept of educating the oppressed into their roles of oppression has been widely and successfully used by various oppressive regimes throughout history. Fighting back against such an education of oppression requires that the oppressed are conscious of not only their oppression but the mechanisms in place to ensure its continuation. In Jane’s case this recognition of her oppressed state or the way in which her oppression is maintained is not fully articulated. It could likewise be said of Brontë that, though she may have felt personally oppressed and understood to some degree the inequities of society, she could not see beyond her own milieu to the wide ranging oppression of her world. There is however in Jane Eyre, as there is in her letters at times, anger at her own
and women of her class’ disenfranchisement. Virginia Woolf famously criticised Brontë stating that ‘Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write herself where she should write her characters. She is at war with her lot.’

Woolf’s assessment of Brontë’s ‘war with her lot’ is validated in Brontë’s letters where she often bemoaned her life as a governess and teacher to her family and friends. In a letter to Ellen Nussey in 1841 while occupying the post of governess for the family of John White at Rawdon near Leeds, Brontë spoke of the relief of having the master and mistress of the house away from home:

The absence of the Master & Mistress relieves me from the heavy duty of endeavouring to seem always easy, cheerful and conversable with those whose ideas and feelings are nearly as incomprehensible to me, as probably mine (if I shewed them unreservedly) would be to them.

The role of governess that she was obliged to undertake because of her family’s finances meant that not only did Charlotte have little time to explore her passion of writing, she also was forced to undertake work she found to be a drudgery and all the while maintaining a pretense of contentment and satisfaction in environments where she felt at best alien and at worst the victim of open hostility.

If she was not already well aware that society was stratified, these roles certainly made Brontë so. In a letter to Emily in 1839 from her temporary post as governess for the Sidgwick family Brontë wrote’I said in my last letter that Mrs Sidgwick did not know me. I now begin to find that she does not intend to know me, that she cares nothing in
the world about me except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be squeezed out of me…”70 Brontë knew how being treated as an inferior felt but while Jane Eyre highlights the inequity of Jane’s existence it does not explore how such inequities are daily perpetuated. Some awareness of the indoctrination process must have informed Brontë however for her to create the rebellious young Jane to whom we are first introduced. Jane in adulthood has undergone indoctrination and no longer attacks the system that oppresses her with the same verve. By allowing the adult Jane’s response to her oppressed state to mellow, Brontë illustrates the ‘maturity of oppression’ or the acceptance of the allocated role by the oppressed. Jane, on the surface at least, grows into the role she has been handed; the indoctrination process which has been established at the Reed’s and reinforced by her education at Lowood has been successful. As readers we are privy to Jane’s thoughts and desires and know that as much as Jane appears to accept her lot there are still times when the passionate resistance she displayed as a child to the injustices she was dealt bubble just below her well controlled surface.

The stoicism that Charlotte’s biography suggests she displayed as she matured is similarly found in her character Jane Eyre. In the novel a stoic demeanour is depicted as a virtue and it is a quality exhibited by not only Jane but also Rochester. For Brontë this is a sign of strength and bestowing this quality on Rochester adds to his attractiveness. Stoicism aligns to Brontë’s constant referral to reason throughout the text; it wages war with Jane’s continual battle with passion. When Jane’s passion takes hold after the aborted marriage ceremony, when she is almost beguiled by passion to accept Rochester’s offer of cohabitation it is her stoicism which she relies on:
‘...The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now.’

For Jane relinquishing control and reason to passion is akin to madness. The need for control has informed Brontë’s life and she has utilized the character of Jane to exhibit her support of this doctrine.

Control or reason however, serves a dual purpose for the victim of oppression. It is, as has been stated, part of Jane’s indoctrination but it is also a gateway by which a modicum of power can be accessed. Because she knows, or has been conditioned to accept how power manifests itself within her world and the limitations in personal power that the power structure provides, Jane’s only assured means of gaining some freedom is to follow the rules as they have been established. Jane vocalised her resentment of the system in youth and it served only to further disenfranchise her, it drew attention to her rebelliousness. Such rebelliousness cannot be hidden within an oligarchy because observation is one of the central tools by which the oligarchy maintains control. Foucault has highlighted the ways in which throughout the classical age surveillance increasingly became a stylised weapon in the construction and maintenance of hierarchical power. He illustrates the way in which power can eventually be maintained not by observation but by the potential for observation. People who believe there is a possibility that they will be observed will act in accordance to social mores and rules because they are fearful of the chance of their actions being scrutinised.
(vii) – The gaze of society

Society itself eventually becomes the monitor, the gaze that maintains the power structure. It is society’s gaze which Jane fears when she announces to Mrs Fairfax her engagement to Rochester. It is in part society’s gaze that she fears when tempted by Rochester into a union without matrimony. Jane has also been conditioned to be mindful of God’s gaze. For Jane this is the gaze that exerts the greatest power. While Jane’s God offers her solace this solace must be brought at the expense of adhering to the rules which she believes her God lays down. Jane must suffer to ensure she maintains society’s and God’s approving gaze:

I was experiencing a terrible ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning! Not a human being ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty – ’Depart!’ 73

Jane’s referral to Rochester as an ‘idol’ whom she ‘worshipped’, ‘I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol.74 suggests the internal struggle being waged. The only way that Jane can remain with Rochester is to replace her God with a new one, that god being Rochester himself. In this eventuality Jane would simply be replacing one controlling gaze with another. She is aware that Rochester taking the place of her God and, by so doing, adopting the position of central monitor in her life is far more dangerous than maintaining her current lower social status.
During conversation Rochester has inadvertently warned Jane of the hazards attached to the arrangement he is offering when he states that ‘Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior…’ Having already received a small taste of what Rochester’s form of ownership entails on their shopping expedition to Millcote Jane has found it bitter:

The hour spent at Millcote was a somewhat harassing one for me. Mr Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses. I hated the business…By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers, I reduced the half dozen to two: these, however, he vowed he would select himself.

Ever fearful that the limited power she enjoys will be further eroded, Jane comes away from the shopping expedition with renewed resolve to control Rochester by more covert means. Although Brontë attempts to portray Jane’s withdrawal of physical affection as an act of virtue it is as much a use of her sexuality as a weapon as Blanche Ingram’s flirtations with Rochester have been. Controlling Rochester by controlling herself is the only option open to Jane however. She is aware that she is in danger of establishing him as a new ‘idol’, as a replacement to her existing beliefs and she is similarly aware that such a replacement in her belief system will leave her totally devoid of any semblance of personal freedom.

While we see Jane as literally homeless after her departure from Thornfield this is by no means her first encounter with homelessness. Jane has never had a proper home. Thornfield offered Jane the promise of a home yet, or as Jane will refer to it ‘a paradise’, because of Brontë’s and, consequently, Jane’s indoctrination into and acceptance of the
19th century social hierarchy, the Thornfield Jane leaves could never truly be her home. Her social position makes her unsuitable to be its mistress no matter what her relationship with Rochester may be. Although, as has been noted, Brontë highlights Jane’s annoyance at Mrs Fairfax’s questioning of the unequal positions of Jane and Rochester’s relationship the text does not dismiss the objections, similarly neither does Jane. While Jane’s social status must be elevated to allow their union Rochester’s power and independence must be eroded. Only through an adjustment in the social positioning of both can a union ever be realised. In Myths of Power Terry Eagleton observed that "Where Charlotte Brontë differs most from Emily is precisely in the impulse to negotiate passionate self-fulfiment on terms which preserve the social and moral conventions intact, and so preserve intact the submissive, enduring, everyday self which adheres to them."77

The search for her ‘place’ is largely what Jane is seeking throughout the novel. A significant part of the idea of ‘place’ is her desire to have a home of her own – not one assigned to her. When she departs Thornfield she is departing a place that could never be that home. Similarly the Rochester Jane leaves could never be her husband. As Karen Chase asserts, the houses in Jane Eyre ‘come to preoccupy their inhabitants’.78 Externally the first introduction Jane gives the reader to Thornfield indicate it is an impressive abode:

…I looked up and surveyed the front of the mansion. It was three stories high, of proportions not vast, though considerable; a gentleman’s manor-house, not a nobleman’s seat: battlements around the top gave it a picturesque look. Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery…and where an array
of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansion’s designation.  

Creating uncertainty and unease, central to Gothic literature, plays a part in Brontë’s description of Thornfield but, more importantly for analysis of the operations of power and control within the text, Thornfield is representative of Rochester himself.

‘Architecture has always been more closely related to Gothic than any other literary form, not simply because of its naming, but because of the crucial significance of the built environment which functions so frequently as a metaphor for dynastic, physical or psychic crisis.’ The architecture of Thornfield therefore prefigures the series of crises which will mark Jane’s time there. A dynastic crisis, in the guise of marriage to the ‘instable’ and unsuitable Bertha, has already befallen Rochester. Henri Lefebvre notes that in Medieval Gothic architecture ‘The verticality and political arrogance of towers, their feudalism, already intimated the coming alliance between Ego and Phallus. Unconsciously, of course – and all the more effectively for that. The Phallus is seen. The female genital organ, representing the world, remains hidden.’ Lefebvre’s premise is afforded greater significance in relation to Jane Eyre when we consider what is hidden at Thornfield beyond the battlements. The destruction of Thornfield is essential if Jane is to gain some equality in her marriage with Rochester. The history of the residence in incarcerating and destroying its mistresses must be broken. In order for Jane to be granted a new, pure and spiritual union with Rochester her home must be closer to the natural world, the same natural world she turned to when she fled Thornfield. Ferndean offers Jane and Rochester a haven. Its depiction in images of natural beauty and fertility foreshadows their future lives together. Bertha’s sequestered existence beyond the
battlements is representative of the burial of female sexuality and its corresponding power, a power that will ultimately destroy Thornfield.

Even before Jane is aware of Bertha’s existence she is experiencing disquiet at the thought of her impending union with Rochester. The frequently used slave imagery in the text throughout Jane and Rochester’s period of engagement allows Brontë to explore the growing unease Jane feels about embarking on a marriage where such a disparity in the balance of power is so manifest. On the return from their shopping expedition to Millcote Jane describes to her reader Rochester’s self satisfaction by comparing him to a sultan, ‘He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched’82 Rochester and Jane engage in banter which has at its heart the assertion of control by Rochester and the resistance to such control from Jane:

He chuckled; he rubbed his hands: ‘Oh, it is rich to see and hear her!’ he exclaimed, ‘Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk’s whole seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms and all!’ The eastern illusion bit me again: ‘I’ll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,’ I said; ‘so don’t consider me and equivalent for one; if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazars of Stamboul without delay; and lay out in extensive purchases some of the spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.’83

(viii) – Female sexuality and limited power

Combating the power dichotomy is difficult for Jane and, as we have seen, she must resort to using her sexuality as a weapon of defence. The first Mrs Rochester also
employed her sexuality as a vehicle through which she could access some modicum of power. From Rochester’s own account this has been the case with all the women with whom he has formed relationships. It is apparent as Rochester relates the tale of his courtship with Bertha to Jane that the overriding attraction for him was Bertha’s sexuality:

..I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic. Her family wished to secure me, because I was of good race, and so did she. They showed her to me at parties, splendidly dressed. I seldom saw her alone, and had very little private conversation with her. She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. s84

This description illuminates the operations of power within Victorian society. Although Rochester and Bertha move within the same social sphere, Rochester holds a superior position by virtue of his gender, family name, wealth, and, as is alluded to throughout the text, race. To combat this power Bertha employs the one quality that allows her to access a site of power Rochester can never control – her sexuality. Bertha ‘displays for [Rochester’s] pleasure her charms and accomplishments.’ She lures him with the only bait available to her, the hope that he might gain access to her sexually and therefore, likewise gain access to the power she possesses. The importance of this power to Rochester is apparent in his comments on the envy his connection with Bertha generates in other men.
With marriage, however, Bertha relinquishes that power; her sexuality is now no longer hers to bestow, Rochester can now lay claim to it. This is the bargaining chip by which Rochester’s name, race, and money are made available to her. When he finally has access to the site of Bertha’s power Rochester no longer values it in the same way, it ceases to wield the lure of the challenge for attainment nor would it equally excite the same level of envy among other men. To maintain some measure of power Bertha must redeploy her sexuality. The madness of the Mason family may well have some validity but the fact that Bertha’s erratic behaviour does not manifest itself until after her marriage to Rochester is evidence that this union in some way exacerbates the situation. After marriage, after he has accessed the one site of power she holds and the site she possesses which is of interest to him, Rochester finds that:

„…her nature [was] wholly alien to mine; her tastes obnoxious to me; her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger – when I found that I could not pass a single day with her in comfort; that kindly conversation could not be sustained between us, because, whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile – when I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders – even then I restrained myself: I eschewed upbraiding, I curtailed remonstrance; I tried to devour my repentance and disgust in secret; I repressed the deep antipathy I felt.”85

Chih-Ping Chen argues that Bertha’s ‘deviant womanhood is defined by Rochester, and her body mediated and appropriated by him for display embodies the gender hierarchy that also oppresses Jane as the cultural/social ‘other.’” Chen suggests that Bertha’s confinement, the image of her strange and animal-like behavior, how she is
displayed for an audience after the failed marriage ceremony is reminiscent of the
nineteenth-century ‘freak shows’. While Bertha was displayed by her family to
Rochester prior to their marriage, Rochester now displays her for others. ‘Bertha's
oppression and inferiority are configured and fused in images of both the racial other
and the exotic display… Brontë uses freak shows to reinforce patriarchal oppression as
well as to articulate her awareness of how the perception of the freakish bodies becomes
overdetermined culturally and politically in the nineteenth-century, during which the
British people witnessed the most intense phenomena of freak shows.86

Offered nothing to equal his own power now, Rochester is unable to cope with Bertha’s
unequal status. Although the Victorian social hierarchy affords Rochester the balance of
power; part of this power is invested in the notion that any partner he has must aid, and
perhaps, extend his personal power. Believing as he does that Bertha is not his
intellectual or moral equal, establishes him as the ruling elite of his household far in
excess of what he is comfortable with or what is the norm. The level of power Rochester
exerts in his household is signified in the paternalistic language he employs in his
depiction of the situation to Jane. Rochester ‘restrained’ himself and ‘eschewed
upbraiding’, he ‘curtailed remonstrance’. All of these terms indicate that he viewed
Bertha as someone he was not only free to govern and control but someone he was
expected to admonish and keep in line. ‘In Jane Eyre, Bertha has no narrative; instead,
Rochester describes her early passionate nature. His account is validated by her sexually
charged behaviour at Thornfield Hall.87 Bertha responds to her increased powerlessness
by utilising the only weapon she is familiar with and the one that she first wielded over
Rochester – her sexuality. Rochester tells Jane that:
‘Bertha Mason, - the true daughter of an infamous mother, - dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste.’

Through marriage the power of Bertha’s sexuality, the allure that other men perceive in her, now reflects on Rochester rather than on Bertha herself. In much the same way as a woman’s accomplishments reflected on their husbands in Victorian society so too does her desirability. In order to secure Rochester Bertha has traded her desirability, her site of personal power. To maintain some power she must reinvent the way in which her sexuality provides her with power. Rather than ‘displaying’ herself in a manner designed to seduce him, Bertha now offers to others what society deems should rightfully be Rochester’s alone; she siphons off part of Rochester’s power and invites others to imbibe.

Upon hearing the tale of Rochester and Bertha’s marriage Jane looks ‘almost sick’. For weeks she has been preparing for her marriage with a gnawing sense of unease. Jane’s constant attempt to maintain her own power in the face of Rochester’s overriding, though, importantly, not deliberate, dominance has seen Jane access the same weapon as Bertha in an attempt to retain personal power. Like Bertha, Jane has turned to her sexuality to stave the seepage of power she begins to experience from the moment her union with Rochester is made official. Displaying herself in the same manner as Bertha is not an option for Jane, her physical attributes, we have been informed throughout the text, are not of the same order. Her character is wholly different and lacking
in the necessary confidence for such maneuvering. Instead Jane has offered a variation on the challenge laid down to Rochester by Bertha, and later by Blanche; Jane withholds affection and offers no promise of ever doing any different. While Bertha and Blanche have both flaunted their desirability to Rochester and the promise that it could be his, Jane recognises that this form of power is fleeting. Relinquishing herself to Rochester as a result of emotion would leave Jane vulnerable; all Rochester’s attempts at romance result in rebukes from her. She recognises that her site of power is fragile and that, once he gains access Rochester will usurp and absorb that power. In the face of any threat of any displays of affection Jane deflects the emotion:

Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both: a weapon of defence must be prepared…I assured him I was naturally hard – very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it.  

The distance Jane attempts to establish and maintain is her effort to retain her power. Her power is even more limited than Bertha’s and Blanche’s, they could also rely on their looks and wealth or family name to invest them with further power. Jane’s refusal to allow herself to be wooed by Rochester is an instinctive attempt to hold on to the only ‘weapon of defence’ she possesses. Jane’s sickly demeanour at the close of Rochester’s tale of his marriage to Bertha is a physical manifestation of the realisation that her fears were well founded. A marriage to Rochester with the current imbalance in their personal sites of power so apparent would leave Jane stripped of the small portion of power she possesses.
If Rochester has, as Jane states, become her idol when Jane leaves him it is her original conception of God she seeks out and returns to, one which aligns itself closely with the natural world. During her trial, on her nights in the wilderness Jane looks to the natural world for solace. The feminine qualities she applies to nature indicate that Jane believes greater comfort can be found within the female soul than within that of the male:

Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. ⁹⁰

The Calvinistic dogma that informed her father’s religious beliefs sat uncomfortably with Brontë as she matured. She ‘witnessed extensive parallels between these religious doctrines and cultural edicts - both restricting her life and subjecting women.’⁹¹ The religious doctrines that her father espoused offered little comfort for a woman determined to step beyond the traditional female roles and embark on a career as a writer. In adulthood Brontë rejected ‘the vengeful Calvinistic model [replacing it with] a merciful, empowering Savior.’⁹²

God presented to Jane through the beliefs of Brocklehurst is a threatening, unsympathetic entity designed to maintain the hierarchy and social order of the day. It is unsurprising that Jane’s conception of god is decidedly different and more closely aligned to Brontë’s own concept than the Calvinistic model. Jane’s experiences up to the time she flees Thornfield instilled this belief but so too have her more positive
relationships with other women like those with Miss Temple, Helen and even Bessie. Though not collectives, these relationships are the only positive ones, prior to her arrival at Thornfield, to which Jane has had the opportunity to gain a sense of belonging. They have all been marginal and all fleeting – the effect however has been significant. All of these relationships have provided her with some happiness. This does not mean, however, that Jane looks to matriarchy as a preferred alternative, she has suffered some of the greatest abuse at the hands of other women. Jane’s circumstances are what they are because of one woman in particular - Mrs Reed. She has been dealt a double blow at the hands of her aunt who firstly neglected her emotionally and relinquished her to deprivation and harshness at Lowood and then she prevented an opportunity for Jane to escape this existence and take her place in the world by lying about her death to her uncle Eyre. Jane’s time in the wilderness, the action within the text following her flight from Thornfield, prepares Jane for her salvation thanks, not as it first appears to St John Rivers, but rather to his sisters Mary and Diana. It is Mary and Diana more than St John who fascinate Jane, it is for them she feels the greatest affection because she finally finds what she has been seeking throughout the novel: a sense of sisterhood and a collective to which not only can she truly belong but feels born to belong to and, once her familial connects are uncovered, this will in fact prove to be the case. Bonds of the type that she discovers with Mary and Diana that bring with them intellectual and emotional harmony have been enticingly dangled before Jane previously in life in the form of Miss Temple and Helen Burns but they have always been ripped away.
(ix) – The female collective

While it is true that the initial attraction at Marsh End is the sense of family largely inspired by both Diana and Mary, Jane soon allows, if not her affections then at least her sense of obligation, to be usurped by St John. Her stay at Marsh End is Jane’s first experience of a semi-collectivist environment which has not been constructed by the social hierarchy as was the case at Lowood. Although she has occupied the same space as families previously at Gateshead she has never witnessed a family unit working together for the whole of the family before. More importantly she had never before been included in the collective. Previously she could only observe from the position of exclusion. All her life Jane has experienced this feeling of exclusion, as a result when she happens upon a collective that embraces her she is almost overwhelmed by the possibility of acceptance to a cohort where her inclusion is not based upon her provision of services. During her time in the wilderness Jane is at her lowest ebb. It is the point of her life where she feels most abandoned by the rest of humanity but it is also at this point that she feels most in tune with the natural world. Nature nurtures her on her first night in the wilderness but it can be a changeable and harsh protector and, by the third night of Jane’s trial it has savaged her and altered her to such an extent that she is nonlonger acceptable to society. Jane’s trial has further alienated this already alienated soul.

By the time Jane happens upon Marsh End she is suffering from feelings of alienation as a consequence of being forced into this extreme state of individualism. Triandis notes that alienation brought about by life in an everyday individualistic society can result in ‘harm to the mental health of individuals.’93 In Jane’s case her isolation is so extreme that by the time she arrives at Marsh End she is almost at the point of physical
breakdown. Although hunger and exhaustion bring about her physical collapse for the most part, Jane’s isolation and sense of abandonment are what finally defeat her on St John Rivers’ doorstep:

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering – a throe of true despair – rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed I was, not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet door-step; I groaned – I wrung my hands – I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation – this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone – at least for the moment: but the last I soon endeavoured to regain.94

Jane’s greatest sorrow when she believes that death is close at hand is that she is dying in complete isolation – there will be no one to mourn her and very few to remember her, she is ‘banished’.

Eagleton contends that, ‘At the centre of all Charlotte’s novels…is a figure who either lacks or deliberately cuts the bonds of kinship.’ Jane has done both, she lacks family but, though offered the opportunity by Rochester to enter into an intimate relationship, she rejects this. Even though life with Rochester will bring her companionship at last the cost is too great. Although Eagleton suggests that these lack of bonds ‘leaves the self a free, blank,’ pre-social’ atom: free to be injured and exploited, but free also to progress, move through the class structure, choose and forge relationships, strenuously utilise its talents in scorn of autocracy or paternalism’,95 isolation is threatening Jane’s very existence by the time she arrives at Marsh End. Entering into the Rivers household and returning to ‘her kind’ saves Jane.
Initially, Jane interprets Marsh End as a collective and depicts it as such to her readers. Her ideas on hierarchical order and dominance however have been informed by those collectives that she has been excluded from – the Reed family and a class of society embodied in Blanche Ingram and her mother. Nancy Armstrong contends that Jane is held captive by those who assert dominance over her and exclude her. Jane’s primary community up to her arrival at Marsh End has been her readers. Her ‘readership is Jane’s community, and her story brands as deficient those who do not agree with her view of English society.’96 It is a brand that she has been indoctrinated into accepting and, as one of the oppressed, perpetuating. ‘Once she speaks with the voice of the dominant culture, however, her account can no longer represent those whose very humanity was actually being extinguished by English imperialism.’ This dominance informs Jane’s accounts of all other marginalised characters in her tale. ‘Captivity could hardly support the interests of that culture and still work on behalf of a subordinated and marginalized group, much as it might appear to do so... The only people to survive Jane's narrative are those who resemble Jane and fit into her social circle.’97

As we become more familiar with the Rivers family it is apparent that it is a collective with an established social hierarchy, the position of dominance occupied, naturally by the representative of patriarchy, St John. The operations of the family are not presented as disparate in its power relations by Brontë, in fact her representation portrays the Rivers as more egalitarian than most. To some extent this is true, St John does listen to the opinions of his sisters and they do play a part in the decision making processes of the household. His dominance manifests most obviously in the desire by his sisters, and
eventually Jane, to please him and serve his needs. It is not long before Jane has replaced her idol of Rochester with that of St John Rivers. When Jane agrees to act as St John’s pupil of Hindostanee she does so largely because ‘St John was not a man to be lightly refused: you felt that every impression made on him, either for pain or pleasure, was deep engraved and permanent.’ While Jane recognises St John’s controlling ways she has difficulty discounting his opinion because his needs and desires are presented under the guise of Christian ‘good works’. While her emotions for him do not extend to the love and passion she feels for Rochester she reveres him more highly:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by; because a tiresomely importunate instinct told me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him…I fell under a freezing spell. When he said ‘go’ I went; ‘come’, I came; ‘do this’, I did it.

His obsessive need to serve makes him appear, at least on the surface, as someone who is beyond reproach. Jane is easily swayed by his indoctrination skills and soon feels a sense of duty to St John and his cause but she ‘did not love her servitude’. Jane is once again in a position where servitude is oppressing her. Servitude to St John and his ambitions is far more constricting than her position as governess at Thornfield or in fact her time at Lowood. With St John Jane is more profoundly oppressed because she wishes to please her oppressor and with him Jane entirely suppresses for the first time the one thing that has always allowed her to escape, at least emotionally, from her oppressed state – her passion. Laurence Lerner points to St John as a dangerous ‘double for Jane’. Lerner accurately asserts that ‘Rivers quite consciously represses his sexuality, knowing his love for Rosamund Oliver, and putting it aside in order to be a missionary
and demand a wife toward whom he feels no sexual attraction. Jane similarly repressed her own sexuality in placing duty before her love for Rochester.100 When Jane rebuffs St John’s proposal but agrees to accompany him to India if she ‘can go free’ the true nature of St John’s proposal and ambitions reveal themselves: ‘I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death.’101 Jane sees in St John, this man who is seen by herself, the world and himself as good and Christian, something that she had never witnessed in Rochester for all his failing at and slips in a Christian way of life, Jane sees ‘a hardness and despotism’. Jane feels ‘his imperfection’ and tells us she now sees the she ‘was with an equal – one with whom I might argue – one with whom, if I saw good, I might resist.’102 St John offers Jane an opportunity to join a new collective, one that would afford her, by his representation of it, glory and honour. Jane has witnessed an aspect to St John she was not conscious of before his vehement insistence on their marriage – his collective is a sham. St John does not want a ‘helpmate’ or a ‘curate’ such as Jane offers. He must have the person body and soul and own them without threat of abandonment, not for love but for the purpose of achieving his own ambition:

The reader believed his name was already written in the Lamb’s book of life, and he yearned after the hour which should admit him to the city to which the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour; which has no need of sun or moon to shine in it, because the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.103

St John Rivers is representative of the 19th century missionary zealot. His inability to see anything outside his dogma is illustrative of the extent of his personal indoctrination. St
John, like Rochester, is an example of the oppressed male in the text. He is driven to pursue his dream of bringing Christianity to the colonies by personal ambition but it is an ambition founded in the dogma of his religion and his age. When Jane suggests to St John that he relinquish his dream of travelling to India to spread his brand of Christianity and instead stay and marry Rosamond Oliver who he is clearly in love with, he rails against the suggestion:

‘Relinquish! What! My vocation? My great work? My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven? My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race - of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance – of substituting peace for war – freedom for bondage – religion for superstition – the hopes of heaven for the fear of hell? Must I relinquish that? It is dearer than the blood in my veins. It is what I have to look forward to, and to live for.’

(x) – St John’s drive for power

St John is driven by ambition but it is his Calvinistic brand of religious belief that makes it not only possible but, in his mind absolutely necessary, to give up love, family and eventually his life to persuade people to believe as he does. A similar drive is later reflected in Robert Moore’s determination for business success in Shirley. In relinquishing his desire for Caroline and proposing instead to Shirley Robert, like St John, is prepared to sacrifice love to achieve his ultimate ambition. Brontë points to the manipulation by men of women in her society, the way in which they are used to enable men for little or no return. In Jane Eyre Rochester, through his marriage to Bertha, has also practiced an exploitation analogous to that of what both St John Rivers and Robert Moore attempt. Rochester’s depiction to Jane of the circumstances of his marriage to Bertha suggests coercion by his family. Although Robert Moore’s ambitions are to
benefit his family they remain his own. He is prepared to permanently disrupt the lives of two women, Caroline and Shirley, to achieve a goal which is largely fuelled by the desire for financial gain and industrial power. Moore is strongly attached to the belief that without financial gain he can not lead a valuable life, he risks all for this - love, the lives and wellbeing of the mill workers he is willing to displace and his own life. However, Robert Moore realises his misplaced priorities before they cause his downfall.

St John Rivers, on the other hand, cannot be swayed from his beliefs. Although his actions are cloaked in the guise of Christian duty, St John also gains personal benefit from the Calvanistic belief system which has been instilled in him; through it he has gained access to power. Ultimately this power is apparently what drives him. Already occupying a more privileged position in society than Jane by virtue of his gender and social class, St John, as we have seen, can exert his influence easily over Jane who enters his household as a blank page on which he hopes to extend his own narrative. St John adopts what is termed a ‘functionalist’ position to power. Sociologist Kingsley Davis summed up the functionalist position, defining it as necessary in a properly functioning society. In his work with Wilbert Moore they suggested that ‘society must make certain that its important positions are filled. To guarantee that the more important positions are filled by the more qualified people, society must offer those people greater rewards.’ Social inequality’ according to Davis ‘is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons.’ St John’s views align themselves to the notion that ‘stratification arises in response to societal needs’. ‘Davis argues that systems of stratification arise in response to two
specific needs common to every human society. First, there is the need to instill in the able members the motivation to occupy important and difficult positions which require greater than average ability. Second, society must motivate such persons, once they are in these positions, to perform the duties attached to them. Hence, it must provide them with greater rewards.\textsuperscript{107} This is an argument that would appeal to St John. As a missionary he believes his role is to go forth and, not only aid, but lead the masses. While his life in India will contain hardships these will still be less than those hardships endured by the colonised masses who he wishes to ‘aid’ and ‘educate’. Not only will his missionary role allow him to offer these services but, in going to India, St John will also be representative of the beliefs he has been indoctrinated into and will be attempting to extend this indoctrination process. Even though he anticipates that the work he is undertaking will wear out his body and result in an earlier death than would be the case if he remained in England, St John still has faith in receiving ‘greater rewards’, which will emerge after his death. Despite all this St John’s oppression manifests because of the religious beliefs he subscribes so emphatically to and finds impossible to question. The impact and resulting loss that his religion has had on St John extends beyond the relinquishment of love and potentially life. Jane’s description of St John’s sermon is illuminating:

\begin{quote}
It began calm – and indeed, as far as delivery and pitch of voice went, it was calm to the end: an earnestly felt, yet strictly restrained zeal breathed soon in the distinct accents, and prompted the nervous language. This grew in force – compressed, condensed, controlled. The heart was thrilled, the mind astonished, by the power of the preacher: neither were softened. Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness: stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines – election, predestination, reprobation – were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom… I was sure St John Rivers – pure-lived, conscientious, zealous as he was – had not yet found peace with God which passes all understanding.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}
Brontë’s portrayal of the exponents of Calvinism in both Brocklehurst and St John Rivers indicate her distrust of its doctrines. While Brocklehurst uses them to bring misery to others, St John allows them to bring misery to himself and is also prepared to allow them to bring misery to Jane should she agree to accompany him to India.

His idea of himself as a leader, almost a savior, is the one thing that St John gains pleasure from. The functionalist viewpoint is similar to what is illustrated by Robert Michels in his analysis of oligarchies. In these investigations Michels highlights that, even within organisational bodies which are fundamentally egalitarian, an elite will emerge out of those who are established as experts, leaders or representatives in any way. 109 Although St John believes that he is going to the colonies to aid the masses, and even perhaps work alongside them, he in no way believes he is going to be one of them. He is a leader; someone set apart from those he will be living among. He will be in a position of power.

Even in his life at Marsh End St John sets himself apart from the collective of the Rivers family. Jane is aware of how she would be positioned in terms of power and control were she to accept St John’s proposal. Although at Thornfield she was never in a position of equality with Rochester nor was there any hope that a marriage between them would result in her gaining that equality, at least Rochester was prepared to attempt to disguise the inequity of their union. St John makes no such attempt, Jane will be there to aid his cause and that is all. Gaetano Mosca noted that ‘In societies in which religious beliefs are strong and the ministers of the faith form a special class, a priestly
aristocracy almost always arises and gains possession of a more or less important share of the wealth and the political power.\textsuperscript{110} St John’s belief in himself as the rightful holder of a superior position in society is the very thing which attracts him to the missionary life. This is where the two Calvinists, Brocklehurst’s and Rivers’, share some common ground – in their notions of superiority.

Transformation of what was once a society dominated by feudal power to one that is now dominated by bureaucratic power may not manifest itself overtly in Jane Eyre nonetheless it is still an important aspect of the world Brontë portrays. Brontë’s text displays agents of power but ones whose bureaucratic dependencies are hidden beneath the mask of tradition and social mores. According to Sandra M. Gilbert,’Brontë was working with plots familiar to many of her readers, who would have known, among other significant precursors, the Cinderella story Samuel Richardson told in Pamela and the Bluebeard tale of Anne Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho’…From one of the perspectives of the Victorian culture whose myths and anxieties Charlotte Brontë so eerily transcribed in Jane Eyre, then, to embody the feminine in Cinderella is to call attention to the physical, financial and emotional deprivation - in a sense, the diminution-endured by married as well as single women in a society where the ‘second sex’ was politically, economically, legally, and erotically disempowered.\textsuperscript{111} By the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Britain had ‘through a series of gradual alterations in the social structure whereby a type of political organisation [which was] the ‘feudal state’ [had been] transformed into an essentially different type…the ‘bureaucratic state’\textsuperscript{112} The bureaucracy is in place to maintain the status quo of society, meaning the established social hierarchy is protected by the bureaucratic machine.
The oppression under which the characters of Jane Eyre exist is multifaceted. Generated by wealth, gender, race and family background this oppression is protected by, not only the indoctrination process society has undergone, but also the bureaucratic machine that operates that indoctrination process and ensures that the hierarchical structure of society remains intact. Brontë’s inability to write an alternate conclusion to the text rather than the one she has created which aligns itself with these sites of power and control is understandable; she was a product of her environment. As Christopher Lane points out, ‘critical debate has seesawed for years between Brontë’s transgressive impulses and containment strategies, without coming to rest on either.’113 Although Jane Eyre highlights social inequity it offers no solutions. However the text succeeds in drawing the reader’s attention to the fact that this inequity is not Jane’s alone. In a socially stratified society everyone has an assigned role and divergence from these roles is impossible. Brontë draws on that which informed her and what her own experiences had been when she portrayed this stratified society.

In the following chapter the themes of social stratification, oppression, alienation and isolation will be examined in Charlotte Brontë’s final novel Villette.
The writers employ the example of migrants encountering racism when seeking housing or employment etc in their definition of secondary oppression. This mode of oppression is, however, a consistent undercurrent to the oppressed person’s existence and it clearly manifests itself throughout Jane Eyre in a wide range of characters.


Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 131

Liberman, p.272


Shuttleworth, p.148

Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 172

Ibid, p. 76


Ibid., p.185


Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 307

Ibid


Shuttleworth, p.152


Brittan and Maynard, p. 63

Lorde, p. 632

Gaskell quotes the rules of the Cowan’s Bridge School to give an indication of the similarities between that institution and Lowood. Although the hardships endured by the pupils of this school were apparent to Gaskell what may have been less apparent is that part of the aim of such an institution is to prepare young girls for the places deemed suitable for them to inhabit. These places were decided by those controlling the girls fate and by those in the upper echelons of society who dictated and enforced the class structure of the day. Because Gaskell, was herself, of this world these points would not be obvious to her.
Foucault traces the development of the controlling gaze from military camps, schools and factories. The notion of observation becomes entrenched in the individual who is being oppressed by the continued gaze, so much so that the gaze no longer needs to be present for the individual to adhere to the ideology established by the power structure.
Mosca refers in this quote to development of organised societies in general rather than specifying Britain. He states that social organisation shall have concentrated and become perfected to such an extent that the protection offered by public authority is considerably more effective than the protection offered by private force.’ By the 19th century Britain fits the description having become reliant on laws and policy to maintain the operations of society.
Chapter Four

‘but, reader, it was a hard submission’¹:

Oppression and breakdown in Villette

Arthur Brittan’s and Mary Maynard’s contention that oppression can operate on either a primary or secondary level was examined in chapter three to produce an understanding of oppression in relation to Jane Eyre. Brittan’s and Maynard’s assertion that, by focusing primarily on sites of oppression such as the state, the economy and other institutions, we ignore power and oppression in a host of other situations’, is important to the analysis of Villette presented in this chapter. If we situate oppression in these external agencies the opportunity to investigate the oppression manifest in sexual and personal relationships and within the family is lost.²

Oppression, as has been illustrated, can manifest in many aspects of life – the public and the private. In Villette Brontë creates in Lucy Snowe, a victim of both primary and secondary oppression, of oppression in her public life and her private life, of oppression delivered by both her treatment by others and by her own psyche. It is in Villette, I suggest, that Brontë delivers her most dramatic representation of the effects of continued scrutiny, isolation, alienation and marginalisation. She does so
not only through her illustration of the external boundaries imposed on a life lived under such constraints but also through her depiction of the internal boundaries imposed from within by the oppressed individual. After the ‘long vacation’ when Lucy is at her most vulnerable, wandering the streets of Villette, driven by her recent isolation, Lucy collapses. When she awakes from her ‘swoon’ Lucy tells the reader she ‘cannot tell’ where her soul went but suggests that:

[Her soul] may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave to rest now, and deeming that her painful union with matter was at last dissolved. While she so deemed, an angel may have warned her away from heaven’s threshold, and, guiding her weeping down, have bound her, once more, all shuddering and unwilling, to that poor frame, cold and wasted, of whose companionship she had grown more than weary.³

Although in Jane Eyre Jane, leaving Rochester and entering a wilderness, not just in a geographical sense but also in an emotional sense, suffers a physical collapse it is a ‘swoon’ of a different type to Lucy’s. Jane is physically exhausted, starving and exposed to the elements, her collapse is a physical inevitability. Lucy, on the other hand, has shelter, sustenance and the opportunity to rest but her inability to take respite in any of these comforts because of her own self imposed internal boundaries makes her collapse an emotional inevitability.

In this chapter, this thesis will interrogate the oppression that Lucy Snowe endures because of her gender, social position, race, religion and isolation. It will examine how oppression is enacted on Lucy and her response to this oppression. This response incorporates the external and internal manifestations of Lucy’s oppressed state. To the outside world Lucy adopts and attempts to project a pose of control and
calm. All Lucy’s control is revealed for the mask that it is, however, during her bouts
of depression and emotional collapse. As in the case of the textual analysis of Jane
Eyre presented in chapter three, the analysis of Villette presented in this chapter will
similarly explore oppression in the lives of characters other than the novel’s heroine,
who is undoubtedly the character most readily identifiable as occupying a position of
oppression in the novel. The analysis presented in this chapter will however engage
directly with examples of oppression and how the accompanying expectations and
restrictions shape the existences and consciousnesses of those who are oppressed.
Similarly to chapter three, this analysis will not restrict itself to exploring specific
sites of oppression such as gender and class but will take an overarching view,
attempting to tease out the various sites in the lives of different characters within the
novel where disenfranchisement is experienced. With this in mind, this chapter will
include analysis of M. Paul Emanuel, Paulina Home, Ginevra Fanshawe and
Madame Beck, who despite appearing as the wielder of power and control, remains
restricted by the hierarchical structure of her society as well the structure she herself
imposed.
(i) - The development of Lucy Snowe.

In creating Lucy Snowe, Brontë has perfected the depiction of the soul tortured both from within and without. Heather Glen refers to Villette as ‘a narrative of isolation’ suggesting ‘the voice that speaks at the end of the novel is that of one who survives in a disenchanted world.’ This is true; it is survival that is recounted at the end of Lucy’s tale rather than joy. From Lucy there are no triumphant articulations of success such as ‘Reader, I married him’ which we hear from Jane. Instead Lucy speaks of the storm ‘that roared frenzied for seven days!’ Lucy’s narrative reviews a period in her life where, as a young woman, she fought for space and identity within a society that offered her neither.

From her earliest recollections, or at least those she chooses to share with her readers, Lucy inhabits a space that positions her at the outer perimeters of inclusion and therefore happiness. In childhood she is positioned by others to be an onlooker in life. Lucy makes herself strangely absent from her early description of her visit to Mrs. Bretton’s house and her first encounter with Paulina or Polly. The account of this visit reveals little of Lucy’s emotions or story, its focus instead is on the other people in the household and the growing affection that is increasingly apparent within this cohort, an affection of which Lucy does not appear to have a share. Not only does Lucy not share in the affection of the household, it often seems to be unfathomable to her. As noted in chapter two, Lucy declares herself ‘guiltless…[of] an overheated and discursive imagination’ This is an assertion that will later prove to be one of a collection of misrepresentations to her readers by Lucy’s as narrator and either a failure in self recognition or an example of self delusion.
In contrast, Polly shows emotions that are alien to Lucy who describes the emotions that she witnesses Polly demonstrate with a mixture of alarm and disapproval. In Polly’s eyes Lucy claims to identify, ‘in its irid and pupil a startling transfiguration. These sudden, dangerous natures – sensitive as they are called – offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries.’ Lucy positions herself in contrast to Polly, her ‘cooler nature’ sustains her in youth, at least her representation of this particular time in her youth that she recounts to her readers, but it will be revealed for the pose that it is when Lucy reaches adulthood. The child Lucy, as she is presented to the reader through the aged Lucy’s narration, superficially accepts and supports the position of onlooker throughout her youth into adulthood. As a childhood character in her own story Lucy occupies the space that Madame Beck will later usurp – that of the voyeur, the hidden eye of surveillance. Whatever misfortune has informed Lucy has also distanced her from the possibility of engaging in a family collective in the way Polly does and it is not until she is outside the orbit of such a collective, for she is never within its confines, that she begins to engage with her own story.

‘The values of collectivists include security, good social relationships, ingroup harmony, and personalized relationships.’ Lucy, sitting outside any collective that is beginning to emerge or to reconfigure for the inclusion of Polly in the Bretton household, is not only unable to engage with the relationships that are forming, she is unable to empathise with those who are forming these relationships. Lucy’s cool acceptance of her situation and her apparent lack of emotion is another indication of how she is shaped differently from Polly. ‘Collectivists have fewer skills than
individualists in dealing with new groups and strangers, but once a relationship is established, it tends to become more intimate and long lasting than the relationships of individuals." Polly struggles with the separation from her father but Lucy, as far as she represents events to the reader, suffers none of these anxieties.

For Lucy who, so far as we can glean, has either had very limited access to a collective or ingroup or has seen this access disrupted earlier in her life, any anxiety under which she potentially suffers is repressed. According to Triandis, ‘individualists have an extreme fear of dependence on the ingroup and therefore avoid getting public assistance.’ He further asserts that when ‘people are not close enough…[they are] unwilling to sacrifice.’ Lucy therefore does not exhibit emotions in the way that Polly does because she does not believe she has the same audience available to her. Instead she represses any anxiety she may be experiencing as a young girl, repression being as Brittan and Maynard tell us a form of oppression, to the detriment of herself as an adult. Sally Shuttleworth’s contention that Lucy’s, ‘commitment to evasion and displacement is articulated in the very title of her book, which gives precedence not to selfhood but to place’ suggests either that, even from the distance of age as she narrates her text, Lucy can recapture the feelings of isolation that her youthful individualist existence aroused or that these feelings have never left her. This chapter will contend that the latter is the case for Lucy Snowe.

Nevertheless, even as an apparently alienated child, Lucy possesses a determination to carve out her own identity. She seeks to carve out a space of her own choosing lurking beneath her façade of a controlled emotionless state that Lucy
apparently embodies. In adulthood, when pushed to the brink this creates a rebellious spirit that means she cannot completely succumb to the role assigned to her as an outsider. Instead, as we will see in her relationship with M. Paul, Lucy provokes those around her and obstinately attempts to retain her isolated space regardless of this being to her detriment. The story of her early life recounted through the distance of age reveals this strength of will that, despite all the suggested hardships such as loss of family and resources, ultimately allows her to overcome her situation and position herself with some independence even if it is an isolated independence.

Lucy’s perspective as narrator benefits from this mature perspective in a way that Jane’s perspective as narrator does not. John Maynard argues that this made her more ‘reflective’ and able to see life ‘more steadily and coherently.’ Even if Lucy’s perspective benefits from this distance however there is no guarantee that the benefit is passed to her readers. What Lucy chooses to impart to her readers with accuracy and without censorship remains questionable. This is of particular importance when exploring the oppression she experienced and the collectives she engaged with or was excluded from. Any omissions, acceptance and forgiveness on Lucy’s part, that are recounted through her mature perspective, have the potential to misrepresent her situation. The possibility of misrepresentation is equally true of any long burning resentment she recounts. Christopher Lane correctly asserts that, ‘None of her protagonists discovers what it means to be sociable without experiencing—an almost insuperable repugnance for other people.’ Villette, he contends, ‘does help us see why hatred remains integral to Brontë’s conception of subjectivity and citizenship.’ The story that Lucy presents to her readers provides plenty to support its narrators’ misanthropic stance. The characters in her tale provide a
good share of, at best, thoughtlessness and, at worst, selfishness. Even the good characters share these faults. Graham and indeed Mrs. Bretton are not without these failings. There are also those who display a good deal of egoism, Ginevra Fanshawe being the most obvious example. Lucy’s story, the one she chooses to share with her readers, is, as it is with Jane, a site of personal power for Lucy who is recounting the youthful part of a life which was overwhelmingly informed by external control and boundaries and where personal power is severely limited.

Their problem in clarity around Lucy’s experiences emerges early in the novel. The early revelation that Lucy has not always been an outsider suggests that her life could have travelled a path quite different to the one that leads her eventually to Villette. But, unlike Jane, she never discloses the circumstances that established her trajectory. We have no sense with Lucy, as we do with Jane, where she would have fitted in the social hierarchy of the day had disaster not found her early in life. Lucy’s life is unfolded initially in vignettes, first in the home of extended family then as carer for Miss Marchmont before her life proper, or the life she chooses to recount to her reader at least, begins as she embarks for Labassécour. While recounting her childhood visits to her godmother Mrs. Bretton’s house in chapter one, Lucy comments ‘One child in a household of grown people is usually very much made of, and in a quiet way I was a good deal noticed by Mrs. Bretton…’ But no sooner do we learn of this small comfort and inclusion than a sense of for eboding is created and Lucy’s precarious position in the household and, perhaps, her world is intimated. Lucy tells us that, ‘One day a
letter was received of which the contents evidently caused Mrs. Bretton surprise and some concern. I thought at first it was from home, and trembled, expecting I knew not what disastrous communication; to me, however, no reference was made, and the cloud seemed to pass.’ As most children are unable to see beyond that which affects them, it may seem normal for Lucy to suffer some apprehension in such circumstances. But Lucy is not of a typical nature, she rarely factors herself into her assessment of the world around her. Her response is so dramatic and at odds with her description of her own ‘cool temperament’ it reveals that within her personal circumstances there is something that she fears occurring, something that could make her ‘tremble’. On return from her walk the next day when Lucy sees the small crib and the ‘tiny rosewood chest’ in her room she wonders ‘Of what are these things signs and tokens?’ Lucy quickly arrives at an answer, ‘A second guest is coming: Mrs. Bretton expects other visitors.’ This event establishes very early in the text Lucy’s position in the Bretton family collective. She is an outsider, a ‘guest’ and not one who has gained a level of intimacy sufficient to afford her if not consultation then at least information about a new addition to the household who will not only be sharing Lucy’s status as guest but also Lucy’s room.

(ii) - Lucy as narrator – a question of reliability

The text fluctuates between the stable and the unstable that will inform Lucy’s life. Lucy explains that when her godmother arrived to ‘claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence’ to take her for what would be
her final visit, she believed Mrs. Bretton ‘plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society.’

What is the purpose of this enigmatic information provided to her readers? Lucy keeps secrets. She attempts to keep them from those around her at Pensionnat Beck, though often these attempts are in vain. Lucy also keeps secrets from those who are supposedly friends. She knows well before revealing either the fact to her readers or revealing herself to him that Dr John is Graham but similarly does not divulge this information. Psychological research reveals that ‘people who are in high self-concealment (i.e., the predisposition to keep secrets), as compared to those who are low in self-concealment, report having more physical and psychological symptoms.’

Lucy does not alter her practice of secrecy as she matures and continues to suppress information from her readers. After years of keeping secrets and later trying to guard them from the constant surveillance of Madame Beck, Lucy manifests severe physical and psychological symptoms resulting in physical and mental collapse. Given that Lucy is engaged in writing an account of her life, keeping secrets from her readers could be considered contrary to her intent. She does not withhold information that may be of an embarrassing or discomfiting nature as is the usual practice of autobiography. Instead Lucy makes her reader aware of her deceptions, if not at once then at some point as her story unfolds.

As Lucy-withholds the information from the reader from her position as aged narrator and has also withheld her identity from Dr John as a young woman in Villette, we can assume secretiveness is a practice of a lifetime for her. Lucy’s lack of experience or understanding of being part of a collective has informed her behaviour. Triandis notes that ‘changes in ecology (how people make a living),
affluence, mobility (both social and geographic), and movement from rural to urban settings contribute to changes from collectivism to individualism." Her slide down the social hierarchy, her losses early in life, the necessity for her continued mobility that ultimately leads her to Labassecour, all serve to alter any collectivist behaviours she may previously have displayed. By the time Lucy reaches adulthood she is thoroughly individualistic and also increasingly isolated. We can deduce that Lucy’s desire for isolation, her distrust of others, never leaves her entirely for it remains a central component of her narrative voice.

Given the way that information is suppressed, even when she is aged, we can similarly assume Lucy’s self-containment never leaves her. The events of her life in the town of Villette, as they are revealed in the text, display the self-containment she possessed in youth. It is more than just an attempt to be inscrutable and guarded that impels Lucy to withhold details of her biography. Her acts of secrecy and omission from those around her and her readers are also a means by which Lucy can battle the power structures under which she has been forced to live. I say structures as Lucy is forced to conform to the overarching hierarchy of her society, much of which in youth is quite alien to her, as well as the power structure imposed on her locally by her employer Madame Beck. As Catherine Lanone notes:

In this obsessively panoptic society, the only weapon is to withdraw oneself from the prevailing gaze. Hence Lucy’s rebellious narrative reconstructions, her famous lies or omissions, as when she fails to tell the reader that Paul Emmanuel gave her the bunch of violets or that she has long identified Doctor John as the Graham of her childhood Lucy’s continued concealment indicates that she has continued her practice of secrecy and tendency towards individualism throughout her life."
Lucy recognises how power operates. Although she may have been innocent to the machinations of power in youth certainly from her position as the ‘snowy haired’ narrator, after a life-time of confronting power, Lucy has the knowledge of lived experience behind her. In Villette it is after the period and nervous collapse recounted in chapter XV, ‘The Long Vacation’, that Lucy’s awareness of the true nature and inaccessibility of power for her in her world begins to develop. Her repeated invitations to her readers to imagine a different reality to the one she has lived are instances of Lucy laughing up her sleeve at our romantic notions and desires. As she writes her tale Lucy knows how power and control are exerted. On leaving the Bretton’s and returning home she offers to ‘permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass – the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer.’ But Lucy does not suggest this in order to save her readers from the harsh reality of life. No sooner does she establish this fantasy than she undermines it, ‘A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?’ Lucy notes that there are girls and women who are ‘supposed’ to live their lives this way – her inference is that this is part of the fantasy. Lucy suggests she is happy if others choose to believe this fantasy, but she is aware of the reality.
Lucy tells us that ‘self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstance‘ for her there was ‘no possibility of dependence on others.’ Lucy is positioned for oppression – oppression in excess of that which, due to gender, would naturally be ‘her lot‘. Without providing a real insight the text suggests that young Lucy is earmarked for burden. It is difficult to discern whether Lucy as a young woman recognised this or if this is something the tale of her life has been invested with by the perspective and experience of the mature Lucy as narrator. What is discernible in Villette however is that the aged Lucy is presenting an account of the time in her life when she was educated about her position in the world and the way in which her world operated.

In the text, Lucy’s account of her youth foreshadows that which will follow. It becomes clear that, although the text hints that she has been cared for by family of some description, losses are inescapable. These losses will leave Lucy a solitary figure in the world when she reaches adulthood. At this point the backdrop for the creation of Villette is worth mentioning. Published in 1853, this is the first text that Brontë wrote quite alone. Her family collective had all but vanished; all that remained was her father. Patrick’s impact on Charlotte’s writing, as demonstrated in chapter one, was at the formative stage of her and her siblings’ development, in their reading habits and resulting preferences, although he did solicit reviews for her work once it was published and was keenly interested in how her work was received.
Branwell, Emily and Anne had all died from consumption in the period between September 1848 and May 1849. It is evident from her correspondence to George Smith that Brontë felt the loss of her siblings deeply throughout the writing of Villette. Coupled with this, and of greater significance, is the fact that Brontë had by now lost almost her entire family prematurely. Her letters from the time reflect the intense grief under which she was suffering. Villette was a novel that Heather Glen notes was ‘conceived and written in unprecedented isolation.’ Kate E. Brown believes that the novel reflects the desolation Brontë felt. According to Brown, as a result, Villette ‘describes that clinging to be both grotesque and necessary in a world without adequate substitutes for the lost loved ones.’

Brontë’s experience of loss no doubt contributed to the creation of what Christopher Lane describes as ‘Villette’s complex antisocial impulses’ for antisocial behavior is rife in the novel. Lucy embodies it in her distancing and isolation and rejection of companionship and others display it in their relations with Lucy. Graham’s disregard of her as a child and, later, his failure to recognise Lucy’s feelings towards him as he attempts to press her into service for him in his romancing of Paulina are illustrative of the failure of others, even those who are supposedly close to her, to truly provide complete support for Lucy. In every situation apart from her eventual relationship with M. Paul, all of Lucy’s
companions fail to see the depth of support she actually needs and the feelings of invisibility she experiences at various times in the novel are legitimately experienced in the repeated failure of those closest to her to see Lucy’s true needs. The biographical detail that Lucy provides to her readers repeatedly demonstrates her back grounding and positioning as an outsider.

As in Jane Eyre, Lucy in by no means the only oppressed and isolated character in her tale. Lucy’s role in Miss Marchmont’s household illustrates not only another period where circumstances led to isolation in Lucy’s life but also another image of oppression in the figure of Miss Marchmont herself. Miss Marchmont’s lot in life should have been, like Lucy’s, quite different. But, unlike Lucy, Miss Marchmont is ‘woman of fortune’ who we are told ‘lived in a handsome residence’. Her fortune means little however. Miss Marchmont is a ‘rheumatic cripple, impotent foot, and hand’ she is oppressed by her physical limitations which keep her confined and away from society. But there is more to her story. She tells Lucy when recounting the loss of her fiancé that, ‘While I loved, and while I was loved, what an existence I enjoyed! What a glorious year I can recall’. 22 For Miss Marchmont there is one year of her existence that she can recount with happiness. Lucy’s time with Miss Marchmont and her knowledge of her employer’s tragic story provides her with further evidence to support her idea that, in the main, women and girls are only ‘supposed’ to lead the fairy tale existence – the reality is markedly different. Miss Marchmont’s story of her lost love also prefigures
Lucy’s eventual loss of M. Paul. Lucy’s loss will be experienced differently. While Miss Marchmont’s loss of love will result in her confinement and dependence, Lucy’s will lead to her independence. Paul’s love paves the way for Lucy’s negotiation of a path through significant, if not all, aspects of her oppression and his suggested demise allows her to maintain her new found freedom on her own terms.

The oppression that is manifest in the novel itself was also manifest for Brontë in the novel’s writing. In a letter to Ellen Nussey in September, 1852 Brontë complained about the burden of the process:

But oh Nell! I don’t get on – I feel fettered – incapable – sometimes very low - However – at present the subject must not be dwelt upon-it presses me too hardly-nearly and painfully. Less than ever can I taste or know please till this work is wound up.23

Brontë struggled with this text. The writing process caused her anxiety. This was no doubt due largely to the intellectual and creative isolation and loneliness that Brontë was experiencing for the first time during the entire writing process of Villette. Volume three of Shirley had been written under the same circumstances but for Villette, as previously indicated, Brontë for the first time did not have a collective to call on for advice during the writing of the entire novel. In a letter to George Smith:
You must notify honestly what you think of — “Villette” when you have read it. I can hardly tell you how much I hunger to have some opinion besides my own, and how I have sometimes desponded and almost despaired because there was no one to whom to read a line – or of whom to ask counsel. “Jane Eyre” was not written under such circumstances, nor were two thirds of “Shirley”. I got so miserable I could bear no allusion to the book – and ha - it is not finished yet, but now – I hope.  

As Kate E. Brown notes:

Critics…have taken the unpredictability of plot and bitterness of tone that characterize Villette to reflect not on the novel’s setting but on the circumstances of its composition. In the eight months between September 1848 and May 1849 Brontë’s three younger siblings died in the order of their births (all of tuberculosis, like their elder sisters years before), leaving Charlotte the sole survivor of the six Brontë children.

Triandis notes that, ‘If a family is large, a certain amount of regimentation and imposition of tightness, that is, collectivism, is inevitable to make life harmonious’. This tightness was a benefit to Brontë as a writer from an early age. We know the writing of the juvenilia was conducted initially in the large sibling collective which later fractured into two partnerships. Lyndall Gordon comments that, ‘Emily and Anne had been dissatisfied with the minor roles assigned to their heroes by a dominant brother and sister, and they were bored with Charlotte’s languishing heroines and Branwell’s battles.’ This collaborative style of writing support and mentorship continued into adulthood, with her siblings available to her to critique and comment on her work at the time that Brontë was actually engaged in the process of writing and creating. Even after she had achieved success, this engagement was natural and no doubt part of the creative process. Such consultation allowed Brontë and her sisters, for she provided a similar critical support, to assess the progression of
her work throughout its development. Once death had claimed all her siblings this support was removed.

Isolation is a theme that emerges in all Brontë’s texts but it is in Villette where the sense of isolation escalates. It becomes a physical and psychological isolation so marked that Lucy is the only one of Brontë’s heroines to demonstrate total nervous collapse, though others come close. During ‘the long vacation’ Lucy describes herself as ‘in a strange fever of the nerves and blood.’ As desperate as Jane is during her trial in the wilderness, she retains her grasp on reality. In Villette, reality for both Lucy and, therefore, her readers slips. Lucy’s ‘fever of nerves’ during her time of isolation is not the result of her loneliness in this one period only. It is the culmination of a life that has been, up to this point, led for the most part as a solitary individual. Although the reader has little idea of the place in society, the family, the collective into which she was born, we do know that from childhood until the time she arrives in Villette she was deprived of access to all of this.

After the death of Miss Marchmont Lucy consults an ‘old servant of the family’ who was now employed as a housekeeper for another family. While there Lucy meets the son of a daughter of the house. Lucy informs us that, ‘Different as were our social positions now, this child’s mother and I had been schoolfellows…and I remembered her – good-looking, but dull - in a lower class than mine.’ It is clear that, from her slide down the social hierarchy, Lucy’s psychological oppression has been gaining momentum from the time of the very first biographical events detailed in the text. She is taken to Mrs. Bretton’s from ‘kinsfolk with whom was at that time
Clearly she has already suffered loss and further losses will be endured. Again these are never articulated by Lucy as narrator but it is apparent that these previous losses were significant and reduced her station in life. In this novel we do not have another orphan like Jane, unconnected and devoid of material resources but still in possession of a degree of hope. In Lucy, Brontë creates not only an orphan who, though not entirely unconnected, is without resources and becomes unconnected because she is either forgotten or lost sight of.

In Lucy Brontë also presents someone who absorbs all of the elements of her alienation, internalizes them and projects them onto the world around her in a way that Jane never does. The difference between the two lies in the connections and ingroups each has access to. Jane may have become significantly more alienated had she not had the opportunity to share her life with others such as Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Had she not enjoyed pockets of friendship and relief from isolation Jane may have borne a greater resemblance to Lucy Snowe.

Upon her arrival at London Lucy wonders how inn-servants and ship stewardesses ‘everywhere tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance and little burdened by cash?’ Lucy perceives that her status is emblazoned on her person, that she can be read and categorized by those she encounters however briefly. This notion will help keep her positioned subserviently. Again, this is different from Jane’s reaction when being ‘misread’ by Hannah and positioned by her in the wrong social class. When Hannah makes this error and treats Jane accordingly she is, as we have seen in chapter three of this thesis, clearly and
firmly corrected and, subtly, admonished for her mistake. Lucy goes to no such effort when in London in her dealings with an ‘arrogant little maid’ and a ‘parsonic-looking, black-coated, white-neckclothed waiter’ who, through ‘maintaining a very quiet manner towards’ them, she gains ‘civility from…ere long.’ Lucy does not need to chastise the two servants in the same way as Jane does Hannah. Instead she seeks only an appropriate level of consideration from them. Lucy is not correcting these two, she has moved beyond Jane in her self-conception. Like Jane she recognises where she should sit in the social hierarchy but, unlike Jane, she no longer positions herself there.

Lucy’s self-concept is formed through the same indoctrination process into the hierarchical social structure as was Jane’s. But little hope of an alternate world view is apparent in the young Lucy. While the orphaned Jane suffered loneliness and lack of inclusion from an early age, just as Lucy did, the social connections she established provided an alternate experience to that which informed Lucy. Helen Burns and Miss Temple were fleeting in Jane’s life but her relationships with them were significant enough to sustain her and offer an alternative to the total isolation that is Lucy’s lot. Heather Glen asserts another point of difference not only between Villette and Jane Eyre but between Villette and the rest of Brontë’s oeuvre stating:

‘More directly, indeed, than any of Brontë’s previous protagonists, this one insists that hers is a lot that others share…[The novel’s] title signals a central concern not merely with [Lucy’s] peculiar viewpoint but what that viewpoint reveals about the world through which she moves.’

What is interesting about Glen’s comment in relation to the possession and movement of power and oppression in the text is the fact that this account of large scale
disenfranchisement by Lucy is not the youthful Lucy’s interpretation of her time at the extremity. This notion that isolation and oppression is the shared state of many in society is ‘the sombre wisdom of the mature Lucy’34 whose lived experience has clearly validated her view.

It is when Lucy confronts her position in the world, when she truly cannot escape her isolation during the long vacation, that her most pronounced symptoms of nervous collapse manifest. In the chapters preceding this Lucy becomes aware of the story of the nun, the young girl ‘buried alive, for some sin against her vow.’35 Lucy enjoys ‘the charms’ of the old garden ‘independently of romantic rubbish.’ Again Lucy’s practice of misleading her readers is apparent. In this, tellingly walled, garden Lucy finds herself thinking back on her childhood and acknowledges the level of her own repression, ‘Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel.’ Lucy will soon detail the five encounters she has with the nun and her emotional breakdown yet prior to this she continues to assert her claim to a ‘cool temperament.’ E. D. H. Johnson suggests that ‘Brontë carefully planted each of these confrontations with the nun, and that the crucial circumstances under which they take place elicit from Lucy a pattern of responses through which the meaning of her ordeal becomes manifest.’36 Lucy’s first visitation from the nun occurs as she becomes increasingly aware of both her feelings for Dr John and his failure to reciprocate them. The self control that she demands in order to survive abandons Lucy. She believes that repressing her emotions is essential in order for her to make her way in the world, ‘About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future – a future such as mine – to be dead. And in a catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature.’37
The Pensionnat Beck would appear an ideal environment in which Lucy can maintain a rein on her passions and hold ‘the quick’ of her nature. But this is yet another example of Lucy’s deception – her self-deception in this instance. The confinement of Madame Beck’s establishment and employ are too much for Lucy to tolerate. Others around her suffer none of the tension and anguish that she does. The other teachers and the students manage a social and emotional life despite Madame Beck’s scrutiny. Only Lucy collapses under her gaze. For Lucy life at the Rue Fossette incorporates a hierarchical dynamic comparable with the structure of a family – one headed by an iron-willed matriarch. As is the case with a family, life in Madame Beck’s establishment ‘provides the site for a kind of political practice which results in the subservience of the personal to the political.’

For Lucy, who sees life as a continual engagement with oppression and constant battle to dominate her passions with reason, the desire for ‘something to fetch [her] out of her present existence, and lead [her] onwards and upwards’ is always close to the surface.

At this point it is worth mentioning that, although this thesis deals with oppression that is a symptom of and reaction to the larger social structure of the day and the way in which that structure informed its citizens, it is not the intention to suggest that oppression is inevitable. Instead I suggest that Villette illustrates that oppression is pervasive, individuals are informed by it and engage with it but to suggest any inevitability in the disenfranchisement of Lucy or others within the novel who are similarly oppressed, would serve to legitimise the perpetuation of oppression. To apply a reductionist approach to oppression suggests it can never be overcome and, in buying into this notion, individual agency is further removed and oppression continues to circulate. This approach to our understanding of oppression absolves the
oppressor from responsibility for his or her actions and reduces the space for the oppressed to combat their marginalisation.\textsuperscript{40} The period of her life in Villette that Lucy recounts to her readers reflects her time when she was largely devoid of agency and how she negotiated this situation in order to gain greater agency until we at last, through her narrative, see her writing her own story rather than allowing her story to be inscribed upon her story by others.

(**iii** - Lucy and Polly – competitors for visibility)

Lucy’s isolation gains momentum as her journey progresses. At the beginning of the novel, as indicated, the reader understands that she has suffered this unspecified loss but is not entirely without friends. Lucy has access to the Bretton family collective, but only on the periphery, and it is a kind and sympathetic collective, unlike the Reed collective to which Jane was subjected. With the arrival of Polly to Mrs. Bretton’s, Lucy’s already marginalised position is exacerbated. Although it is suggested that Lucy has been a regular visitor to the Bretton’s house, she does not have the quaint yet appealing manners of Polly making it difficult for Lucy to become part of the family collective. Polly, like Lucy, also sits outside this collective but she is able to ease her way into it in a way that Lucy could never hope to achieve.

Terry Eagleton describes Lucy as a ‘spectatorial outsider; like Jane she is alien in another’s home, able to pride herself only on a coolly analytic brand of observation.’ He contends that Lucy’s attitude towards Polly is ‘intensely ambiguous’ and ‘so clearly self-defensive that it succeeds only in drawing attention to the firmly repressed fascination she feels for her
more privileged, more emotionally vulnerable but also oddly opaque and
self-possessed companion.41 Later in the text Polly will officially become
part of the family through her marriage to Dr John, further highlighting
Lucy’s outsider status as her position is again usurped by Polly’s sec-
ond and, again unexpected, arrival in Lucy’s life. With both of her
arrivals Polly eclipses Lucy and displaces her. This second displacement
is harsher as Lucy, with her reconnection to the Brettons, has another
glimpse of her chance to become part of a collective snatched from her
just as it seems to be a possibility.

This is evidenced as again Lucy’s narrative reveals her as an outsider and a spectator
looking on at family life and relationships. In the chapter titled ‘The Little
Countess’, while visiting Graham and his mother along with Polly and her father at
La Terrasse, Lucy watches on in the kitchen as Graham and Polly’s father, the Count
de Bassompierre, remove their snow covered clothing. Lucy describes the
spontaneous intimacy between father and daughter and mother and son. As Polly
assists her father Lucy describes the scene:

The little white Countess danced in a circle about her equally white
sire, clapping her hands and crying. - ‘Papa, papa, you look like an
enormous Polar bear.’ The bear shook himself, and the little sprite
fled far from the frozen shower. Back she came, however, laughing, and eager to aid in removing the arctic disguise... The
grave and reverend signior looked down on her as men do look on
what is the apple of their eye.42
At the same time as this scene is unfolding a scene of equal warmth was unfolding between Graham and his mother who, Lucy tells us, was ‘in conflict with her son about some change of dress she deemed advisable, and which he resisted. He stood leaning against the Dutch dresser, laughing and keeping her at arms length.” Lucy once again sits outside this action, detailing it rather than experiencing it. It is not until Polly directs her father’s attention to Lucy, requesting him to tell Lucy to dance with her, that Lucy’s presence is recalled with Polly pointedly stating ‘there is Lucy Snowe.’ It is as if Lucy has vanished while the family intimacies she recounted have taken place and it is almost a surprise that her presence is realised. This reinstates Lucy’s invisible status reducing the level of inclusiveness she has access to in this broadening collective of the Brettons and the Home de Bassompierres.

But if Bertha Mason is Jane’s ‘dark double’ then Polly also acts as a type of double for Lucy and ‘she reflects a contradiction inherent in Lucy herself.’ Andrew Dowling points to Mary Jacobus’ assessment of the ‘multiple images of women in Villette’ as ‘projections of Lucy’s psyche and fragments of her own personality’ as a site of comparison of the ideal notions of womanhood (Polly reflecting the ideal) and the notions of ideal and deviant masculinity in his assessment of ‘manliness’ in Victorian fiction. The reflection of the various aspects of both Lucy’s and Jane’s characters through the doubling of characters in the text allows Brontë to suggest rather than assert the aspects of deviance and the ideal in her heroines.

Polly is not dark, not violent, not fearsome but threatening nonetheless. She is not an illustration of the impact of a life of passion; rather she shows Lucy what a life that is
open to emotion, attachment and inclusion can offer. On her visit with the Brettons, Paulina reveals to Lucy that she is in fact Polly. As Polly asserts her view that, despite the lapse of time, she, Graham and Lucy are still the same people as they were in youth Lucy tells us that ‘I thought the same, but I wondered to find my thoughts hers: there are certain things in which we so rarely meet our double that it seems a miracle when that chance befalls.’ Given the account of herself and Polly in childhood, how Lucy is at pains to make it clear that she is informed by reason while Polly is informed by emotion, the source of this doubling of thought is a surprise to Lucy whose attitude to Polly is, according to Eagleton, ‘a subconscious tactical conversion of suppressed jealousy to mature condescension.’ Although Lucy, in telling her tale, may not see the doubling between herself and Polly, this doubling is apparent when Polly reenters the text as Paulina and, in the same way as Bertha’s life proves to be instructive to Jane, so too does Polly’s for Lucy.

While Bertha is physically represented as corpulent, in line with her passion, sexuality and lack of self control, Polly is represented as child-like, tiny and innocent. If Polly does not represent a rejection of sexuality, she embodies an absence of it. Anna Krugovoy Silver notes that ‘Brontë considered Paulina the novel’s biggest failure.’ There is a lack of substance to Polly, she is slight, eager to please and seems determined to make herself of service to the men who are important to her – first her father then Graham. After her father leaves her at Bretton and Polly begins to settle into this new environment her attentions turn to Graham. Polly displays her affection through the comfort and service that she can provide to those she cares about. The morning Graham is unable to come to the breakfast table because he has school work to complete Polly asks Mrs. Bretton to, ‘Please send
your boy something good.’ When Mrs. Bretton indicates that Polly should choose the young girl does so, selecting ‘a portion of whatever was best on the table’ and waiting on him herself.

When Graham asks Polly to be a ‘kind little woman’ it is a role that she eagerly embraces. She readily accepts society’s established positioning of her. Polly is socialized to accept the role expected of her as a ‘little women’. From her interaction with Graham and her fussing over her father it is apparent that she has been socialized into this role from early age. ‘Whenever a child is socialized, he or she is in no position to resist or fight back,’ Polly is certainly in no position to rebel against her situation. Polly has lost her most significant female role model, as it would appear is also the case with Lucy. But we are told that, according to Mrs. Bretton, ‘the loss was not so great as might at first appear. Mrs. Home…had been very pretty, but a giddy, careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband.’

This labeling of Mrs. Home as ‘careless’ and ‘giddy’ is a convenient way of invalidating any influence she may have exerted on her daughter. These labels are comparable to those discussed by psychiatrist Thomas Szasz in relation to mental illness. He claims that these labels are affixed to ‘people who are social pests, odd, or challenging.’ This idea was supported by Foucault who ‘argued that mental illness must be understood not as natural fact but as a cultural construct.’ Mrs. Home’s ‘giddiness’ indicates that she did not fit the ‘mythical norm’ of her society or display the attribute of the socially constructed notion of the Victorian wife and mother. Here is another site of comparison between Jane Eyre and Villette. This labeling by Mrs. Bretton invalidates Mrs. Home in the same way as Rochester’s labeling of Bertha
invalidates her. Had Mrs. Home lived Polly may have been informed differently, her ‘giddiness’ and ‘carelessness’ may have exposed Polly to a different way of being. This may have lessened the extent of her socialization into the Victorian hierarchical order.

Polly is inescapably conditioned by the patriarchal society she inhabits. Although it is, as we will see, a social order that abandons her, nevertheless she is socialized to accept the hierarchical structure and herein rests the source of her oppression. If Lucy is oppressed by her outsider status, her lack of connections, family or support Polly is oppressed because she possesses them. As the textual analysis of Jane Eyre asserts, there are degrees of oppression enacted on the characters in Brontë’s novels. In the same way Jane’s oppression is more significant than Blanche Ingram’s but less than that of Bertha Mason. Polly is oppressed but not as oppressed as Lucy.

The scene in the kitchen at La Terrasse clearly defines Polly’s social positioning. In this scene Polly is represented as the dutiful and loving daughter to her father and Mrs. Bretton’s attentions to her son foreshadow that which Polly is destined to become, the dutiful wife and mother. Lucy tells us at the beginning of this chapter that, as Mrs. Bretton, Polly and herself await Graham’s and Count de Bassompierre’s return, ‘there was no true enjoyment that evening at La Terrasse, till, through the wild howl of the winter-night, were heard the sounds of arrival.’52 Polly’s future is anticipated as Lucy ponders:
How often, while women and girls sit warm at snug fire-sides, their hearts and imaginations are doomed to divorce from the comfort surrounding their persons, forced out by night to wander through dark ways, to dare stress of weather, to contend with the snow-blast, to wait at lonely gates and stiles in the wildest storms, watching and listening to see and hear the father, the son, the husband coming home.53

In taking on the anticipated role of wife and mother, this will be Polly’s future, she will be ‘running down and into halls to meet and greet’ her returned husband – being her father’s daughter provides her with the training for being another man’s, specifically Graham’s, wife. This paragraph prefigures Polly’s future. It also prefigures Lucy’s future devoid of living out such a role while at the same time recalling Lucy’s past which has not had the opportunity to be informed by consistently observing the role enacted.

In her periods of extreme isolation it is Lucy herself who wanders ‘through dark ways’, yet, as a woman devoid of the social support of a collective unit, there is no one who anxiously awaits her return. Lucy may describe herself as living ‘in a house full of robust life’ where she ‘might have had companions, and chose solitude’ but this is hardly the case. While Lucy may have found company with her fellow inhabitants at the pensionnat, she would not have found companionship. She talks of accepting invitations for intimacy from the other teachers, stating that she ‘tried them all’. Lucy is a harsh critic of each. The other teachers are labelled scathingly by her with appellations ranging from ‘insignificant’, ‘corrupt’, ‘without creed’ to ‘prodigal and profligate’54. Lucy describes her environment at the school as, ‘A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world’ where ‘great pains were taken to hide chains
with flowers’. The ‘subtle essence of Romanism that pervaded every arrangement’
to Lucy means that, ‘Each mind was being reared in slavery.’ Her alienation from
this cohort could be viewed as largely by her own design. This is not entirely the
case however. Up until this point Lucy has led a life that has been predominantly
individualistic. This condition has not been interfered with because, from the
absences in Lucy’s narrative, we can infer that her lack of family and social networks
have meant that individualism is all that has informed her. Life at the Pensionnat
Beck and, indeed in Villette, is far more collectivist however.

(iv) - The challenge to isolation

Lucy can no longer assert a solitary status without it being challenged and the
challenges to her state of isolation are largely unwelcome to her. Triandis tells us
that:

..to get homogenous shared culture, language is not enough. It is
necessary to have similar economic status, occupations, the same
concept of — “truth”...and the same social structure. Similarities in
religion and in the sense of aesthetics are also desirable but may not be
essential for the creation of a stable ingroup in all cultures. 56

Lucy has little common ground with those who seek to include her and, more
importantly, she does not want to share a common ground. Audre Lorde, speaking
from the position of the ‘other’, asserted that ‘it is the members of oppressed,
objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the
actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor.’ 57 Lucy has no
intention of bridging the gap; she fails to identify with her fellow inhabitants at Rue Fossette. Lorde noted that, ‘Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows ‘that is not me.’’

Lucy can find no space for herself in the homogenous ‘mythical norm’ at Pensionnat Beck or indeed Villette. Instead she seeks out isolation, she inhabits the garden when it is uninhabited by others, she wanders the streets of the town observing life rather than engaging in it. The Bretton’s and the Home de Bassompierre’s and even Ginevra have all been indoctrinated in by the same social conventions and structures as Lucy. The only one who is informed differently to Lucy who she can become close to is M. Paul. He recognises Lucy’s position telling her, ‘I will aid you sincerely. After all, you are solitary and a stranger, and you have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may well be that you should become known. We will be friends; do you agree?’

Lucy accepts Paul’s offer of friendship in a way that she has accepts no others at the pensionnat because she knows that Paul recognises her true character in a way that others in the school do not and in ways that Graham and his mother also fail to see. Paul ‘can appreciate the true Lucy behind the protective façade…Lucy finds his discipline energising, and is flattered that one man at least intuited her hidden imaginative depths in a society which obtusely takes her skillfully contrived sangfroid at face value.’

During her self-imposed isolation Lucy’s wanderings reflect the oppression she feels and the feelings she has held and struggled with since childhood. The long vacation brings the events of a lifetime to a head. Lucy tells us that, ‘My spirits had long been gradually sinking; now that the prop of employment was withdrawn, they went down fast.’ Revealingly, this chapter of the text supports the argument proffered in chapter
three regarding Brontë’s failure to consider the oppression of others beyond her own socio-economic sphere for, like Jane, Lucy does not recognise oppression in those of a lower socio-economic position. She tells us that she is left with a servant and ‘a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of crétin whom her stepmother in a distant province would not allow to return home.’ Lucy tells us only that ‘her poor mind, like her body, was warped: its propensity was to evil…’

In Lucy’s circumstance one might consider, her continued alienation and oppression have resulted in a growing and soon to be overwhelming depressive state which makes it impossible for her to recognise any suffering in those around her. This could be presented in defense of both Lucy and Brontë but Lucy’s later accounts of the local students, who she describes as a ‘swinish multitude’, do not bear this defense out.

For Lucy’s part the depression she is experiencing and that which she recounts in her narrative is startling in the pace of its acceleration. She tells us she looked on life as a ‘hopeless desert’ stating that ‘the hopes which are dear to youth, which bear it up and lead it on, I knew not and dared not know.’ Lucy dare not hold such hopes as clearly throughout her life all her hopes have been dashed. Lucy’s realisation that she is devoid of hope engulfs her during the extended and almost complete isolation of the long vacation now that she has no other occupations to distract her from her musings. Seeking relief from the oppression of her mind Lucy finds ‘a fever forbade [her] to rest’. Her wanderings, she tells us, were from ‘want of companionship’ in her ‘soul cravings of a most deadly famine’. Lucy thinks of others on her solitary walks, she imagines those she knows engaging with family and friends and enjoying the world around them. Considering the joy of others at this time can only serve to exacerbate Lucy’s misery, she thinks the ‘well-loved dead, who had loved me well in
life, met me elsewhere, alienated: galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable
sense of despair about the future." Her continual ramblings are a physical means by
which she hopes to escape her emotional confinement but they offer no respite.

The town of Villette is narrow, closed in and contained – walking along its streets only
serves to heighten Lucy’s feelings of oppression. One evening when ‘the solitude and
stillness of the long dormitory could not be borne any longer’ Lucy tells us that she
dressed herself. Though weak and shaking she asserts herself as sane despite her
description of the dormitory’s ‘ghastly white beds turning into specters – the coronal
of each became a death’s head…’ Even nature, as she looks out on to it through
‘latticed’ windows, yet another image of confinement, is dark, low and oppressive.
Lucy sees that ‘twilight is falling’ and she ‘deemed its influence pitiful’, the ‘coming
night clouds trailing low’ again adding to the feeling of claustrophobic confinement.
Believing that if she gets out ‘from under this house-roof, which was crushing as a
slab of a tomb’ and goes outside the city to a ‘certain quiet hill’ some of the burden
she is suffering will be lifted.

Nature does not offer the same level of comfort in Villette as it does in Jane Eyre
however. Instead Lucy finds a Catholic church and seeks solace inside. Her
attempted confession offers her the consolation of telling another how she feels but,
we know from Lucy’s attitude to Catholicism and Brontë’s depictions of it in her
work, that this encounter cannot resolve Lucy’s problems. Instead it is suggested that
the priest, who is ‘not a native priest’ provides some comfort but, had Lucy accepted
his offer to visit him again at his home she may well have found herself more
thoroughly oppressed by her conversion and would one day find herself sitting in the ‘cell of a certain Carmelite convent’. Leaving the church and attempting to return to Rue Fossette Lucy finds herself lost within the city walls of Villette in a part of the city which is old and ‘full of narrow streets’ and ‘mouldering houses’\textsuperscript{66}. The city itself is another mechanism for establishing control, for maintaining oppression – Lucy is literally caught within its walls. The description of Lucy’s confusion as she is lost in a network of turns resembles an animal caught in a maze and the increasing panic as it tries to escape. Lucy’s collapse at this point is the physical manifestation of not only the events which have preceded it during the long vacation, but also all that has preceded it in Lucy’s life up to this point.

\textbf{(v) – Control and the Gothic}

The Pensionnat Beck is like the town of Villette itself, confining, claustrophobic and mysterious to Lucy. The school, like the culture she has entered, is alien to Lucy. During the ‘long vacation’, when Lucy is entirely isolated and nearing nervous collapse, her visit to Père Silas and subsequent disorientation as she attempts to return to the pensionnat reflect her powerless and oppressed state. The streets of the city, like the church she has just visited, are strange to her, they embody Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’. Laurel Amtower tells us that the uncanny is ‘related to what is frightening — to what arouses dread and horror... the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general.’\textsuperscript{67}

The dark, narrow and claustrophobic streets of Villette which will be the scene of Lucy’s collapse, exhibit a number of gothic features. The town is an ‘antiquated space’ and ‘aging city’ within which ‘are hidden some secrets from the past...that haunt [Lucy], psychologically [and] physically.’\textsuperscript{68} Her night-time
wanderings are a precursor to a series of gothic tropes that serve to highlight Lucy’s position of disenfranchisement and powerlessness. The tale of Justine Marie, the machinations of Père Silas and Madame Beck, the story of the nun and the unearthly sightings of her ‘ghost’ are all central to Brontë’s positioning of Lucy as devoid of agency. By calling on gothic traditions which, as chapter one notes Brontë was familiar with and appreciative of from her own readings, Lucy’s instability is increased. Her one site of personal control, her mind, becomes clouded and confused by the strange events and alien world she has foisted upon her.

Brontë’s use of these gothic tropes implies the physical dimension of oppression, not only the structures that serve to restraint the oppressed but also direct human control imposed upon them. In both Jane Eyre and Villette Charlotte Brontë suggests the potential of physical brutality in the Rochester and Paul. After the aborted marriage ceremony Rochester, desperate to hold on to Jane, discusses her fragility and his ability to ‘crush’ her. His potential actions of aggression are discounted by Rochester, however, the possibility of violence cannot be entirely forgotten after comments so saturated with this idea. In Villette Paul is consistently volatile. Lucy becomes increasingly conscious of the volatility of his nature at the same time as she comes to recognise his compassion.

The threat of physical harm, of violence and physical dominance is another gothic trope evident not only in Charlotte’s work but also in the writings of Anne and Emily Brontë. In Wuthering Heights, it is apparent to all that Heathcliff beats Isabella and that he has also forced himself on her sexually. He also beats Catherine delivering a ‘shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head.’ Heathcliff is significantly more threatening than any male, hero or villain, created by Charlotte yet he cannot be
labeled a villain. Heathcliff embodies a duality which creates unease in those around him and in our reading of him. He is the familiar made unfamiliar; he is the lover made monster; a victim of oppression now an oppressor.

In The Tenant of Wildfell Hall Anne Brontë takes this defamiliarisation a step further. Arthur Huntingdon’s descent into drunkenness and debauchery offers a subversion of the role of husband in the Victorian novel. Arthur, initially affectionate if obviously self centred and intellectually and emotionally limited, rapidly descends into an abusive spouse in a cycle of escalating emotional abuse. Arthur’s actions transgress all the idealised notions of marriage and duty. Arthur’s gambling, drinking and extended absences escalate into flagrant philandering and then continual verbal and emotional abuse. Charlotte implies the possibility of violence but ultimately her domestic scenes still present a version of the Victorian ideal. In contrast Anne and Emily show the darkside of this ideal, a violent spectre haunting married life.

The gothic context of Lucy’s initial collapse prefigures the recurrence of Brontë’s use of gothic tropes throughout the novel as Lucy continues her journey as a ‘modern [woman] seeking a place for [herself] in a world that is hostile to [her].’\textsuperscript{69} The mental instability that Lucy exhibits leaves her open to assessment and diagnosis by the male authority figure of Dr John. He is unable to comprehend Lucy’s situation for he has only his own lived experiences to assess them against. These experiences have been informed by Dr John’s position in a family and home, institutions ‘which were viewed by veneration’ in the Victorian period. Lucy’s life in the pensionnat is the idealised home, made unheimlich, creating another site of the uncanny. The pensionnat ‘fails to provide comfort, safety and support’ to Lucy. With her sanity in
question and constantly scrutinised from within her ‘home’ and without, Lucy’s position at the pensionnat takes on the quality of an inmate. Valerie Pedlar tells us that, ‘Within the asylum the madman is confronted with authority rather than repression; the community imitates the patriarchal, bourgeois family, with the mad instituted as children.’ As Lucy’s limited control is eroded her battle to assert her position beyond the ‘instituted child’ marks the rest of the novel. Although in her creation of her two best know heroines, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Brontë depicts two women who share similarities in circumstance there remain significant differences between the two. That Jane had friendships and Lucy did not is a result of more than just differing situations and opportunity. Lucy rejects friendship; she intentionally attempts to distance herself first from Polly and later Ginevra. It could have been expected that, as a child, Lucy would have welcomed the addition of Polly to the household at Bretton but Lucy is, from the first, determined to observe rather than engage with Polly and at no point does she show any inclination towards forming an emotional attachment. Describing Polly’s arrival Lucy asks the servant Warren simply, ‘Is that the child?’ Her question is cool and detached, she continues that she ‘would have opened the shawl, and tried to get a peep at the face.’ It is curiosity rather than any child like excitement or anticipation of finding a companion that prompts Lucy’s interest. Polly, we are told, ‘hastily turned from me to Warren’s shoulder.’ This action prefigures the way the childhood interactions between Lucy and Polly will unfold and also foreshadows the rejection both perceived and realised that Lucy will experience in her future life not at Polly’s hands but at the hands of many others. Tellingly Lucy’s depiction of her first encounter with Polly differs to that which is recounted by Polly when they meet again as adults. Polly’s memories are much warmer than those which Lucy has
detailed. Instead of a detached observation such as that which Lucy has provided, Polly recalls that Lucy provided her with ‘comfort and protection by which [Lucy] soothed an acute distress’.72

This distancing is telling, revealing more about her character than perhaps Lucy as the secretive narrator intends. ‘Collectivists tend to have few but intimate relationships, and individualists have many relationships of low intimacy.’73 This rejection of attachment is informed by her losses and dwindling collective identity. Alienation occurs as there is a shift towards individualism.74 Lucy’s increasing loss of access to personal collectives necessitates her move towards individualism and this move produces an increasing alienation. Lucy also has a prickly personality. Whether this is because of her lived experience is hard to ascertain. She is, as has been stated, slippery with the truth and her perspective of the period of her life which she is recounting has to be regarded as potentially flawed and significantly, though perhaps unintentionally, inaccurate. Lucy consistently distances herself from Polly in her early accounts of the young child by describing her as a ‘creature’ and continues in her representation of her as ‘a mere doll, delicate as wax.’75 By projecting an image of Polly as an inanimate object Lucy can legitimise her distance from the young child.76 She can offer up her cool assessment to her readers of Polly’s character and emotions and appear as an impartial assessor rather than as someone devoid of the capacity for empathy.

As the text progresses there is little emotional movement from Lucy in her assessment of people and situations. There is the recognition of goodness in others when she considers she has found it, Miss Marchmont being a case in point. Lucy tells us of the ‘originality of her character’ and ‘the steadiness of her virtues’. Lucy has arrived at Miss Marchmont’s home at a time when she is suffering a loss, again not detailed to the reader but intimated by Lucy’s ‘mourning-dress’ and her recounting her image in the glass as a ‘faded hollow-eyed vision’.77 Lucy gains quiet
comfort from her role as Miss Marchmont’s companion but it is short lived. Again most of the detail regarding Lucy’s time there relates to Miss Marchmont’s story rather than Lucy’s. Lucy maintains the status of observer in her narrative until she begins her travels.

The primary action in the text takes place once Lucy has reached adulthood and Villette. More losses have been incurred by the time the adult Lucy reintroduces herself to us shortly before the death of her employer Miss Marchmont, but again we do not know the details around these. Aside from the secrets Lucy keeps she is also recalling a time in her life when her emotional well being was in question. Lucy ‘seldom experiences tranquillity, instead viewing her peers, students, employer, and even the man who would be her future spouse as a menace from whom she requires sanctuary.’

The reader has only the narrative voice of the aged Lucy with which to access Lucy’s life – the reminiscences around friendship, as with other aspects of her story are often questionable, nevertheless we can still discern that her social encounters become uneasy as people get closer. For Lucy ‘engaging with others proves a source of constant disappointment, frustration, and difficulty.’ This difficulty and frustration is not however, consistently the fault of those Lucy engages with, more often than not Lucy is an evasive and difficult misanthrope who, disappointed by life, appears unwilling to trust or befriend others.

(vi) – The Victorian family and society – a model of control

Sacrifice and restraint are qualities that Brontë obviously valued. Yet these are the very qualities that help to create the tension within her texts. It is always this notion
of control and restraint which is in conflict with the untamed, natural and, according to Victorian England's standards, dangerous aspects of the characters she created, the passion and desire that bring the greatest meaning to her work. Since the industrial age, the family is supposedly a ‘haven in a heartless world, a retreat for men enabling them to escape from the ruthless alienation of the industrial world outside. The family exists as separate sphere of personal fulfillment, where women have the particular responsibility for ensuring love, happiness, security, and emotional well-being for other family members.' This notion suggests, at least with superficial observation, a dynamics that ensures the benefit to all family members. In reality we know that equality in family relations in the Victorian period was not part of the social consciousness. Antony H. Harrison tells us that:

The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits, a bestseller by Sarah Stickney Ellis published in 1839, defines what is now known as the ‘domestic ideology’, a widely accepted conservative theory of social roles and ‘separate spheres’ for Victorian middle-class men and women. According to this ideology…‘to men belongs the potent…consideration of worldly aggrandizement‘. They operate in the professions, governmental services, and the world of business and industry, to acquire property, advance themselves, and improve the material condition for their wives and families. The world in which they move is seen to be dominated by ‘inborn selfishness’, temptation and vice. Women, by contrast ensconced in the domestic sphere are understood to be ‘clothed in moral beauty’ – selfless, disinterested and spiritually pure by ‘nature’. They are protected against worldly evils, and possess a ‘secret moral influence’ that can correct men’s missteps.

During the nineteenth-century female oppression was part and parcel of family life.

Oppression stemmed from ‘man’s control over her labour power. This control is
maintained through woman’s exclusion from access to essential productive resources…and via restrictions to their sexuality.’ 82 This is reflected in both Jane Eyre and Villette though in different ways. In Jane Eyre Jane’s labour was controlled first by a series of men – Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester and finally St John Rivers. Each man exerted control in varying ways, Brocklehurst through violence, Rochester via social hierarchy and emotional game playing and St John through manipulation of Jane’s social conditioning an act that brought with it its own form of violence – psychological. In Villette Brontë shifted this focus, reflecting how a man’s control over a woman’s labour could be enabling, should the man choose it to be. Paul’s establishment of Lucy in her own business is the act of a man, not only enabling a woman to take control of her own labour and its future, but also permitting it.

Brontë’s treatment of male control over women’s labour expands in her each of her novels to encompass different aspects of this dominance. The circulation of control among men that is reflected in Jane Eyre shifts in the Villette to reflect how this circulation can be passed not only to another man but on to the woman herself. However it was in Shirley that Brontë showed not only how the control of a woman’s labour but also the associated control of power and profit is procured by men should it happen to reside with a woman. Ultimately this is what transpires in between Louis and Shirley. Even before they are married Shirley steps back from the role of decision maker and authority figure over her estate. At the novel’s close she is no longer Shirley Keedlar but instead ‘Mrs. Louis’, Mr Louis Moore’s ‘lady’. Even though Shirley did not need one she seeks out and marries a patriarchal protector, much to his benefit, just as her society, and that of Brontë’s, asserted as essential for all women regardless of their social positions.
In Villette Susan Lydon believes that we see the failure of the Victorian family model – the ideal of patriarchy. Lucy’s access to a patriarchal protector is removed. We meet her when she is living with Mrs. Bretton, a woman who has been provided for under the very model that fails Lucy and, according to Lydon, is also failing Polly. She notes that, ‘although Polly has the paternal affection that Lucy lacks, it seems to bring more torture than comfort. She is abandoned by her father and then abandoned by Graham, another potential patriarch, when he goes off studying with his male schoolmates.’ The idea that this ‘lack of female agency is associated with pain’ in Villette is understandable when considering what had informed Brontë throughout her life and most especially prior to the writing of her final novel. Patriarchy had certainly failed Brontë. As explored in chapter two of this thesis, Branwell could not assure Charlotte and her sisters of the home and security which the codes and mores of Victorian England and its patriarchal society assumed would be the case.

Instead Brontë, like Lucy, had to find a way of establishing her own agency. The way independence is negotiated in the novel has been the subject of scrutiny by many critics, including, as this chapter will explore, Kate Millett. Some see Lucy’s eventual emancipation from Madame Beck and the servitude of being teacher in another’s employ as a position she is able to enjoy because of the patriarchal model that controls her society. It is M. Paul who, after all, assists Lucy in acquiring the skills to be an independent teacher in Villette. It is he who obtains a school for her, equips the school and home with all necessities.
Trapped between a way of life she had been taught to adhere to and her own natural instincts, Brontë created tales and heroines who epitomise the struggles of her age, particularly as they pertain to women. This more than anything is why Brontë has been imbued with feminist tendencies but it is important to bear in mind that her purpose in writing was, first and foremost, to meet her own needs. Like any working writer Brontë was mindful of her critics and reviews. When Villette was published and she read the reviews she wrote to George Smith stating ‘I ought to be – and feel that I am – very thankful’. Good reviews were more than a recognition of her writing, they were also an indication of financial security. A successful literary career meant that Brontë could avoid working as a teacher or governess, something that she had found, as we know, overwhelmingly oppressive. She did not feel equipped to address the condition of women in her work though her work nonetheless engaged in that very dialogue. Brontë could not help reflect the affects of oppression on the women in her text in particular because, prior to her literary success, she had spent a large part of her adult life engaged in employment that she saw as both servitude and a means of prohibiting her desire and opportunity to write.

Restraint is therefore a constant presence in Brontë’s work. Her heroines are restrained, by individuals and the society they inhabit. This restraint becomes internalised so that the oppression that is enacted upon them eventually becomes self governed. This internalisation removes the need for an outside agency to exert control over these women. Michel Foucault discussed how control of activity could be achieved through acts such as timetabling. He noted that the model was suggested by monastic communities. According to Foucault ‘it soon spread.
Its three great methods - establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition – were soon found in schools, workshops and hospitals. By the nineteenth century these practices of regulation were deeply ingrained in public institutions and professions. The roles that Brontë’s heroines were obliged to undertake and the roles of governess and teacher that Brontë herself engaged in, established control that was self monitored in much the same way as Foucault suggested.

Lucy’s employment at Madame Beck’s firmly establishes control of activity. Not only does she have to conform to the timetable of the school’s activities but she must do it under the constant surveillance of Madame Beck thereby being further controlled by the panoptic gaze. In Brontë’s novel the restraint that her heroines learn to display because of the exertion of power on them manifests in a number of ways – including controlling their diet. Restraint in diet and habit and physical frailty, another quality shared by Jane and Lucy, was something Brontë had in common with her heroines, or at least the appearance of physical frailty is a common link. Jane and Lucy display unexpected strength beneath their slight frames. In Jane Eyre, Blanche, Mary and Lady Ingram are described as ‘of the loftiest stature of women’ and, though we are told Mary is ‘too slim for her height’, Blanche ‘was moulded like a Dian’. It is most certainly Blanche and Lady Ingram who are marked out as the two women in the Ingram clan Jane dislikes the most and, as narrator, she encourages the reader to react similarly. The almost corpulent aspect of their physicality to which she alludes in the descriptions of these female competitors is not without some disgust. The women are fashionable in attire and large in comparison to the heroines in the texts but their size and attractiveness become an indication of their lack of spirituality and genuine decency – they become representative of these women’s affluence.
and greed. As such they are a reflection of the changing world order built on trade, commerce and capitalism.

(vii) – Personal restraint and control

Part of Brontë’s unconscious response to her limited power may well have manifested itself in her own rigid eating habits and in her delineation of fictional characters by body type. Charlotte, Emily and Anne were all known to have displayed some eccentric eating practices with Charlotte and Emily engaging in self-starvation on different occasions. In December 1836 Tabby Ackroyd, the Brontë’s servant, fractured her leg. The Brontë sisters took on the task of nursing Tabby themselves at the parsonage and carrying out many of her duties. Aunt Branwell, concerned about the practicalities of the situation and economy, insisted Tabby should be sent to her sister’s house until she was fully recovered. Emily and Charlotte refused to eat until Aunt Branwell gave in, allowing Tabby to remain at the parsonage and be cared for by the sisters.86

In many cases of anorexia the underlying trigger relates more to power and control than it does to body image:

Anorexia nervosa patients have a positive psychological reinforcement of restricting food and losing weight from a feeling that they are in absolute control of this behavior and initially from admiring statements from peers and family concerning their weight loss. Gradually their increasing weight-losing obsessions and compulsive behaviors provide a secondary reinforcement for avoiding perceived aversive or threatening environmental events.87
‘Brontë’s novels, rather than the radical texts of protest that some critics consider them, are complicated and ambiguous novels that express the anorexic logic of Brontë’s culture at the same time as they depict the suffering of the hungry woman.’ 88 Brontë’s heroines are slight women – small of stature and apparently physically frail, like herself. However, the seemingly frail heroines always possess surprising emotional strength and endurance, often a strength that is greater than the most robust males within the texts. Jane for example, shows significantly greater emotional strength than Rochester when she turns away from his emphatically professed love and departs Thornfield with no plan and no resources, sustained only by her absolute conviction that her actions are the right ones. Lucy is determined; she undergoes continual loss, upheaval and breakdown and ultimately survives. But Lucy is by no means the only strong woman in Villette.

This is also true of Polly. Even as a child her determination is apparent. Polly’s determination is not marked, as Lucy’s is, by her positioning herself on the boundaries, Polly does not flinch from the focus of the group. Polly’s determination is fixed on external entities – first on her father then on Graham. Lucy on the other hand is focused on control and remaining backgrounded in order to observe life unfolding rather than being an actor in life. On Polly’s father's visit to his daughter before his departure for the continent, Lucy describes Polly, newly arrived at Bretton, sitting beside him after dinner ‘holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem, and at which she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track on minute red dots.’ 89
Lucy unwittingly reveals more of herself than intended in her depiction of Polly’s self-restraint. She talks of Polly’s reaction to her father’s arrival as a ‘scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously or overflow, only oppressed one the more.’ Lucy, who counts herself as being in control, without an ‘overheated or discursive imagination’ seeks release from the sight of this repressed emotion recalling that she ‘wished [Polly] would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease.’ This offers the reader a clue to the true nature of Lucy and prefigures the Lucy who will eventually fall victim to her ongoing repression of her ‘overheated and discursive imagination’ in the town of Villette, suffering emotional collapse and engaging in desperate night wanderings in order to escape her confinement.

The size of Lucy Snowe’s second rival for Dr John’s affections, Ginevra Fanshawe, is dwelt upon in even greater detail than the Ingrams. Ginevra’s robust frame is an indication of her excessive selfishness – the way in which Brontë portrays her size suggests a greediness which exceeds the mere pride and arrogance manifest in the Ingrams. Anna Krugovoy Silver suggests that ‘Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe modify the negative depiction of female appetite found elsewhere in the novel. Paulina’s and Ginevra’s sexual drives and intellects are clearly reflected in their contrasting physical types: Paulina is tiny and almost bodiless whereas Ginevra is full
and fleshy. Surprisingly, however, Brontë draws a largely positive rendition of Ginevra side by side with a highly conflicted portrait of Paulina. I disagree. Although it is true that the portrait of Paulina is clearly not a complete endorsement of her character the representation of Ginevra consistently and increasingly displays her as flawed, selfish and intellectually limited. Lucy does exhibit some tolerance of and affection for Ginevra but it is not an endorsement of her character.

It is, however, unsurprising that Paulina rouses mixed feelings in Lucy. Her arrival at Bretton as a child reduced still further any possibility of Lucy becoming part of the Bretton family collective. Paulina’s return to Lucy’s life in adulthood, as we have seen, snatches from Lucy’s grasp for a second time her connection to Graham Bretton. This second connection is far more significant than the first for Lucy. Meeting Graham again as Dr John, Lucy begins to establish an intimacy with him that was never realised in childhood. In adulthood Lucy desires this intimacy but it is apparent that this will never be realised. When Paulina reenters their lives Lucy’s repeated outsider status is brought home to her. Graham asks her, ‘Were you not a guest at Bretton, ten years ago, when Mr. Home brought his little girl, whom we then called ‘little Polly’ to stay with mama?’ Lucy responds, telling him that she ‘was there the night she came, and also the morning she went away.’

Graham’s continued recollections cause Lucy not only distress but displeasure. In seeking Lucy’s opinion of him from her time at Bretton, Graham says ‘I think I was almost a brute to you’ he continues ‘I do remember: quiet Lucy Snowe tasted nothing of my grace.’ For Lucy these comments serve to further negate and disenfranchise her and she tells us that, ‘she hushed a groan. His ‘quiet Lucy Snowe’, his
‘inoffensive shadow’, I gave him back not with scorn, but with extreme weariness.\textsuperscript{94} When Graham asks Lucy to whisper in Paulina’s ear ‘all he recalls’ he not only fails to understand her feelings but he also he revisits on Lucy his childhood neglect of her. In adulthood this neglect rouses something beyond the stoicism of childhood, it rouses her ire and rebellion. Lucy now feels an ‘inward courage, warm and resistant’ and is finally ‘not disposed to gratify Dr. John: not at all.’\textsuperscript{95}

At various stages of her life Lucy occupies as pace of invisibility. When Graham returns to her life as Dr John his association and friendship offers Lucy a site of power, she is visible and her company is sought out by others. Dr John and his mother are not like others who seek Lucy’s society such as Ginevra, they seek her company not with a selfish agenda but as companions. When Graham recalls to Lucy his disregard of her in his youth then asks her to attract Paulina’s attention on his behalf Lucy again feels her position backgrounded. She is negated as an individual by Graham’s reference to her as an ‘inoffensive shadow’. This negation had been an ongoing practice of Graham’s in his dealings with Lucy. During his first engagements as a physician to Madame Beck’s children Lucy recalls that while she was in the room with him ‘he would muse, smile, watch or listen like a man who thinks himself alone…He, I believed, never remembered that I had eyes in my head; much less a brain behind them.’\textsuperscript{96} This consistent negation of Lucy dehumanises her in much the same way as her narration has previously dehumanised the young Polly.
Kate E. Brown notes that Lucy is nullified in her life at Villette observing that it is a ‘city in which value is governed by usefulness’. Lucy’s usefulness is therefore the only site of power open to her. She had hoped with her reconnections to the Brettons to realise an identity beyond her ‘invalidating role as schoolteacher’. According to Brown, ‘the novel characterizes Lucy’s progress, which offers economic betterment in lieu of rewarding social ties, as the very nature of catastrophe.’ The ambivalence of her relation to Polly, in this case, could be viewed as a response to her own backgrounded state. Lucy’s construction of a reading of Polly as inanimate and doll like is a way of inverting the backgrounding. Lucy has endured a life of sacrifice. It is not surprising that she resents, if only on an unconscious level, those who have not endured the same.

Lucy can more easily deal with her second rival Ginevra. She, unlike Polly, is possessed of an obviously flawed character. As her failings become more pronounced, Ginevra becomes more voluptuous. After Lucy’s breakdown when the students return from holidays we are told that:

Miss Fanshawe’s travels, gaieties, and flirtations agreed with her mightily; she had become quite plump, her cheeks looked as round as apples...she had an excellent appetite, like any other healthy school-girl, for the morning pistolets or rolls, which were new baked and very good, and of which a certain allowance was served to each. This allowance being more than I needed, I gave half to Ginevra...  

Anna Krugovoy Silver notes that, ‘Like Dickens’s work, Brontë’s novels emphasize food and, and how much is consumed, in detail.’ She notes that in Villette, ‘Lucy does not figure hunger negatively and fullness positively. Rather, her desire to eat is often comprised by her scorn for corpulent women, whose obesity she repeatedly
equates with promiscuity and with an irrational mind.¹⁰⁰

To consider the repeated references that Brontë makes to size, appetite and physical features in her writings of particular interest because they closely related to her own size and appetite alone would be to oversimplify the significance. A relationship between size and control exists within Brontë’s novels and this is most apparent in Villette. Lucy is a woman possessed of greater passion, emotion and intensity, for all her initial denials, than any other female within the text. Her decision not to display these aspects of her character is an overt act of self-control and, to a large extent, self-denial. Whereas Jane suffers the pain and guilt of denying herself and Rochester, Lucy’s suffering takes her to the brink of madness. Self-containment is shown, in Brontë’s final novel, to bring with it inherent dangers. While in Villette and Jane Eyre Brontë privileges the ability of the individual to assert power over the self and their circumstances, her texts warn that a fine line that must be trod to ensure one does not overbalance allowing self-containment to engulf one. Lucy’s nervous collapse and St John Rivers stoic sacrifice are examples of what can happen to those who attempt such absolute self control.

Just as corpulence indicates weakness of character, darkness forms another physical indicator of a dubious nature within these texts – at least for women. Bertha Rochester, being Creole, is dark. This fact is presented as a form of explanation for her erratic and dangerous nature. Similarly, the suggestion is made that Lady Ingram and Blanche are both dark featured. Lady Ingram has ‘Roman features’ which were ‘inflated and darkened’ and Blanche, who Brontë describes as being like her mother, possess ‘dark eyes and black ringlets’ and is also ‘dark as a Spaniard’.¹⁰¹
combination of large and dark in a woman is, within Brontë’s novels, an indication of a flawed character, the physicality acts as a signpost to the reader. Mrs. Bretton is also dark and Lucy consistently describes her positively. Lucy describes Mrs. Bretton physically as ‘still handsome, tall, well-made, and, though dark for an Englishwoman, yet wearing always the clearness of health in her brunette cheeks.’

Good though Mrs. Bretton is she fails Lucy as a child and then later in adulthood. Lucy tells us that she has ‘long lost sight of Mrs. Bretton’ during the time of her obvious but unexplained personal upheaval. Mrs. Bretton’s fortunes have also changed, her property and wealth diminished. But as a child it is not for Lucy to keep sight of Mrs. Bretton but rather the other way around. Once the family does reconnect with Lucy however, she is again neglected by Mrs. Bretton and Graham after the events at the theatre.

It could be suggested that Lucy is replaced at this time by Polly in Mrs. Bretton’s and Graham’s thoughts and affections, and certainly this will prove to be the case. Lucy tells us that. ‘After that eventful evening, came for me seven weeks as bare as seven sheets of blank paper: no word was written on them; not a visit, not a token.’

Certainly Mrs. Bretton and Graham are kind and generous to Lucy when they are reunited in Villette yet Mrs. Bretton remains a product of her time. She is formed differently from Lucy, she can occupy a position of comfortable tradition in Victorian society – she is attractive, has access to wealth and in society has all things of which Lucy is devoid. Because of what has informed her life, a stable family collective, inclusion and security Mrs. Bretton is ignorant of the effect of the suspension of communication on Lucy who ‘underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair.’
(viii) – Ginevra as a product for exchange

Ginevra is likewise informed differently to Lucy by society. While Mrs. Bretton’s experiences of comfort and security result in unintentional neglect of Lucy, Ginevra’s result in usage and pronounced selfishness. The contrast between the Lucy and Ginevra is as distinct as the contrast between Jane and Blanche, with Brontë clearly preferencing the weaker, plainer and more isolated character. Self-control, depth of emotion and conformity to what Brontë regarded as decent principles are the attributes that outshine the voluptuous femmes fatales who are rivals and foils to her heroines. Brontë’s repeated references to the failings of Ginevra illustrate that, by the time Villette was written, she had developed a clear delineation of what she considered virtuous and what she considered weak. She also demonstrated what mode of behaviour, even if it were not what society prescribed, was excusable because itserved a greater good. Jane and Lucy often behaved in ways that flaunted society’s dictums but it was always to uphold this ‘greater good’. Ginevra is shown to possess a significant flaw above all others – she is thoroughly selfish. In all aspects of life Ginevra takes from Lucy and any others who may serve her aims, including Dr John. Brontë highlights this selfishness in the simplest of details, as in Lucy’s complaint that ‘When she [Ginevra] took my arm, she always leaned upon me her whole weight; and, as I was not a gentleman, or her lover, I did not like it.’ Although she leads a life of comfort and privilege, Ginevra is far from free from restraint and oppression. The attractive and confident Ginevra is as much a product of her society’s hierarchical structure as Mrs. Bretton, or indeed Polly. Ginevra, however, is short-sighted and not equipped with the same degree of intelligence as the other two.
As much as Lucy dislikes Ginevra’s behavior she does not altogether dislike Ginevra. In fact, her dealings with Ginevra afford her a site of power that she cannot enjoy in her dealings with Polly. Ginevra displays a genuine affection for Lucy despite her usage of her. Upon Lucy’s return to the pensionnat after her stay at La Terrasse, Ginevra tells her ‘I am glad you are come back’ though her motives are purely selfish ‘You don’t know how often I had wanted you in this dismal hole.’ But Lucy is free to be abrasive to Ginevra in a way that she is unable to be with anyone else, she instantly retorts ‘you have something for me to do: stockings to mend perhaps?’ Ginevra refers to Lucy as a ‘crabbed and crusty as ever’ and this is how their repertoire and relationship is enacted.

Lucy does not refrain from telling Ginevra that her treatment of Dr John is shabby and she is quick to ridicule Ginevra’s love interest in Alfred de Hamal. On her first surreptitious inspection of him directed by Ginevra Lucy tells us:

I believe I could have picked out the conquering de Hamal even undirected. He was a straight-nosed, very correct-featured, little dandy. I say little dandy, though he was not beneath the middle standard in stature; but his lineaments were small, and so were his hands and feet; and he was pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated – he was charming indeed.
There is something comical in Lucy’s description of Dr John’s rival for Ginevra’s affections. Again she uses the image of a doll to present de Hamal as an inanimate object. The doll imagery previously applied to Polly however, did not contain the contempt that is implied in Lucy’s application of it to de Hamal. Her assessment of de Hamal reflects Lucy’s instantaneous reading of Ginevra’s suitor as well as Lucy’s long held opinion of Ginevra. Lucy could have identified de Hamal without being directed to him because she identifies him as suitable for Ginevra. Prior to pointing out de Hamal to Lucy, Ginevra looks at herself and Lucy in costume side by side in the mirror and states, ‘I would not be you for a kingdom’. Lucy maintains she is unfazed by this comment and when asked by Ginevra what she would give to be her Lucy responds, ‘Not a bad sixpence – strange as it may sound.’ This does sound strange to Ginevra who assesses her life and her attributes vastly superior to Lucy’s. But to Lucy and her readers it is a truthful summation of Lucy’s view of her younger and more privileged companion.

Ginevra counters this by detailing to Lucy, in her words, ‘how happy I am and how miserable you are’. Her conditions for happiness are superficial – the daughter of a gentleman, expectations of wealth, youth, accomplishments, attractive with many admirers and in possession of a continental education. In comparison Ginevra describes Lucy as ‘nobody's daughter’. She continues her disparaging assessment, ‘you have no relations; you can’t call yourself young at twenty-three; you have no attractive accomplishments – no beauty. As to admirers, you hardly know what they are; you can’t even talk on the subject…I believe you were never in love, and never will be; you don’t know the feeling; and so much the better, for though you might have your own heart broken, no living heart will you ever break.’ Lucy does not
flinch from this assessment but continues instead to poke fun at Ginevra and de Hamal. Ginevra’s articulation of the differences between herself and Lucy highlights her site of personal oppression. She has been conditioned to view herself and her beauty as a product for exchange. As Ginevra lists her attributes she is reciting the qualities that comprise the ‘mythical norm’ for a woman of her class in the nineteenth century. Beauty, family connections, accomplishments are all elements of exchange that Ginevra can use to raise her cultural capital. While she talks to Lucy of love, Ginevra is blind to the fact that what she will engage in when she settles on de Hamal is an act of economic exchange. Herein lays the source of Ginevra’s oppression. She has been indoctrinated to regard herself as a commodity and is oblivious to the fact.

When Ginevra elopes with de Hamal she exchanges all her attributes for his title. In her letter to Lucy after their elopement Ginevra says, ‘dear Alfred has nothing but his nobility, native and hereditary, and his pay.’ She hopes that her uncle M. de Bassompierre will give her ‘a decent portion’ but notes that he will not do so unless de Hamal agrees to stop gambling. Ginevra’s short-sightedness and inability to assess the potential dangers in her situation are again an aspect of the social structure that has informed her. She has been raised to pursue precisely what she has attained in de Hamal, reminding Lucy ‘I am a countess now’ and noting that it ‘Sounds rather better than Mrs. John Bretton.’ Ginevra, Lucy tells us, does not end up sorrowfully but it is only because she pressures others to come to her aid when crisis, which is anticipated in the text through the characterisations of both Ginevra and de Hamal, eventuates. Lucy in contrast to Ginevra gains greater personal freedom through her ability to step outside her expected social positioning and pursue independence.
In the character of Lucy Snowe, Brontë makes a departure from her previous works not only in terms of the extreme manifestation of her oppression but in narrative style. Sally Shuttleworth notes that ‘The reader, entering the world of Villette, is forced to relinquish cherished assumptions of rational order’. In Jane Eyre Jane’s story is told with a logical chronological movement. In Villette events unfold chronologically but so much important information is suppressed by Lucy that as readers we can never really be certain what events have occurred in her life to shape the young woman Lucy becomes. Neither can we be certain what happens to Lucy in the years between the time she occupies the space as the young heroine of the novel and the aged narrator of the tale. According to Jessica Brent, ‘the gaps in Lucy Snowe’s narrative…arise at the very moment the reader most expects information or expressive interiority.’ Brent suggests that Lucy ‘arrives fully-hatched…and resists self-revelation by permitting us only to watch her watch others.’

Lucy’s decision to go to London and then on to Villette after the death of Miss Marchmont is a bold one and, in another more contemporary context, could be read as an indication of a level of self possession and confidence that could only be formed in a young woman whose background and upbringing had been secure and comforting. However, as Brent asserts Lucy’s lack of self-revelation make her absent from the first three chapters of the novel and she is ‘virtually unseen’ by others around her. What she leaves behind in England is therefore negligible, place cannot have a hold on her. As the novel progresses however, there is much to suggest that Lucy, as much as she rejects friendship, is an ‘allocentric’ person, she will place
the needs of the group before her own. Her early descriptions of life at Bretton reflect Polly’s emotions and Polly’s engagement with the household, they do not reveal Lucy’s. Her later role as companion to Miss Marchmont and attachment she felt for her deceased employer indicate that Lucy has a desire for inclusion, but it is a desire buried beneath the experiences of her life. The boldness of Lucy’s departure from England and journey to Villette is tempered therefore by the necessity of her move and the feeling that she can leave because she has nothing to lose in doing so. With this move there is also a chance that she might gain what was lost to her in childhood, a collective to which she could belong.

The family can often be the site of oppression and the indoctrination by the family of young women such as Ginevra to perform the roles allocated by society is one example of this familial oppression. As noted in chapter three of this thesis both Rochester and Blanche Ingram are victims of these social expectations which are compounded by the endorsement of them by the families. It is a theme that emerges throughout Brontë’s writings where both the compliant and the uncompliant woman are portrayed, In Shirley we are told the dour Mrs Yorke wishes to make her daughter Rose, ‘a stubborn girl’, ‘such a woman as she is herself, - a woman of dark and dreary duties’. Rose, we are told, ‘has a mind full-set, thick sown with germs of ideas her mother never knew. It is agony to her to have these ideas trampled on and repressed.’ Rose escapes her prescribed destiny opting instead to become a ‘lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere.’

Rose leaves a mother who would see her emulate her own life to follow the social order. She must sacrifice her family and all that is known to her in order to escape the
oppression that remaining with them ultimately entail. Anne Longmuir points out that both Rose Yorke and Lucy Snowe emigrate as a way of escaping the oppression faced in the nineteenth century by the single middle class woman.\textsuperscript{114} This oppression was enacted upon these women by both their society and their families.

The driver for Lucy’s departure was quite different to Rose. Unlike Rose, Ginevra or Blanche Lucy does not have a mother or any family in the background. In the case of Lucy Snowe the family or the concept of the inaccessibility of family to her is a way of illustrating her level of oppression. ‘Oppression does not have to have an institutional base – it can be sited anywhere’\textsuperscript{115} and for Lucy, who is oppressed on a number of fronts, the family becomes inaccessible, inclusion in one is something which proves impossible to leverage from her alienated position in the world. As John Maynard notes, Lucy as narrator is Brontë’s first mature narrator, her story is told with a ‘distance of a lifetime…There will be no miraculous calls or sudden elevations of fortune in Lucy’s world.’\textsuperscript{116}

All future relationships Lucy may have are informed by her early experiences as an outsider. Relationships, as they are explored in Villette, bring with them the traits of ownership and control. This type of relationship is overwhelmingly apparent in the text and it is evident in Lucy Snowe’s description of her interactions with M. Paul:

\begin{quote}
Yet, when M. Paul sneered at me, I wanted to possess them [the intellectual abilities he accuses Lucy of hiding] more fully; his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes – it imparted a strong stimulus – it gave wings to aspiration.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{117}

Lucy desires the knowledge that M. Paul continually accuses her of secretly
harbouring. She wants his high regard and esteem and, although she responds with anger, she also yearns for his respect. M. Paul offers challenges to Lucy and she continues to attempt to meet them, she continues to allow herself to be subjugated. Lucy permits her suppression by a number of people but she is not ignorant of their dominance of her. Of M. Paul, Lucy notes that, ‘Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot.’

Eagleton claims that Brontë’s characters ‘want independence but they also desire to dominate, and their desire to dominate is matched only by their impulse to submit to superior will’. The characters in Villette who, at various times, assert their power over Lucy also have power asserted over them; this is particularly true in the case of M. Paul.

The master/slave relationship is at the heart of Brontë’s novels. It reflects recognition of the limited access to power for women; that it is only through the terms of the existing social hierarchy that some power will be achieved. Eagleton points to the ambiguous nature of Brontë’s heroines who possess both ‘smouldering rebelliousness’ and ‘prim conservatism’ noting that their characters relate closely to their roles as governesses or private tutors. ‘The governess is a servant, trapped within a rigid social function which demands industriousness, subservience and self-sacrifice; but she is also an — “upper” servant …furnished with an imaginative awareness and cultivated sensibility…’ Brontë’s heroines are the embodiment of what she witnessed in society and her role and socio-economic position within her society’s hierarchy. As Eagleton notes, the governess ‘lives at an ambiguous point in the social structure at which two worlds – an interior one of emotional hungering, and an external one of harshly mechanical necessity – meet and collide.’ The class structure is ever present in Villette just as it is in Jane Eyre.
Shortly after undertaking her role as a teacher for Madame Beck, Lucy tells us that. ‘Equality is very much practised in Labassecour; though not republican in form, it is nearly so in substance, and at the desks of Madame Beck’s establishment the young countess and the young bourgeoise sat side by side: nor could you always by outward indications decide which was noble and which plebian; except that, indeed the latter had often franker and more courteous manners.’

Although the engagement with class in Brontë’s last novel is less obvious than in Jane Eyre, the question of class and its associated hierarchy still reverberates throughout the text. The acceptance of class differences informs both *Villette’s* creator and the novel’s narrator. Despite Brontë’s reluctance to directly respond to the ‘condition of women question’, as noted in chapter three of this thesis, in her writing Brontë was able to engage with the dialogue around this issue. In *Villette*, as in *Jane Eyre*, this engagement reflects that her understanding was unavoidably informed by her society. *Villette’s* resolution indicates that Brontë’s idea of how an independent space could potentially be carved out by a woman was informed by the Victorian ‘domestic ideology’ which Stickney Ellis had endorsed.

(ix) – Scrutiny and control

M. Paul constantly observes Lucy, he assesses her behaviour, her dress, her intelligence and scruples in an effort to measure her worth. His surveillance controls and antagonises her. M. Paul’s first encounter with Lucy is to read her for Madame Beck and assess her, not on intellectual or professional qualities, but as a person. Lucy tells us that M. Paul ‘scrutinzed’ her but that, ‘The judgement when it at last came, was as indefinite as what had gone before it.’ When asked by Madame Beck if Lucy be ‘Bad or good’ M. Paul pronounces that she is ‘Of each kind, without doubt.’ His
recommendation to Madame Beck is to, ‘Engage her. If good predominates in that nature, the action will bring its own reward; if evil – eh bien! Ma cousine, cesera toujours une bonne oeuvre.’ M. Paul asserts his right to ‘read’ Lucy from their first encounter, this perceived right is not only legitimatised but instigated by the Mistress of the Pensionnat de Demoiselles, Madame Beck. Sally Shuttleworth notes that, ‘On her entry to Villette…it is the inner passions of Lucy herself that become the subject to the calm gaze of institutional authority.’ Lucy tells us that, ‘This was strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine.’

In Jane Eyre Jane and Rochester battled for control of the gaze but in Villette this type of battle is impossible to stage, Lucy is scrutinised from too many quarters and too surreptitiously for her to successfully assert a dominant gaze. Instead Lucy opts to assert power by challenging the gaze of M. Paul and inviting confrontation. This is a tactic that offers uneven success as do Lucy’s attempts to soothe his anger when it explodes into sudden passionate rages. One such rage is in reaction to Lucy’s quiet delight at receiving a letter from Dr John. Lucy returns to her classroom after secreting the letter in her room to ‘behold M. Paul raging like a pestilence!’ Lucy describes his tirades and how, shaken, she sits to resume her work. This act throws Paul into an even greater fury and, after physically attacking her desk he demands if ‘Est-ce que vous avez l’intention de m’insulter?’ Though Lucy says she is ‘not unhappy, nor much afraid’ Paul’s actions cause first her then the students to weep. This display of emotion serves to quiet Paul’s rage and by way of apology he tells them ‘Decidedly I am a monster and a ruffian.’
M. Paul believes Lucy has hidden knowledge and secrets and Lucy desires greater knowledge, she is aware that knowledge brings with it power. As chapter two of this thesis explores, Brontë’s own life was informed by this premise. The integral relationship between knowledge and power informs the work of each of the Brontë sisters. It is perhaps Emily who best illustrates the effect the lack of knowledge and education has on one’s access to power and therefore one’s positioning within the social hierarchy. In Wuthering Heights Hareton is socially repositioned by Heathcliff out of spite and anger. Heathcliff manipulates Hareton’s life, positioning him to step into the role that society originally deemed suitable for Heathcliff himself. Heathcliff’s recognition of the correlation between knowledge and power is what drives him to flee Wuthering Heights and alter his path in life. At the end of Chapter IX Heathcliff, overhearing Cathy’s discussion with Nelly Dean about her ‘love’ for Edgar Linton, disappears into the night to departing to reinvent himself. It is Cathy’s description of what she loves about Edgar that inspires Heathcliff’s journey to become a self-made man who can rival Edgar’s power. Heathcliff knows that he must be more than a stable boy at the Grange, that he must see the world and acquire knowledge of its operations in order to hold on to Cathy.

Hareton should have occupied a position of some privilege in life but, through Heathcliff’s manipulation of his family and life he is totally disenfranchised. Heathcliff ensures this disenfranchisement by promoting ignorance on all fronts. Hareton is lacking in his understanding of the society around him and the social mores required to navigate this society. We are told that:
Mr Heathcliff, I believe, had not treated [Hareton] physically ill; thanks to his fearless nature, which offered no temptation to that course of oppression; it had none of the timid susceptibility that would have given zest to ill treatment, in Heathcliff’s judgement. He appeared to have bent his malevolence on making him a brute: he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice.¹²⁷

Both Charlotte’s and Emily’s texts reflect ignorance as a cause of oppression. Emily, however, demonstrates how this cause can be manipulated to achieve particular goals by those who have access to knowledge. Once Hareton gains knowledge he is able to escape his oppressed state.

In Villette Charlotte indicates that power may be accessible through knowledge but despite this, increased knowledge would never make the female pupil equal to the male master of the Victorian period. It would however, if only among women of her own socio-economic background, increase Lucy’s personal power. What Paul clearly recognises in Lucy that no one else in the novel does, is that she is not meek, mild, pliant and without passion. Lucy’s inner turmoil is driven by a lifetime of repressing her passions – Paul sees this. Though his initial scrutiny of Lucy came at the command of Madame Beck, as Lucy’s true self becomes apparent to him he scrutinises her with an entirely different intention. Distrust may have prompted his first assessments of her character but it is an increasing regard and love that leads Paul to continue to assess Lucy.

M. Paul’s position of power in relation to Lucy is further increased by his role as her instructor. Because he holds knowledge that Lucy must obtain in order to become professionally competent, and therefore access some level of independence,
establishing an equal relationship with him is all but impossible. Where Jane and Rochester can finally realise a balanced and more equal relationship through the rise in Jane’s fortunes and the reduction in Rochester’s, no such solution is available for Lucy and M. Paul. There will always be a power differential and their relationship will always be problematic because of this.

The notion of the older male mentor providing knowledge and thereby equipping his protégé with an improved opportunity for personal power is important to both Jane Eyre and Villette. Brontë’s own feelings for Constantin Heger were tied up with dreams of acquiring the required knowledge to allow her increased liberty – from him she would learn the skills to start a school, run by her siblings and herself. This may well have been what attracted her to the master/pupil relationship and why she repeatedly romanticised it in her work. These responses were unlikely to have been conscious. The attraction that Brontë felt towards Heger, her repeated portrayal of the dominant male who recognizes a higher intelligence in the victimized woman, were unconscious responses to her world.

As much as M. Paul can be read as an agent of oppression he is also its victim. He is pressed into service by Madame Beck, it is she who demands he ‘read’ Lucy initially but it is Paul’s continued ability to read and interest in reading Lucy accurately that ultimately provides Lucy with her freedom. Paul is represented for the majority of the novel through the language of oppression, Lucy describes him with various badges of tyranny – ‘despot’, he is of ‘an order of beings who must not be opposed’, Lucy says he ‘superintends’ her. However, Paul is not what he appears. He is sentimental, leaving Lucy violets and treats. Of all the people within Lucy’s orbit it is Paul alone who
recognises who she really is, it is only he who actually takes time to ‘read’ her and
read her accurately. All her other associates, even those who count themselves as old
friends, such as Graham and his mother, fail to adequately assess Lucy. While Paul
reads Lucy as a ‘young wild creature, new caught, untamed’ Graham will later
incorrectly read Lucy as an ‘inoffensive shadow’. Where Lucy was angered by
Graham’s reading of her she does not object to Paul’s assessment.

After Paul’s breakfast excursion with the teachers and boarders, Paul’s own
oppression becomes apparent to Lucy. She witnesses him in the garden with Madame
Beck. Once their animated discussion is concluded Lucy watches as Paul ‘leans
against that tree, with his arms crossed and brow bent.’ The control that is manifest in
Paul’s life will reveal itself fully to Lucy as both Madame Beck and Père Silas
attempt to intervene in his burgeoning relationship with her. As Paul asserts his own
authority by his deferral of his trip to Antigua and his obvious intention to pursue
Lucy despite the objections and machinations of those who had previously controlled
him, Lucy witnesses Madame Beck’s power dissipate. As Lucy, who is convinced
Paul’s affections lay with is young ward Justine Marie, cries out ‘My heart will
break!’ she is at last free from the restraint imposed by both herself and others. With
Paul’s response of ‘Trust me!’ she says ‘the seal of another fountain yielded under the
strain: one breath from M. Paul, the whisper, ‘Trust me!’ lifted a load, opened an
outlet. With many a great sob, with thrilling and icy shiver, and yet with relief – I
wept.’¹²⁸ Acceptance and the understanding that she is loved at last release Lucy from
a state of self determined control.

Madame Beck’s power over Paul and therefore over Lucy is dissolved as Paul
ignores her interventions and attempts to take control of Lucy even when she
threatens to call for Père Silas. While Paul is wresting control of Lucy away from Madame Beck however, he asserts control himself. His insistent ‘Laissez-moi!’ indicates that he will to take charge of the situation and therefore the emotional Lucy. Upon returning to Rue Fossette, after Paul has revealed to Lucy her new home and school she tells us that, ‘At this hour, in this house, eighteen months since, had this man at my side, bent before me, looked into my face and eyes, and arbitrated my destiny. This very evening he had again stooped, gazed and decreed.’ The events of the day may have unburdened Lucy from the oppression of life at Madame Beck’s and the loneliness and isolation she has endured but it has been won through another source of authority. Paul has aided Lucy in escaping the shackles of her current life and, after his final service for Madame Beck and Père Silas, Paul will likewise be free of them.

The three years that M. Paul is away are revealingly described by Lucy as ‘the happiest years of her life’. She is at last in a position to assert her own power and agency which she credits to her ‘wonderfully changed life’ and ‘relieved heart’. It is through Paul that Lucy has acquired agency but, in his absence, she leverages what he has provided her with into more substantial power. She proves her worth in the school and is able, through the beneficence of another man, Mr Marchmont, to expand her commercial power base and therefore financial and social position. Paul’s return would displace Lucy’s power. Prior to his departure she enjoyed a taste of life with Paul when he ‘claims her hospitality’ and expresses his need for refreshment. Lucy, with ‘shy joy’ serves her ‘benefactor-guest’. Should Paul return Lucy’s power will always be compromised by Paul’s position as her benefactor; her life with him will never be entirely self-determined.
M. Paul offers Lucy an alternative to the ongoing scrutiny and control she endures at the Pensionnat Beck. The opportunity to start her own school means that Lucy will no longer be subjected to the watchful eye of Madame Beck or any other employer. Personal mastery is achieved by the conclusion of Villette. Lucy is a teacher and in her own school, she is no longer answerable to Madame Beck or anyone similar. Kate Millett suggests that Lucy endured Paul’s tirades to ‘flatter his pedagogic vanity’, believing that Lucy has ‘hoodwinked him into giving her the keys’ to freedom through education. Millett states that ‘the minute they are in her hand and she has beguiled him into lending her money, renting her a school of her own, and facilitated her daring in slipping from the claws of Madame Beck – she’s gone.’

There is some truth in this assessment. To be her own master Lucy must relinquish love. Within the ideology that informed Brontë there was no precedent which allowed for a woman to straddle both romance and freedom. But Millett’s analysis suggests that Brontë asserts an intentional inversion of power, that Lucy manipulated the situation towards its outcome. Instead, the conclusion of Villette derives from that which Brontë could not conceive - a woman having both marriage and freedom. Lucy’s autonomy springs from necessity rather than intent and this necessity arose as much from Brontë’sown prejudices against Catholicism as anything else.

Finally with Paul Lucy experiences an appreciation of and response to her emotion and affections. Prior to this Lucy did not, as Ginevra asserts, ‘know love’ or at least what it is to have love returned. Both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe pursue men who have given no indication of reciprocating their feelings - this is particularly true in Lucy’s initial affection for Dr John. Informed as she was by her own painful experiences it seems strange that Brontë’s heroines do not warn against such
attachments. Instead her novels indicate that personal triumph can eventually be achieved through dogged determination. Behaviour of this kind is not without its price. Both Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre undergo a form of trial, they pay for their assertions of principles, independence and romantic freedom. While Jane’s trial has psychological aspects, the physical trial she endures proves to be the penultimate one. For Lucy however, the trial takes place mainly in her mind. Her trial is far more difficult than Jane’s for Jane always has a centre of stability – her logic, her conscience helps her endure. For Lucy the psychological havoc she endures all but denudes her of any protection or power. She has no access to help from the outside world and her access to self-help is diminished. According to Keefe:

In creating Lucy, Charlotte managed finally to plumb the depth of her own state of alienation. This is not to say that Lucy Snowe is a fictionalised Charlotte Brontë…she does represent one aspect of the author’s mind, the numbing depression which Brontë had fought against nearly all her life.132

This darkness and alienation help explain the binaries that Brontë creates within her texts, binaries that have their counterparts within her world. Although often classed as the doubles of Brontë’s heroines or as embodying an aspect or aspects of their psyches, the glamorous, attractive and, importantly, full-figured femme fatales who contrast with the plain, poor, insignificant and slight Jane and Lucy, help to outline the binary oppositions that Brontë encountered. After outlining this dichotomy in her work Brontë systematically dismantles it - she attacks by throwing a light on what is beneath the social exteriors of her age. It is Brontë’s illustration of her own interpretation of the privileged position within the binary schemata of her texts that
throws light on her own psyche. The role that the women she created who acted as foils to her heroines played in sharpening the isolation felt not only by her heroines but by Brontë herself, becomes all too apparent in the portraits she creates of the Blanches and Ginevras of her world.

Although Brontë’s heroines suffer the physical and emotional deprivations they emerge victorious. Victory over their rivals is never clear-cut for Brontë’s characters. They do not emerge with the spoils of their battles nor are they themselves un tarnished. It is the fact that Charlotte’s victorious women emerge from their ordeals at all and having undergone some redemptive change that makes their battles just and the outcomes suitable in relation to the social hierarchy of Brontë’s day. The true difference between Brontë’s heroines and their female rivals is that her heroines have all the potential while their rivals have none. Ginevra is unable to learn from her errors, she will always be spoilt and selfish. Lucy, however, gains wisdom and independence after her ordeals. Again, Brontë clearly shows that intellect is what will be rewarded. In some way all of her heroes are teachers in that their behaviour helps to educate and further develop the ‘right’ women. Brontë shows, particularly through the characterisation of Ginevra, that the lessons they offer are wasted on the ‘wrong’ women.

(x) – Structures of control
This highlights a very important aspect of Brontë’s work, particularly as it pertains to power and hierarchical structures. Despite claims by some critics that they are feminist tracts, Brontë’s writings toe the line of the ruling elite of her day. Her work was produced within a society that also produced movements such as Disraeli’s conservative ‘Young England’ movement. In the 1840’s this group ‘sought the
community of purpose that constitutes society’, without which ‘men may be drawn into contiguity, but…still continue virtually isolated,’ in a romanticised vision of aristocratic charity and peasant deference.'133 Groups such as this highlight the embedded class structure of the age and the way that those in positions of authority within this structure were determined to maintain its existence. Brontë’s heroines may be strong, but their strength comes at a cost and their claims for freedom can only ever be realised when they meet with the norms of the Victorian era. Jane returns to Rochester but, as we have seen, not as an impoverished, friendless governess. She has her own money, a great social equalizer and something that now makes her union with Rochester socially acceptable. Rochester has also suffered his losses. Crippled and blind his power and status has been reduced. The social acceptability of Rochester’s power has always been questionable. Eagleton remarks that:

Jane and Rochester are not as socially divided as may at first appear. Rochester, the youngest son of an avaricious landed gentleman, was denied his share of the estate and had to marry instead into colonial wealth; Jane’s colonial uncle dies and leaves her with a sizable legacy, enough for independence. The colonial trade which signified a decline in status for Rochester signifies an advance in status for Jane, so that although they are of course socially and economically unequal, their fortunes spring from the same root.134

The social division between Lucy and M. Paul is somewhat more difficult to determine. Lucy as the secretive narrator makes access to her social position limited. We glean from snippets of information that Lucy, had her unrevealed circumstances been different, would have occupied a position of middle class comfort. But it is more than social position that must ultimately separate Lucy from M. Paul. Brontë’s prejudices informed by her society and her upbringing mean that a relationship between the two cannot be resolved in the same way as that of Jane’s and
Rochester’s. There are no reversals that can alter M. Paul’s position which will place him and Lucy on a similar footing. Brontë suggests that the divide caused by their religious differences will pose no problem to Lucy’s and Paul’s union by indicating that he is not catholic of the same order as those she considers slaves to the creed and indicating his letters to Lucy tell her to remain an Anglican, that this faith ‘suits’ her. Brontë suddenly counters all the text has previously asserted regarding the religious differences between the two faiths by offering small ways of navigating around them. The need for these differences to be overcome is however never realized. Lucy finds love but not where she originally pursued it and, unlike Jane who the reader farewells with her happily married to Rochester in their new Eden, Lucy leaves us with the image of storm, loss and turmoil. She has found love but it is only fleetingly hers.

This conformity to society’s dictums is why in Villette M. Paul must ultimately perish. Keeping in mind the anti-Catholicism that flowed through Villette it is unlikely the Brontë could step away outside her anti-Catholic prejudice into that which she had been so fully indoctrinated and see Lucy Snowe enter into a union with a ‘son of Rome’. Although in the text Lucy tells us that, ‘All Rome could not put into him [M. Paul] bigotry, nor Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit.’¹³⁵ This provides Brontë with a useful out, she can allow Lucy to love a Catholic but she must stress that he is not really a Catholic in the ‘worst sense’ of the word. Lucy’s account of Paul Emanuel’s faith makes him appear more misguided in his religious beliefs than he is devout. Even early criticism of Charlotte’s work notes her contempt for Catholicism. In 1877 Leslie Stephen suggested that, ‘If at times she felt the aesthetic charm of the Catholic system, she was but more convinced that it was a poison, dangerous in proportion to its sweetness.’¹³⁶
For Lucy freedom comes from stepping into the traditional and socially acceptable role of teacher, but it is on her own terms. Lucy escapes the bounds of governess. As governess for Madame Beck, Lucy was significantly more oppressed than Jane had been while in Rochester’s employ. Madame Beck’s constant need to know the personal details of her employees and Lucy in particular results in Lucy’s repression. In order to carve out a private space for herself she must always assume a mask. After her visage is interrogated by M. Paul, Lucy’s personal space is further violated by Madame Beck who, once she assumes Lucy is asleep, inspects both her physical features and personal effects. Not only are inspections conducted by her, they are done so with the intention that Lucy remain ignorant of the fact that they transpired. Madame Beck mistakenly believes Lucy to be asleep and feels free to conduct her examinations. This initial invasion is the start of an ongoing surveillance of Lucy’s life and person by her new employer. In this sense it is unfortunate that Lucy is only feigning sleep and witnesses these intrusions on her person taking place. I say unfortunate because Lucy witnesses Madame Beck ensuring her future access to Lucy’s possessions by copying Lucy’s keys to her trunk, desk and work-box:

I softly rose in my bed and followed her with my eye: these keys, reader, were not brought back till they had left on the toilet of an adjoining room the impress of their wards in wax. All being thus done decently and in order, my property was returned to its place, my clothes were carefully refolded.¹³⁷

Lucy knows that from this moment on her life could potentially be examined at any time by her new employer yet she does not rail against this, she does not interrupt Madame Beck’s invasion of her privacy and instead refers these infringements being done ‘decently’. Shuttleworth believes Lucy ‘allows all her actions to be dictated by
the sense that she might be overlooked’. Lucy is used to being overlooked and has inhabited a space of invisibility for a large part of her life. In this sense to counter Madame Beck’s infringement on her privacy, Lucy must either engage in her own surreptitious rebellion or relinquish her personal power to Madame Beck.

(xii) – Madame Beck’s oppression

Madame Beck controls her school and the teachers under her employ through her constant surveillance and manipulation of situations and people to suit her needs and desires. She positions others to be the enforcer with the students when the need arises in order to retain her popularity with them. When Paul begins to slip from her grasp, she conspires with Père Silas to intervene in the relationship that is developing between him Paul and Lucy so that her own plans and designs and ambitions for further fortune are not disrupted. Lucy’s depiction of Madame Beck contrasts elements of attractiveness with the hardened features borne from a lifetime of anxiously guarding her position of authority:

I know what of harmony pervaded her whole person; and yet her face offered contrast, too; its features were by no means such as are usually seen in conjunction with a complexion of such blended freshness and repose: their outline was stern; her forehead was high but narrow; it expressed capacity and some benevolence, but no expanse; nor did her peaceful yet watchful eye ever know the fire which is kindled in the heart or the softness which flows hence. Her mouth was hard: it could be a little grim; her lips were thin.  

The importance of phrenology in determining an individual’s true nature informs nineteenth-century thinking. Brontë, as has been previously noted in the analysis of Jane Eyre, subscribed to the accuracy of this practice. Lucy’s assessment of Madame Beck reveals she is alert to the type of person she is engaging with shortly after
arriving at the pensionnat. Phrenology was a subject of interest in the Brontë household and the physicality of their characters plays an important part in the psychological development of characters in each of the sisters’ novels. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne Brontë details Helen Huntington’s description of her husband Arthur’s physical limitations discovered in the early days of marriage. Helen tells us that ‘His head looked right enough, but when he placed my hand on the top of it, it sunk in a bed of curls, rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle.’

Similarly Emily uses the darkness, and suggested foreignness, of Heathcliff to imply the danger and volatility of his nature. When Heathcliff and Cathy as children are found outside the Linton’s property and Cathy, attacked by the family dog, is taken inside with Heathcliff following old Mr Linton describes Heathcliff as ‘villian’. He proposes that Heathcliff ‘scowls so plainly so plainly in his face, would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?’

The physical description of Madame Beck does not only reveal her shortcomings but it also indicates that she is not a contented woman. The efforts that Madame needs to make to ensure her power is not eroded bring with them their own form of oppression. She may be the one controlling the gaze but the gaze controls Madame Beck as much as it controls those who it falls upon. Her guard is never down, she can never become complacent because Madame Beck is a woman occupying a position of authority in a social structure designed to prevent precisely this occurrence.

Sally Shuttleworth observes that, ‘the ‘system of management’ employed by Madame Beck in running her school is linked by Lucy to the practices of political
and industrial control (and Madame Beck herself to masculine figures of authority). The masculine imagery that surrounds Madame Beck removes from her reach the usual form of exchange employed by women in the nineteenth century to ensure their social position. While women such as Ginevra and Polly will exchange their sexuality and capacity to be wives and mothers in order to gain social position, Madame Beck can no longer negotiate her access to power in this way. This may appear inconsequential given that she has already negotiated power in excess of what she could hope to achieve through marriage but there are consequences for Madame Beck. Relationships for Madame Beck will always be informed by her adherence to this masculine identity that she must retain in order to maintain her power. This means, when she is attracted to Dr John, even had he reciprocated her feelings nothing could become of their relationship without a significant loss in power for Madame Beck. She would be forced to exchange her independent identity and authority in lieu of the feminine qualities she has already exchanged to acquire this independence in the first place.

There is little doubt that Brontë’s experiences, particularly those in Brussels, as well as her opinions, informed the portraits she created as a writer. Juliet Barker notes that Brontë’s publisher George Smith helped inform her characterisation of Dr John. Similarly, there are, in both the characters of Rochester and M. Paul Emanuel elements of Constantin Heger. Juliet Barker notes that ‘in Brussels she had fallen in love for the first time – with a man that was the antithesis of everything that she had previously valued…Her unrequited passion for him was to alter permanently and radically her vision of what a male hero should be.’

Brontë’s heroes occupy positions of power over the women within their world – they
are intellectually, socially and economically superior to both Jane and Lucy. Despite this, both Rochester and M. Emanuel are prepared to share their knowledge and power with Brontë’s heroines. The idea that Jane and Lucy align themselves with sources of power who choose either to share or withdraw their power with significantly less powerful women, supports what Karen Chase suggests when she states that ‘Brontë is no more a prophet of freedom than she is a priestess of love.’

When we recognize how her heroines maintain the status quo rather than subverting it, the thoroughness of her indoctrination by the ideology of the day is apparent. Brontë identified sites of inequality and marginalization. But, even while she thought she was confronting them, she was unwittingly endorsing them.

Based on the characters of her heroes and the man she was attracted to most violently in her own life, Brontë exhibits her tendency to privilege men in possession of authority. Whether they possess intellectual or social authority, Brontë’s assessment of male desirability is tied to power. This reveals her adherence to the codes and mores of her time as well as the power structure which, though her texts attack it on many levels, she ultimately endorses. As has been illustrated through the textual analysis presented in this thesis in the previous chapter, this indoctrination and the resulting support of the power structure is almost impossible to avoid. Brontë subconsciously supports what she can see is problematic and lacking in equity because she has been indoctrinated into this belief by the system itself. Her heroines also illustrate a further psychological aspect of her own make-up. According to the theories of psychologist Alfred Adler, Brontë could be seen as ‘striving for perfection’. This theory states that ‘the fundamental law of life…is that of overcoming.’

Certainly Brontë, like many women of her day, had much to
overcome. However her attempts exceeded the norm for her time. Where most sought security through alliance, she sought it through independence. Discussing her refusal of Henry Nussey’s proposal of marriage with his sister Ellen, Brontë wrote, ‘I will never for the sake of attaining the distinction of matrimony and escaping the stigma of an old maid take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy.’

Brontë’s tendency to create dominant heroes could be classed as indicative of what Adler terms as idealisation. According to Adler idealisation allows people to have:

A ready-made, often unconscious, ideal to which traits of the father, a brother, a fairy-tale hero, a literary or historical character are admixed...The hysterical desire for a great strong man before whom one can bow.

Brontë used her idealised notion of the Duke of Wellington as a basis for the heroes in her juvenilia and, although she recognised the dangers of his character, she also romanticised Byron. Christine Alexander notes that in her juvenilia, Brontë’s arch-villain, ‘Alexander Percy…initially created by Branwell Brontë as a republican anarchist and misanthropic buccaneer like Byron's Corsair, he is molded by Charlotte Brontë into the sinister Gothic type, outwardly handsome but dark and brooding by nature.’ Her writing as an adult was informed by both these idealised notions at first and then also later by her feelings for Heger. Similarly, as explored in chapter two, the great hopes held for Branwell by the Brontë family collective are yet another example of idealisation that informed Brontë’s life and work. As she matured Brontë came to recognise the flaws in some of her idealised characters, specifically Branwell. It became apparent to Brontë that no great-strong man would reverse her position in the world. Establishing herself and carving out a site of
power was something Brontë had to achieve for herself. Certainly in Villette the 
resentment of the subordination and dependence forced upon women in her position comes through, more so than is the case in Jane Eyre. This apparent increased resentment may well have been because, as previously noted as suggested by Keefe and Kate E. Brown, by the time of writing Villette Brontë had suffered complete and overwhelming loss. Power through a collective was no longer accessible to her. Brontë’s collective had disappeared within months.

In considering Brontë and her work we are considering the position of all of her gender and class. Her texts offer insight into her psychological make-up in that they, sometimes inadvertently, reveal habits of her age which were considered the norm but would later in fact prove to be devices of indoctrination and tools of oppression. As the previous chapters have highlighted, indoctrination does not need to be carried out by the elite, those who have the most to gain from the maintenance and perpetuation of the oligarchy. This becomes the work of those already oppressed by the structure. Foucault’s work illustrated how the structure of oppression operates as a self-perpetuating machine. Similarly, Brontë’s Villette illustrates the indoctrination of the oppressed and the flow on effect of this oppression as they indoctrinate others. Brontë presents this process in action without any apparent awareness of what she was recounting. Lucy, who is undoubtedly the main focus of oppression in the text, passes on to the young women under her tutelage what she herself has been taught to accept. Referring specifically to her Labassécourienne students (throughout the text English girls are portrayed as being superior – academically and morally), Lucy describes how she deals with their resistance to either study or discipline:
They (the students) would riot against three additional lines to a lesson; but I never knew them rebel against a wound given to their self-respect: the little they had of that quality was trained to be crushed, and it rather liked the pressure of a firm heel, than otherwise. 150

While Lucy is noting the level of control these girls are conditioned to accept in life, she is ensuring that this control filters into all aspects of their lives. Lucy, as does Jane, falls in line with the power structure already in place. In the process of displaying to the reader the oppression and control under which her heroine exists, Brontë has inadvertently displayed oppression that is endemic to society at large – so much so that Lucy fails to recognise herself as a tool of this systemic assertion of power. Likewise, Brontë does not appear to recognise Lucy in this capacity.

This is a further illustration of the level of conditioning by the power structure that Brontë had herself absorbed.
In Myths of Power Terry Eagleton notes that while Polly is a ‘little creature’, Lucy compares herself indirectly to a cat.

35 Brontë, p. 158
37 Brontë, Villette, pp. 161-162
38 Brittan and Maynard, p. 217
39 Brontë, Villette, p. 162
40 Brittan and Maynard, p. 210-216
42 Brontë, p. 331-332
43 Ibid.
44 Eagleton, p. 64
46 Brontë, p. 329
47 Eagleton, p. 63
49 Brittan and Maynard, p. 72
50 Brontë, p. 58
52 Brontë, p. 331
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., pp. 178-179
55 Ibid.
56 Triandis, p. 170
58 Ibid.
59 Brontë, p. 208
60 Eagleton, p. 68
61 Brontë, p. 210
62 Ibid., p. 135
63 Ibid., p. 209
64 Ibid., p. 211
65 Ibid., pp. 211-212
66 Ibid., pp 215-220
71 Ibid., p.3
72 Ibid., p. 257
74 Ibid., p. 107
75 Brontë, p. 60
76 Eagleton, p. 63

In Myths of Power Terry Eagleton notes that while Polly is a ‘little creature’, Lucy compares herself indirectly to a cat.
82 Ibid., p. 118
88 Silver, p. 20
89 Brontë, p.68
90 Ibid., p. 66
92 Brontë, p. 368
93 Ibid., p. 369
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., p. 370
96 Ibid., p.150
97 Brown, p. 350 -380
98 Brontë, p.285
100 Ibid., p. 100 - 101
102 Brontë, p.57
103 Ibid, p. 318
104 Ibid, p. 319
105 Ibid, p. 360
106 Ibid, p. 285
107 Ibid, p. 199
108 Ibid, p.198
111 Ibid.
http://jcc.sagepub.com/content/26/6/658
‘Personal collectivism, or allocentricism, is defined as one’s tendency to give priority to the collective self over the private self, especially when these two are in conflict. There are at least two possibly universal reasons for allocentric tendencies: psychological attachment to an in-group and fear of rejection from in-group members.’
115 Brittan and Maynard, p. 5
117 Brontë, p. 403
118 Ibid, p. 355
119 Eagleton, p. 58
120 Ibid, p. 51
121 Brontë, p.134
Brontë, p. 119. Trans. ‘Well! My cousin, it will always be a good work.’

Shuttleworth, p. 223

Brontë, p. 284

‘Do you intend to insult me?’

Brontë, p. 292-293


Brontë, p. 553

‘Let me!’

Brontë, p. 544


Ibid, p. 156


Eagleton, p. 57

Brontë, p. 546


Brontë, p. 121

Shuttleworth, p. 224

Brontë, p. 124


Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, p.50

Shuttleworth, p. 223

Barker, p. 704

Barker, p. 427

Chase, p. 81


The notion of striving for perfection does not equate with only personal gain. According to Adler this trait helps ensure the progression of society. The driver in Charlotte’s case may have been more than self interest.

Barker, p. 302


Brontë, p.135
Chapter Five

‘I am my own mistress’¹: Conclusion

Audre Lorde said that ‘the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressor’s tactics, the oppressor’s relationships.’¹² The ambition of this thesis has been to illuminate the oppression which is manifest in both Jane Eyre and Villette as well as the way in which Charlotte Brontë was herself informed by the oppression particular to her time and place in history, her social position and her gender.

As the biographical assessment of Charlotte Brontë’s life revealed, oppression in various forms helped to shape the writer she became. The biographical detail provided in chapter two of this thesis is not intended as, nor does it presume to offer, a psychoanalytic assessment of the nature of Charlotte Brontë the woman. Instead it provides a backdrop to Brontë’s lived experiences and how these may have informed her creative work. It is clear from Brontë’s letters that she was aware of many of inequities within her world though, as asserted throughout the textual analysis of Jane Eyre and, as suggested by critics such as Terry Eagleton and Karen Chase, Brontë’s awareness of her society’s inequities was by no means equally inclusive of all classes within her society. Her feelings on the role of the governess, the stratified
environment in which women were expected to exist while occupying this role, were evident in her letters to friends and family. Brontë’s bouts of depression while occupying such roles further demonstrate the very personal investment she had with this issue. Both novels examined in this thesis were influenced by Brontë’s lived experience as a governess and, as a result, signal to the reader what this lived experience was like for her. More importantly, in regards to what this thesis addresses, both of these texts point towards Brontë’s own experience of the feelings of isolation, when separated by necessity from family, and the frustration experienced by her when these separations diverted her energies from her creative ambitions.

Because of the multifarious nature of the way in which oppression operated in the Victorian age, particularly in regards to women such as Brontë who were devoid of wealth and had limited access to securing financial independence and who were reluctant to engage in unions of convenience, the representation of oppression in Jane Eyre and Villette manifests in a variety of ways. The nature of oppression that Brontë addresses is complex in its scope. For this reason the treatment of all manifestations of oppression is beyond the purview of this thesis.

Instead I have chosen to scrutinise specific aspects, drivers and results of oppression in detail while pointing to others that may offer scope for future investigations. The works of sociologists Harry C. Triandis, Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard have been important to the analysis of both Brontë’s life and work. Important also to initial understandings of collectives as a source of power and the operations of socially structured hierarchical power and the indoctrination into its operations have

232
been the works of two nineteenth-century sociologists, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels. The use of these theorists has allowed for a new approach to analysis of Jane Eyre and Villette as well as providing an alternate lens to that which Brontë’s life is usually viewed through.

The concept of inclusion and exclusion are central to any analysis of oppression and the analysis provided in this thesis has attempted to interrogate this concept in way which is new to the field of literary studies, by assessing instances of individualism and collectivism. The marriage of the disciplines of literary studies and sociology is an unusual but, hopefully, productive one, allowing for an analysis that can cross the literary output as well as the life of Brontë without superimposing psychoanalytic readings on her life which have been arrived at through the textual analysis.

Important also to this thesis is the work of Audre Lorde and her recognition of the limitations of collectives in presenting a truly representative voice because of the alienation of those who do not embody the shared characteristics of the collective identity. Her concept of the mythical norm was asserted in response to the inability of feminist groups to represent all women equally. In this thesis the mythical norm of collectives and ingroups as well as those imposed by nineteenth-century society are important to understanding the isolation of individuals within the novels under analysis. The concept of the norm ties with Robert Michels’ assessment of labour movements in the nineteenth-century. Michels identified that as soon as a collective
body is formed an elite must emerge thereby preventing a genuinely representative voice. These ideas although not constantly referred to in the analysis presented in the thesis have nonetheless informed the analysis and are important to the way in which oppression is conceived here.

Within the more detailed analysis of power and oppression a number of lines of inquiry are opened up within this thesis but space restrictions and the overarching intent of this work prohibit a thorough engagement with these themes. These lines of inquiry are there to be pursued in future research. They include the control of diet and occurrence of anorexia in oppressed individuals which is discussed briefly in chapter four in relation to Villette. This is an intriguing area which can be illustrative of both the effects of oppression on the oppressed individual as well as the assertion of power by the oppressed individual against her/his oppressor – food intake being one of the last sites available in which a disempowered individual’s power can be asserted.

There exists a large body of scholarship on the life of Charlotte Brontë as well as on her oeuvre. The work of many researchers is important to the understanding of Brontë’s life and the texts selected for analysis in this thesis. Groundbreaking works such as those of Terry Eagleton and Gilbert and Gubar sit alongside more contemporary analysis offered by scholars such as Catherine Lanone and Susan Lydon. Combined, these interpretations of Brontë and her writing create a dialogue that directly and indirectly assess the operations of power. This thesis aims to add to that dialogue by understanding and interrogating power in a new way in Brontë’s life.
and work. Finally, this thesis shows that power, long recognised as an important aspect of Brontë’s work, can be assessed in new ways that add to our understanding of not only this author’s writing but her life and times. Despite the existence of such an extensive collection of personal correspondence from Charlotte herself, contention is endemic to Brontë scholarship. But perhaps it is because of this wealth of information that debate about Brontë’s intent and opinions still holds currency. Brontë’s treatment of and opinions about power, disenfranchisement, class and particularly the position of women have been scrutinised by critics since Jane Eyre was first published in 1847 when critics such as Eliza Rigby, writing for the Quarterly Review, labelled the work ‘coarse’ and ‘dangerous’:

There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment--there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence--there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact, has at the present day to contend with.³

Since that time Brontë critics and scholars have been unable to agree on whether Brontë’s work exposes and opposes her stratified society and the hierarchical structure of Victorian England or if her work ultimately endorses these methods of control.
The conclusion arrived at through the analysis presented in this thesis is that Brontë’s work ultimately does both. While she points to failings of and inequities in her society Brontë is also conditioned by that society, what she is capable of exposing is therefore limited. The impact of her work and the dialogue it continues to foster however make Brontë’s creative intent of less importance than the lines of inquiry her writings have initiated and how these inquiries continued to be pursued.

Bibliography


Amtower, Laurel. The Uncanny http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html


Armitage, Nicholas, ‘Melting Miss Snowe: Charlotte’s Message to the English Church’, Brontë Studies, Vol. 34 No. 3, November 2009


Brontë, Anne The Tennant of Wildfell Hall, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1984)

Brontë, Charlotte and Brontë, Emily. The Belgian Essays, edited and translated by Sue Lonoff (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996)


Brown, Kate E. ‘Catastrophe and the City: Charlotte Brontë as Urban Novelist’, Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 57, No. 3 (December 2002)

Cadwallader, Jen. ‘‘Formed for labour, not for love’: Plain Jane and the Limits of
Female Beauty’, Brontë Studies, Vol. 34 No. 3, (November 2009)


Davie, Stevie. ‘Growing up and zoning out: Charlotte and Emily Brontë.’ Essays and Studies 62 (2009)

Davis, Kingsley. Global Stratification’
http://www.highlands.edu/academics/divisions/socialcultural/socio/nlythcott/Outlines7,8,9.htm


Fisk, Nicole Plyler. ‘“I heard her murmurs”: Decoding narratives of female desire in a Jane Eyre and Secresy, Brontë Studies, Vol. 33, (November 2008)


Godfrey, Esther. ‘Jane Eyre, from governess to girl bride.’ Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 45.4 (2005)


Henck, Karen Cubie. ‘That Peculiar Voice’: Jane Eyre and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, an Early Wesleyan Female Preacher, Brontë Studies, Vol. 35 No. 1, (March 2010)


Hodge, Jon. ‘Villette's compulsory education.’, Studies in English Literature, 1500-
1900, 45.4 (2005)


Hughes, Kathryn. The Victorian Governess, (London: Hambledon and London, 2001)

Jenkins, Ruth Y. Reclaiming myths of power, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995)


Kees, Lara Freeburg. ‘Sympathy' in Jane Eyre.’ Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 45.4 (2005)


Lane, Christopher.’ Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating’, ELH, Vol. 69, No. 1, (Spring 2002)

Lanone, Catherine. ‘Arctic Spectacles in Jane Eyre and Villette’, Brontë Studies, Vol. 34 No. 2, (July 2009),

Lawson, Kate, and Lynn Shakinovsky. ‘Fantasies of national identification in Villette.’ Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 49.4 (2009)


Lemaster, Tracy. ‘M/Othering the children: pregnancy and motherhood as obstacle to self-actualization in Jane Eyre.’ Genders 47, 2008
http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A179660950&sou rce=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=uvwdsydney&version=1.0


Lescart, Alain. ‘All women are Grisettes in Villette’, Brontë Studies, Vol. 30, (July 2005)


Little, Daniel. ‘False consciousness: A brief explanation of Marx’s conception of false consciousness; some of the ways in which later Marxist thinkers have used the concept.’

http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/ies5%20false%20consciousness%20V2.htm


Longmuir, Anne. ‘‘Reader, perhaps you were never in Belgium?’: Negotiating British Identity in Charlotte Brontë’s The Professor and Villette’ Nineteenth Century Literature, vol. 64, issue. 2, (2009)

Lonoff, Sue. ‘The education of Charlotte Brontë: A pedagogical case study.’ Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture, Volume 1, Number 3, (2001)


Lorde, Audre.’Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’, Paper delivered at the Copeland Colloquium, Amerst College, April 1980


Martin, Robert B. ‘Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau’, Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 7, No. 3 (December 1952)


Rivkin, Julie and Ryan, Michael (ed.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998)


