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Ostensible Obedience: The Male Narrative Voice and the Theme of Women's Independence in *The Professor*

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The Professor is the first novel that Charlotte Brontë intended to publish, an intention to which she adhered throughout her life, making nine attempts to persuade the publisher. This novel, however, continued to be rejected because of "the want of varied interest" (Barker 526) even after the success of *Jane Eyre* made the author famous and was finally published only in 1857, two years after the author's death. Winifred Gérin even points out that "[o]nce she was dead and no more masterpieces could be looked for, her publishers were thankful to fall back on *The Professor*" (312). Critics have agreed that this novel is an unskilled wish-fulfillment based on the author's Brussels experience[1], and that *Villette* might not have been written if this novel had been published. However, a careful examination clarifies that *The Professor* is not just a wish-fulfillment but an ambitious work which develops one of the important themes in her later novels, the theme of independence of women.

The main reason why *The Professor* has been lowly evaluated is that, while Brontë employs the male narrator William Crimsworth as the ostensible protagonist throughout the novel, its focus gradually shifts from William to a woman called Frances Henri.[2] It might be right to say that its plot, which contains both a man's success story and a woman's fairy-tale marriage story, lacks unity. However, what is more important is that the author embeds the story of a woman in the plot by letting the obviously biased narrator tell his complacent story. In fact, this novel does not end simply with the success and marriage of William: Brontë spends two chapters after their engagement mainly to describe Frances' social success after her marriage to William. What Brontë really wanted to explore in this novel is how a woman can be financially and emotionally independent in the androcentric society. My main concern in this paper is to elucidate how Brontë manages to present a woman's possibility for independence while using a notably limited male narrator. I will first examine the limitation of the male narrator, and then move to the description of Frances' success.

Brontë insists in the Preface on the importance of the protagonist's achieving independent life by his own effort: "my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs" (1).[3] However, while Frances agonizes to achieve her independence, William's success comes not necessarily from his own efforts but from his privileges as a male.[4] For example, compared with women for whom "womanhood was a vocation in itself" (Showalter 21), William can choose his vocation freely. As Terry Eagleton points out: "it [William's entering trade] is at least a free choice, rather than, as Jane and Lucy, an unavoidable fatality" (34). His male friends can help him to succeed in life, and his education at Eton enables him to gain a job easily as a "professor." In addition, William can rescue the son of M. Vandenhuten, his patron, owing to his experience at Eton: "I had not been brought up at Eton and boated and bathed and swam there ten long years for nothing" (182). Nevertheless, William is never aware of his privileged position. On the contrary, he always feels self-complacent about his ability, and even tells Frances to gain a better job than "a dull—stupid occupation" like lace-mending: "'Why do you pursue it [lace-mending]? Why do you not rather teach history, geography, grammar—even arithmetic?' 'Is Monsieur certain that I am myself thoroughly acquainted with these studies?' 'I don't know—you ought to be at your age.' 'But I never was at school, Monsieur—' 'Indeed!

. . . what was your Aunt about?'" (130). His words betray his arrogance and ignorant prejudice.

In fact, since this novel employs a male narrator, it enables Brontë to separate herself from the narrator better than any other novel by her hand. In the abandoned Preface to *The Professor,* Brontë herself refers to the limited perspective of William's narrative:

> I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Crimsworth very well—and can vouch for his having been a respectable man—though perhaps not altogether the character he seems to have thought he was. Or rather—to an impartial eye—in the midst of his good points little defects and peculiarities were visible of which he was himself excusably unconscious. (295)[5]

What is characteristic of William's narrative is, indeed, his strong sense of superiority. It is most eminently revealed in the scene where William sees M. Vandenhuten, asking for his help:

> I had not sat five minutes alone with him in his bureau, before I became aware of a sense of ease in his presence, such as I rarely experienced with strangers. . . . M. Vandenhuten was rich, respected and influential; I—poor, despised and powerless. . . . The Dutchman . . . was slow, cool, of rather dense intelligence, though sound and accurate judgement; the Englishman far more nervous, active, quicker both to plan and practice, to conceive and to realize . . . in short our characters dovetailed—but my mind having more fire and action than his, instinctively assumed and kept the predominance. (195-6)

According to Erich Fromm, men's anxiety originates mainly in the fear that they might not achieve the expected task, and "it is therefore imperative for him to find recognition by others, . . . to be superior to competitors" (103). In short, a man tends to struggle in the community to show his superiority in order to overcome his anxiety. This male inclination is distinctive in William's character. Even when situations force him to ask for someone's help, William never feels nor shows gratitude. He oversensitively wants to predominate over everybody else and can endure contempt by no one. At the beginning of the novel, it is the scorn shown by one of his uncles that makes him decide to be a tradesman: "I do not think that my turn of mind qualifies me to make a good tradesman . . . but such was the scorn expressed in Lord Tynedale's countenance as he pronounced the word *Trade,* I was instantly decided. My father was but a name to me—yet that name I did not like to hear mentioned with a sneer to my very face" (4). The feeling of being indebted to his aristocratic uncles, who obligatorily gave him education at Eton, makes him reject their offer of a job. Then he decides to ask his elder brother, Edward, and is employed as the latter's second clerk. Feeling discontented with his position, however, William emphasizes his own spiritual superiority over his brother, though he must admit the social and physical superiority of the latter: "Antipathy is the only word which can express the feeling of Edward Crimsworth had for me; . . . Had I been in anything inferior to him, he would not have hated me thoroughly, but I knew all that he knew and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer" (25-26). Brontë makes William to mention trivial things such as his own "southern accent" and "the degree of education evinced in" (25) his language in order to somehow feel superior over his rich, handsome, successful brother. Taking Fromm's definition of men's anxiety into consideration, William's narrative can be categorized as a highly masculine one, despite many critics' assertion that the narrator is feminized.

Brontë makes William's narrative characteristically male most eminently when he describes women. His view on women is revealed in two ways: as romantic and idealized in the first half of the novel, and as cynical and sardonic in the latter. William's first view is unrealistic because he has had no acquaintance with real women. He romantically yearns to take a glance at the "pensionnat de demoiselles" from the window of his room, which is "boarded up" (58): "the first thing I did was to scrutinize closely the nailed boards, hoping to find some chink or crevice which I might enlarge and so get a peep at the consecrated ground. . . . I thought it would have been so pleasant to have looked out upon a garden planted with flowers and trees, so amusing to have watched the demoiselles at their play" (58-59). However, his actual gaze on "the angels and their Eden" (68) results in disappointment at, and assault against, them.[6] It is a reaction against his former romantic fantasy about women. The real women depicted by William's narrative are either utterly sensual or utterly non-sexual and nun-like:

> [H]ow was it then that scarcely one of those girls having attained the age of fourteen could look a man in the face with modesty and propriety? An air of bold, impudent flirtation or a loose, silly leer was sure to answer the most ordinary glance from a masculine eye. . . . The least exceptionable pupil was the poor little Sylvie . . . the best and ugliest pupil in the establishment. . . . No smile, no trace of pleasure or satisfaction appeared in Sylvie's nun-like and passive face. (89-111)

When he "looked for a pretty face" on the street (54), Brontë stresses that he sees women only on the surface, with his biased prejudice. In fact, what William relies on in judging women is phrenology, a form of pseudoscience, which was very popular in Victorian England.[7] His shallow, self-righteous judgement allows him to be attracted to the outer charm of

Mlle. Reuter, the Directress of the pensionnat: "The colour on her cheek was like the bloom on a good apple, which is as sound at the core as it is red on the rind" (71). It was not until she herself speaks of her hidden design that he can perceive her real nature. Brontë ironically reveals Mlle. Reuter's intentional flirtation to William when he is romantically dreaming of his educational influence on her:

> Supposing she were to marry an English and protestant husband, would she not, rational, sensible as she is, quickly acknowledge the superiority of right over expediency, honesty over policy? . . . [A] ray of moonlight . . . revealed very plainly, very unequivocally, Mlle. Zoraïde Reuter, arm in arm, or hand in hand . . . [with] Monsieur François Pelet. . . . "Truly, my dear François, . . . affianced as I am to you, I would give no man false hopes." (99-101)

William never forgets nor forgives either Mlle. Reuter or M. Pelet. After that, his descriptions of these two, who have damaged his "amour-propre" (21), become thoroughly critical.

In order to show readers the limitations of William's narrative, Brontë has created a character, Yorke Hunsden, who perceives aspects of William's character of which William himself is unaware: "'Oh I see!' said he [Hunsden], looking into my eyes, and it was evident he *did* see right down to my heart" (45). When William intends to succeed in business, Hunsden points out his aristocratic arrogance, tells him that he will "*never be a tradesman*" (32), and pushes him towards the job which will satisfy William. Though Hunsden makes him quit his distressful job, writes a recommendation for him, and even buys back his mother's portrait for him, William never lets himself feel grateful to his friend. Because Hunsden can perceive things far more correctly than William, and because William understands the other's superior ability, William feels offended with Hunsden. It is clear enough that Brontë here succeeds in showing the reader, through Hunsden's designation, her narrator's limitation. While the misogynistic protagonist sees women's nature as repulsive, Hunsden asserts that William's perverse view results in his unsuccessful relationship with others:

> " . . . There are sensible, as well as handsome women in X—, women it is worth any man's while to talk to, and with whom I can talk with pleasure; but you had and have no pleasant address. . . ."
>
> "Content!" I ejaculated.
>
> "No—you are not content—you see Beauty always turning its back on you—you are mortified and then you sneer." (189-90)

This perversity in William is also revealed in his relationship with Frances: his sense of superiority over her is notable, and readers can hardly rely on his one-sided description. In fact, William regards Frances as an obedient Victorian angel, and "his descriptions of her to Hunsden are vulgarly reifying" (Eagleton 42). William asserts that feeble, gloomy, and uneducated Frances has "improved" into a girl who "waken[s] to life" (136) through communicating with him. The narrator describes the change in Frances as follows: "The benefits of my system becomes apparent also in her altered demeanour as a teacher; she now took her place amongst her pupils with an air of spirit and firmness which assured them at once that she meant to be obeyed" (137). From the viewpoint of William, it is he that has brought about Frances' transformation and, therefore, her gratitude should never end even after their marriage. However, it is quite doubtful if her transformation really takes place in the way explained by William. Indeed, Frances' firmness is revealed at the moment when he first sees her: "She saw me and I read in her eye pain that a stranger should witness the insubordination of her pupils. . . .

I heard her say suddenly and sharply, addressing one of the eldest and most turbulent of the lot: 'Amélie Müllenberg—ask me no question and request of me no assistance for a week to come; during that space of time I will neither speak to you nor help you.'" (114).

That Frances is indeed very proud of her talent, though she succeeds mostly in repressing her feeling, is made clear from the beginning of their relationship. When William admires her composition, her pride comes out so clearly that even the narrator notices it:

> [H]er countenance was transfigured, a smile shone in her eyes—a smile almost triumphant, it seemed to say: "I am glad you have been forced to discover so much of my nature; you need not so carefully moderate your language. Do you think I am myself a stranger to myself? What you tell me in terms so qualified, I have known fully from a child." She did say this as plainly as a frank and flashing glance could, but in a moment the glow of her complexion, the radiance of her aspect had subsided. (125-26)

Taking this repressed self-respect of Frances' into account, we see that Mlle. Reuter perceives Frances' nature far more acutely than William does: "the sentiment of amour-propre has a somewhat marked preponderance in her character" (139). Mlle. Reuter keeps talking: "it appears to me that ambition—*literary* ambition especially, is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of a woman; would not Mlle. Henri be much safer and happier if taught to believe that in the quiet discharge of social duties consists her real vocation, than if stimulated to aspire after applause and publicity?" (139). There is a strong similarity between this remark and Robert Southey's letter to Charlotte Brontë. Brontë wrote a letter to Southey, the poet laureate, when she intended to publish her work and, in reply, he wrote to her: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation" (Gaskell 123). Southey's comment shows the widely approved idea in Victorian culture that women should not undertake writing as a profession, and so do the words of the rational, reasonable woman, Mlle. Reuter. She, a follower of the patriarchal social system in which she has attained some social success, observes women "very vigilantly" (144) lest they should be deviant from the norm of femininity. Elaine Showalter's discussion of *Jane Eyre* is useful here: "It is interesting here to note that sexual discipline is administered to women by other women, as agents for men. . . . Thus the feminine heroine grows up in a world without female solidarity, where women in fact police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny" (116-7). Frances must be expelled from the school in order not to disturb its order, and, in reverse, she dare not ask Mlle. Reuter for any help unless she aims to be another Reuter and to contribute to the solidarity of patriarchal society.

Frances' real nature is revealed also in front of Yorke Hunsden. He incites her to express "ire . . . and defiance" (220) and to show her firmness. She even utters the word "hell" in front of him: "it was when the word 'hell' twanged off from her lips . . . that Hunsden designed to bestow one slight glance of admiration: . . . he liked whatever dared to clear conventional limits" (219). She firmly disputes with him, clinging to her own estimation: "No, though I have neither logic nor wealth of words, yet in a case where my opinion really differed from yours, I should adhere to it when I had not another word to say in its defence; you should be baffled by dumb determination" (223). Brontë conveys Frances' firmness in her conversation with William as well. She desires to see the world, as the author herself did, instead of being enclosed in the feminine limitation[8]: "In Switzerland I have done but little, learnt but little, and seen but little; my life there was in a circle; I walked the same round every day. . . . [In Brussels] I walk in as narrow a limit, but the scene is changed, it would change again if I went to England" (133). Frances is an ambitious, aspiring woman with a firm purpose in life. Because she cannot achieve what she wants under patriarchal Mlle. Reuter, Frances desires to go to England, the country she believes "is something unique" (132).

From the beginning of their relationship, William feels he can easily dominate her: "I perceived that in proportion as my manner grew austere and magisterial, hers become easy and self-possessed" (127). Some critics, such as Pauline Nestor, assert that the heroines in Charlotte Brontë's novels have a disposition which can be labelled masochistic. However, Frances' submission seems to be well calculated. Actually, in the relationship with William, she seems to be manipulative by way of her silence and obedience: "To this wise speech [of William's], I received no answer, and when I looked up, my pupil was smiling to herself, a much-meaning though not very gay smile—it seemed to say 'He talks of he knows not what.'" (129). Hunsden, to whom Frances shows her real nature, perceives her disguise and remarks as follows: "She treats you with a sort of respect, too, and says 'Monsieur,' and modulates her tone in addressing you, actually as if you were something superior!" (225). Indeed, in spite of William's idealistic description, Frances even gives an impression to readers of a calculating coquette when she is proposed marriage: "'Monsieur sera-t-il aussi bon mari qu'il a été bon maître?' 'I will try, Frances.' A pause—then with a new, yet still subdued inflexion of the voice; an inflexion which provoked while it pleased me; accompanied too by a 'sourier à la fois fin et timide' in perfect harmony with the tone . . . 'Master, I content to pass my life with you'" (206-07). Frances is not enraptured at William's proposal at all. Before she accepts it, "some moments were taken for reflection" (207), and some conditions of marriage were set.

Brontë, in fact, characterizes Frances as an emotionally self-sufficient woman as well as aspiring and ambitious. Frances' desire for social success is too intense to make her abandon her self-sufficiency or to reduce herself merely to an obedient and dependent angel:

> "You will teach still I suppose, Monsieur?"
>
> "Oh yes! it is all I have to depend on."
>
> "Bon! . . . Thus we shall have both the same profession—I like that—and my efforts to get on will be as unrestrained as yours—will they not, Monsieur?"
>
> "You are laying plans to be independent of me," said I.
>
> "Yes, Monsieur, I must be no incumbrance to you—no burden in any way." (208)

Although William understands that Frances plans to be only financially independent from him, she indeed wants her emotional independence, too, regardless of their marriage. The reason she accepts William's proposal is not simply because she loves him. It seems as if Frances chose marriage partly in order not to be an old maid, a condition she thinks of as "doubtless . . . void and vapid" (236). Even when she decides to marry him, Frances' interest is concentrated on her independence after marriage: "Oh no! I [Frances] shall hold it [Frances' job] fast! . . . Think of my marrying you to be kept by you, Monsieur! I could not do it!" (209). During William's speech about his wish to support his family economically, Frances does not pay attention to him. It is only the earning differentials between them that attracts her attention: "I [William] am not sure whether Frances had accorded due attention to my harangue: instead of answering me with her usual respectful promptitude, she only sighed and said: . . . 'Three thousand francs! . . . while I get only twelve hundred!'" (208). She understands that marriage to William would be the best way to gain the kind of independence the society permits and accepts his proposal. This reading can explain the reason why Frances regards the wedding as a "formidable piece of business" (226). Explaining her tears on her wedding day, C. Malone points out that "the decision to marry him, to relinquish her independence perhaps, is by no means an easy one" (183). It is true that marriage for Victorian women meant a strict constraint, but for Frances, who does not have power, beauty, education, money, or family, marriage with a man who utterly loves her might be the most acceptable constraint of all.

Marriage, however, is not the ultimate aim of Frances' life. What she desires is her self-sufficiency and social success after marriage. In order to keep her self-sufficiency, Frances manipulatively satisfies William's sense of superiority. Understanding her husband's limitation, she disguises herself in ostensible obedience in order to keep her liberty. She never ceases to call her husband "Monsieur," and their relationship still remains the one between master and pupil. The master describes their matrimony as follows:

> [S]he never allow[ed] my interest in the pupils to fall asleep, and never [made] any change of importance without my cognizance and consent. . . . [I]t was her pleasure, her joy to make me still the Master in all things. . . . [and] ever at the hour, as I entered our private-sitting room—the lady-directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms. (232)

This master-pupil relationship, as William perceives it, is too perfect to bear reality. In fact, Frances, in accordance with each situation, chooses attitudes from two alternatives: the attitude of an ambitious and successful directress and that of an obedient and innocent wife. Ironically Brontë even makes William notice it, though he cannot understand its meaning: "As to this same Mrs. Crimsworth—in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different circumstances I seemed to possess two wives" (230). In other words, Frances gains her financial independence and keeps her emotional self-sufficiency by letting William feel so superior that he can *permit* his wife to continue working. It is simultaneously important that Frances' independence is safely placed inside the structure of patriarchal society, because she is, at least ostensibly, a good wife and mother as well. Even her job of teaching, for that matter, entails being a mental mother to her pupils, and it does not menace the society, at least on the surface.

At the end of the novel, Brontë's description of William is reduced to that of merely a sympathetic, supportive husband of the successful woman, Frances: "I put no obstacle in her way; raised no objection; . . . I delighted in offering them [Frances' faculties] sustenance, in clearing them wider space for action" (229). William does not insist on the sense of superiority that he has adhered to so far with such zeal, because it is now fully satisfied by the manipulative Frances. On the contrary, Brontë hardly even depicts his life in the latter half of the plot, especially during their matrimony, but she reduces William's importance to accentuate Frances' success. As far as the society allows women, Frances achieves financial independence, keeping her emotional self-sufficiency. Though William feels self-complacent about their matrimony, saying "Frances was then a good and dear wife to me, because I was to her a good, just and faithful husband" (235), she has her own world and has even power over their life together, ostensibly obeying and respecting her husband. When their son, Victor, disobeys his father, it is Frances that soothes the boy to make him apologize to William.

The description of a successful life in the latter half of the novel concentrates on Frances, though the narrator says that *both* of them succeed in their careers. Furthermore, it should be noticed that, though Brontë does not directly describe Frances' success, she presents Frances' story clearly in the notably limited male narrative voice. The story told by William is full of discrepancy, because the author purposely characterized him ironically as a limited narrator and tried to present the woman's implied story of success behind the narrator's self-complacent story. Indeed, the shift of focus from William to Frances accentuates the heroine, and readers can realize that what Frances attains is not only marriage with the professor but her own independent life.

In interpreting *The Professor,* critics have hitherto inclined to depend on parallels with Brontë's biographical facts. Malone insightfully points out that Brontë herself became a "popular heroine" (175) owing to *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* which was written by Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë's contemporary, and was published the year before *The Professor:* "Brontë's life was now found to contain all the necessary elements for elevation to a Victorian model of womanhood" (175). *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* indeed stresses the peculiarity of the Brontës' life and Charlotte's melodramatic love for M. Heger, and has helped critics to interpret Brontë's novel as the author's wish-fulfillment. However, Brontë was not a heroine in a fiction but a real woman who was eager and ambitious to gain success through her literary career. The male narrator of this novel is the author's strategy to disguise her real intention, just as she disguised her sex with a pseudonym.[9] In the age when women were hardly allowed their rights, Brontë ostensibly employed male protagonist-narrator in order to explore the issue of independence. However, the true independence is indeed achieved by her heroine. Their prosperous matrimony is emphasized in the end, but what is especially stressed is the benefits their marriage brought to Frances, who is successful both in her career and in her matrimony with the support from the sympathetic husband. This fairy-tale ending of *The Professor* shows the independent woman, Frances, accomplishing the kind of happiness available to her through laboring behind the mask of her ostensible obedience to the androcentric society; and at the same time, it reveals to us the independent woman writer, Charlotte Brontë, who, in ostensible obedience to the literary tradition, succeeded in making her work acceptable in Victorian society.

Notes

1 Brontë studied at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels in 1842 and 1843 to 1844. Charlotte fell vainly in love with M. Heger, the professor of literature, and wrote some passionate letters after she came back to England. She wrote her novel in 1845-46 in the despair of never having heard from M. Heger, and therefore *The Professor* has been regarded as her wish-fulfillment. However, a letter in 1846 shows that she had already resigned marriage and had decided to live independent by writing: "it seems that even 'a lone woman' can be happy, as well as cherished wives and proud mothers . . . I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be married women nowadays. . . . [T]here is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly perseveringly" (*Correspondence* 77).

2 On the whole, the male narrator has been criticized as a crucial failure so far. Gilbert and Gubar, for example, assert that "it is understandable that Winifred Gérin, among others, sees the male narrator as 'an intrinsic demerit' in the work: Charlotte Brontë as William Crimsworth certainly lacks the apparent directness and confessional intensity of Charlotte Brontë as Jane Eyre or Charlotte Brontë as Lucy Snow" (315-6). Helen Moglen sees Brontë's use of the male narrator as "the ambivalent attitudes of adolescence" and the "crucial problem" (86-8). However, some critics offer interesting discussions.

For example, Annette Federico explains that "[l]ike everything else, narrative voice corresponds to the cultural needs of Victorian society, and so an age comparatively rich in literary heroines (and in women writers) still finds the masculine voice more representative, and, supposedly, more rational, more 'objective'" (323). According to Ruth Parkin-Gourelas, "he [a male hero] could protect her [a woman writer] from a natural feminine timidity in adopting the 'authoritative' stance" (41).

3 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor,* ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1991). Page references shown in this paper refer to this edition throughout.

4 Brontë was keenly conscious of the double standard in Victorian society. In the letter she wrote to Miss Wooler just before completing *The Professor,* she confesses her resentment: "I think, too, that the mode of bringing them [boys] up is strange: they are not sufficiently guarded from temptation—girls are protected as if they were something very frail or silly indeed, while boys are turned loose on the world as if they—of all beings in existence, were the wisest and least liable to be led astray" (*Correspondence* 77).

5 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor,* ed. M. Smith and H. Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1987). The citation of the abandoned preface is from the appendix of this edition, but this edition is now out of print and all I could obtain was a copy of its appendix.

6 Virginia Woolf stresses that the assault against women enables men to feel superiority:

> Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis, because it was a jewel to him of the rarest price. . . . Hence the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself. (31-32)

7 Phrenology was popular in Victorian England, and Brontë herself once visited a phrenologist in London with George Smith, her publisher: "[A]n expedition with him [Smith] alone [was] to visit a phrenologist in the Strand who

pursued the then fashionable vogue for reading character from the bumps and indentations in the cranium" (Barker 680). According to Sally Shuttleworth, "[b]y 1851 Combe's *Constitution of Man* (published in 1828) [a book on phrenology] had sold 90,000 copies. . . . From the 1820s onwards, phrenology received constant attention in newspapers and the periodical press, both of a supportive and fiercely condemnatory nature" (63). Shuttleworth's argument on phrenology and society is very useful in understanding its importance in the Victorian context.

8 Brontë wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey about her wish to see the world: "such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings; . . . such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to lean" (Gaskell 164).

9 It was Charlotte that suggested using the famous pseudonyms of the Brontë sisters:

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine"—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. (Biographical Notice 362)

E. Showalter points out that there was the sense of guilt for Victorian women writers concerning writing: "In strict evangelical circles, all imaginative literature was suspect, and children were taught that storytelling could lead to untruth and transgressions. The extraordinary number of women writers who were daughters, sisters, or wives of clergymen suggests that women writers would have been especially sensitive to these arguments" (54). Actually, Brontë was the daughter of a clergyman who was influenced by the evangelical movement, and she became the wife of a clergyman who tried to inhibit her from writing. "One of the many indications that this generation [meaning women writers from 1840-1880] saw the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women is the appearance of the male pseudonym"

(Showalter 19). In addition, Brontë was very sensitive about being judged by her female sex, repeatedly asking not to be regarded as a woman writer, and she resented those critics who admired her as a woman. Here is an example from her letters to G. H. Lewes, one of her literary advisors: "I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me" (Gaskell 323). As to the argument between Lewes and Brontë, Gaskell writes:

> The January number of the "Edinburgh Review" had contained the article on "Shirley," of which her [Charlotte's] correspondent, Mr. Lewes, was the writer. . . . [Y]et the headings of the first two pages ran thus: "Mental Equality of the Sexes?" "Female Literature," and through the whole article the fact of the author's sex is never forgotten. . . . "My dear Sir, [Charlotte wrote to him] I will tell you why I was so hurt by that review in the "Edinburgh"; not because its criticism was keen or its blame sometimes severe; not because its praise was stinted (for, indeed, I think you give me quite as much praise as I deserve), but because after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an author, not as a woman, you so roughly—I even thought so cruelly—handled the question of sex. I dare say you meant no harm, and perhaps you will not now be able to understand why I was so grieved at what you will probably deem such a trifle; but grieved I was, and indignant too. (333-34)

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