

HAUNTED DREAMS: RELIGIOUS ANGUISH IN
CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S POETRY

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Abstract


Charlotte Brontë wrote four novels, three of which were published during her lifetime. But she also wrote hundreds of prose tales and poems before embarking on her career as a novelist. Of these early writings, Charlotte only collected and edited nineteen poems for publication in 1846. Many of the remaining manuscripts have been published since her death, but have received little or no critical attention. The poems in particular have been largely ignored.

However, Charlotte's poetry is worthy of closer attention, for it is mainly in her poems that she chronicles the agonizing religious conflicts which had so profound and so far-reaching an effect on her life and her novels. Scholars tend to minimize the significance of Charlotte's religious crisis in 1836, frequently considering it only a symptom of the mental depression brought on by the mundanity and drudgery of teaching at Roe Head school. But Charlotte's life was shattered by her crisis, and although the intensity of her conflicts may have lessened after she returned home, she was never able to repair the damages.


The purpose of this thesis is to trace the development of Charlotte's attitudes towards the supernatural and the imaginary in her poetry. The poems of Charlotte's

adolescence, for example, are characterized by bright dreams and visions, and Christian, mythological, and fairy-tale themes and images are incorporated into the magical fantasy world of Glass Town. Later, maturity and misery bring about a series of upheavals which first sift out the mythological and fairy-tale elements, then separate the Christian from the imaginary, and finally bring those two remaining forces into direct collision with each other. She could not repent of her idolatrous love for her dream world, and was horrified by the prospect of eternal damnation. But the conflict itself rapidly destroyed her dreams, and so she felt herself doomed to a lifetime of misery--unable to seek consolation in either imagination or religion. After the crisis, Charlotte found both her dreams and her Christian faith in ruins, and her final poems are characterized by themes and images of a cold, impassive, and merciless supernatural force. In her novels, Charlotte often recalls the supernatural and fantastic themes and images which abound in her poems, and a fuller understanding of the poems gives the reader greater insight into the novels.


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Introduction

To the general public, Charlotte Brontë is known largely as the author of that delightful gothic love story, Jane Eyre. Critics and biographers usually extend their attentions to all four of Charlotte's novels, and although The Professor and Shirley are often considered to be less successful works, Villette (Charlotte's final novel) is esteemed at least as much, if not more than Jane Eyre. The juvenilia, however, particularly the poetry, has been sadly neglected. Recently, scholars such as Christine Alexander have shown that these early writings are worthy of much closer attention. But even in their studies, the emphasis is on the prose writings; poems are mentioned only occasionally to illustrate or elaborate a point.

However, Charlotte's poems can and in fact should be viewed both as entities in their own right and as parts of a body of poetry separate from her prose writings. In the first place, Charlotte's prose writings contain very little of that intensely personal self-examination which we find in many of her poems, especially after 1835. Furthermore, poems can be not only personal but also private, as in fact many of Charlotte's were. Letters can express and to some extent explore problems with which the author is struggling,

but they are limiting because the author is always conscious that she will be judged by the reader. Finally, we must take into account the significance that Charlotte herself placed on poetry. In the early nineteenth century, the novel had still not attained the respectability of poetry as an art form, and from her earliest works it is clear that Charlotte aspired to be not merely a writer but a poet (see, for instance, "THE VIOLET"). She collected her poems in "volumes," and her first published works were poems. The fact that she was successful only as a novelist should not blind us to her poetic ambitions.

One of the main reasons for the lack of attention to Charlotte's juvenilia has been the lack of complete and reliable texts. At various times during her teens and early twenties, Charlotte wrote prolifically in both prose and verse. However, of the hundreds of manuscript pages she amassed over the years prior to the publication of Jane Eyre, she collected and prepared only nineteen poems for publication in 1846. The manuscripts for the vast remainder of her writings have, since her death, been broken up and scattered through an alarming number of collections and libraries in various countries, posing a staggering task for the would-be editor. The difficulties of collecting and editing Charlotte's juvenilia are further increased by the physical form of the manuscripts, which often consist of tiny sheets of paper covered with miniscule and, at best,

barely-legible printing--obscured or even obliterated at times by blots and emendations. These problems, coupled with the less-than-respectable practices of early collectors and editors, have resulted in a proliferation of incomplete and seriously inaccurate texts.¹

Fortunately, Brontë scholars can look forward to a much-improved state of affairs in the future. Christine Alexander is presently working on a complete edition of Charlotte's juvenilia, and Victor Neufeldt's recent edition of Charlotte's poetry provides texts of the poems which are as complete and reliable as is currently possible, given that some manuscripts have been lost and others, such as those believed to be in the possession of the Law family, are unavailable for examination and transcription. The problem of accessibility to Charlotte's early writings will, therefore, soon be much alleviated.

Of course, critics and biographers will for the most part continue to focus their attentions on Charlotte's novels, for they are her best and most significant works. The juvenilia, however, should not be ignored. We cannot separate the novels Charlotte wrote in her thirties from her earlier writings any more than we can separate the woman from her childhood and adolescence. The world of Glass Town and Angria seems far removed from the world of Jane Eyre, yet Charlotte's rejection of the fantastic in favour of the realistic is itself significant, and we must

be familiar with both worlds in order to understand fully the sense of realism she felt her novels should reflect:

I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs As Adam's son he should share Adam's doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment.²

In the first chapter of Shirley, Charlotte rejects "sentiment, and poetry, and reverie . . . [and] passion, and stimulus, and melodrama": "Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you."³

Scholars with fixed interests often fail to appreciate some of the complexities of Charlotte's fictional world. Her handling of sexuality, for example, is much oversimplified. On the one hand, we have critics of the psychoanalytic school such as Margaret Blom who is mainly interested in collecting evidence of "the fatal power of sexual desire."⁴ On the other hand, we find the more common stance, expressed here by Valentine Cunningham: "The Brontës' novels . . . are empty of real physicality; their dominant feeling is yearning for fulfilment, based on the authoresses' profound sexual innocence."⁵ Blom's pre-occupation with sexual themes seems to blind her to the significance of religion in Charlotte's rejection of her "fictional world" in 1839: "At the age of twenty-three, Charlotte consciously severed relations with this fictional world, because she had come to feel that the mental activity which produced it was

dangerously seductive."⁶ Such purely psychological interpretations would have been meaningless to Charlotte, for nowhere in the id-ego-superego "trinity" is there room for an immortal soul, and the terrors of eternal damnation were clearly instrumental in Charlotte's rejection of her fantasy world. But Cunningham's assertion of the Brontës' "profound sexual innocence" is equally unacceptable, for it fails to account for the obvious sexual promiscuity of characters such as Zamorna and Mr. Rochester. Charlotte is certainly more interested in love than in lust, but also insists on a relationship between sex and love. Jane Eyre, for example, recoils at the thought of marrying St. John Rivers and enduring "all the forms of love" with a man who did not love her.⁷

Sexuality, however, is only one issue; Charlotte's religious conflicts also had profound and far-reaching effects on both her life and her writings. Symptoms of a serious religious crisis appear throughout Charlotte's letters and poems of 1836, but scholars often tend to minimize their significance. Fannie Ratchford's The Brontës' Web of Childhood (1941) is still one of the best of the few studies that exist on the juvenilia. In her analysis of Charlotte's rejection of her fantasy world, however, Ratchford tends to over-simplify both the problem and the "antidote": "As an antidote against the blissful, but soul-destroying poison of her imagination, Charlotte sought the

comforts of religion and friendship."⁸ Winifred G erin (the most respectable of the Bront  biographers) is aware that the "comforts" of Ellen Nussey's friendship were in fact more harmful than helpful, but she seems not to recognize the full extent and impact of Charlotte's religious crisis, considering it only a symptom of the mental depression brought on by the mundanity and drudgery of teaching at Roe Head: "Charlotte's mental sufferings produced their own reaction: she revolted fiercely against the very tenets she sought to accept. . . . The rebellious feelings . . . were prompted by much that had nothing to do with religion."⁹ G erin, like most other writers, bases her judgments almost entirely on Charlotte's correspondence, prose tales, and the Roe Head journal. She refers briefly (and in no great depth) to poems such as "We wove a web in childhood" and to the poem Charlotte wrote in 1831 detailing her farewell to Glass Town, but never mentions the anguished poems of 1836 in which Charlotte examines her dilemma. Of course, texts for some of those poems were not available to G erin; the others, one must assume, she simply ignored.

Christine Alexander's recent discussions of "We wove a web" and one of those 1836 poems are thoughtful and accurate, but unfortunately all too brief. In her study, The Early Writings of Charlotte Bront  (1983), Alexander is mainly concerned with setting out clearly and chronologically the development of the Glass Town/Angrian saga: its characters

and their relationships, and the atmosphere and events of those imaginary lands. And she accomplishes her task very well, blending fictional with biographical details, and prose tales with correspondence and poetry. But again, the poems serve for the most part only as illustrations or "gap-fillers" in the fictional saga. The format of Alexander's work prevents her from viewing the poems as entities in their own right--part of a larger body of poetic works often separated by Charlotte from her prose tales--and therefore also prevents her from noting the development and the far-reaching effects of the religious conflicts which Charlotte chronicles in her poems. Like most other writers, Alexander assumes that "The . . . conflict, although it lessened in intensity after 1836, was only to be resolved by her [Charlotte's] departure from school in May 1838."¹⁰ In fact, the conflicts were never fully resolved. Charlotte's world was shattered by her religious crisis, and although the intensity of her conflicts may have lessened, she was never able to repair the damages. Gérin's references to Charlotte's post-crisis "Recaptured tranquillity" and "strong undemonstrative faith"¹¹ are not supported by the poems.

In discussing Charlotte's crisis, many writers have justifiably noted the paramount importance of "Duty." Yet few have recognized the full significance of the term. For Charlotte, Duty ("to the grand end of doing good")¹² was not only a social but a religious fact of life. The two concepts

were inseparable: a failure to perform one's duty in this world was a failure in one's duty to God. Roe Head, the school where she earned a living by teaching, represented one aspect of such duty for Charlotte. But the misery of her existence there, which drove her more and more to her imaginative world for comfort, forced her to face the question of her religious duty: she could neither give up her attachment to the increasingly immoral inhabitants of her imaginary world, nor could she repent of the idolatrous love she bestowed upon them. Charlotte was therefore turning her back on both her social and religious beliefs, and herein lies the root of her crisis. Moreover, since she had in childhood conflated Christianity, Greek and Roman mythology, and fairy tales with her own magical imaginary realm, she could not destroy the latter without seriously damaging her faith in Christianity. That "strong undemonstrative faith" which Gérin sees as having carried Charlotte through the tragedies of her later life was at best very precarious, as her final poems demonstrate.

It is not my purpose in this thesis, however, to argue against particular stances adopted by Brontë scholars. During my early readings of Charlotte's poems, I was intrigued by the successive changes that occurred in her supernatural and fantastic themes and imagery. The poems of Charlotte's adolescence, for example, incorporate dreams and visions of a bright, beautiful, harmonious higher reality

unhampered by ties to any particular supernatural force. Many of those poems relate to Glass Town, a fantasy land which represented all the joys, wonders, and exciting adventures the Brontë children could imagine--a land created before sin or responsibility became meaningful concepts. Charlotte's first sojourn at Roe Head school as a student made her aware that she was no longer a child and must begin to face the responsibilities and necessities of adulthood. The upheaval made her melancholy and uncertain, but did not at that time seriously unbalance her world or alter her attitude towards either the supernatural or the fantastic.

In 1835, however, Charlotte returned to Roe Head as a teacher, and this time the upheaval was devastating. She hated teaching, but felt she could not avoid her duty, and as the theme of idolatry made its first tentative appearances, her supernatural imagery became confused and equivocal. 1836 was a turning point for Charlotte. She could no longer avoid the knowledge that her attachment to her imaginary world was dragging her deeper into the mortal sin of idolatry. She was haunted both by her fantasy world and by her fears of damnation. At this point the equivocation vanishes--her poems are overwhelmingly characterized by despair, anguish, and bitterly reckless blasphemies. As the crisis faded, Charlotte's dreams became more and more hollow. Guilt destroyed the solace that her fantasies had brought, and in 1839 she rejected them. But what remained of her Christian

faith gave her little consolation. In her final poems, the supernatural forces are cold, impassive, and merciless. Hence, by tracing the development of Charlotte's attitudes towards the supernatural and the imaginary in her poems, we can gain new insights into the spiritual conflicts which plagued her for many years. Technically, Charlotte may not have been a great poet, but since many of her poetic themes and images recur in her novels, those poems deserve closer attention than they have so far received.

Chapter One: Bright Dreams (1829-33)

Born in April 1816, Charlotte was just thirteen years old when she began writing poetry (and fiction) in earnest. Between July 1829 and December 1830, she composed no less than 61 poems, totalling over 2,700 lines. Life favoured Charlotte during those seventeen months: time had eased the painful memories of the deaths of her mother (in 1821) and two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth (in 1825); youth gave her energy, optimism, and freedom from responsibility; and nature had blessed her with creative powers more than capable of compensating for the deficiencies of reality. Indeed, all four Brontë children (Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne) were gifted with extraordinarily vivid imaginations: as Fannie Ratchford so appropriately expresses it, they were "possessed of an Aladdin's lamp through whose magic power they transcended time and distance, walked with kings, and swayed the destiny of a mighty empire."¹

The image is most fitting, for the children were obviously much influenced by the Arabian Nights and, like Aladdin's lamp, their imaginations could conjure up magical beings, places, and events at will. By July 1829, when Charlotte started writing of it, the "great Glass Town" was already well-established.² A few years hence, Charlotte and

Branwell would move on and develop the more complex "mighty empire" of Angria, but for now the simple childhood joys of Glass Town absorbed and enthralled them. Most of Charlotte's earliest poetry is, either directly or indirectly, related to Glass Town: many poems are "signed" by the Marquis of Douro or Lord Charles Wellesley, sons of the Duke of Wellington (Charlotte's first Glass Town hero--based on the real Duke), and the unidentified narrators of other poems may well be Glass Town characters.

Glass Town was a fantasy land, where anything was possible and the limitations of realism were irrelevant. It was basically amoral. Terrible things did happen there, but natural law ruled: the lion may kill the lamb, but we can weep for the lamb while still admiring the power and grace of the lion. This is the consciousness of childhood. All is bright. All is beautiful. And since in the world of the imagination all things can co-exist, then all is balanced. Universal harmony is not so much an ideal as a reality that waits only to be discovered. Glass Town may have been imaginary, but to the Brontë children it was not unreal, merely another kind of reality.

I. All Things Bright and Beautiful (1829-30)

ALL things bright and beautiful,
 All creatures great and small,
 All things wise and wonderful--
 The Lord God made them all.³

Perhaps the first thing one notices in Charlotte's early poems, however, is the brightness. Enthusiasm, optimism, a love of beauty, and the influence of the exotic imagery in works such as the Arabian Nights prompt Charlotte to indulge herself freely in "sparkling" language. In the following lines, from one of her earliest poems, joy and beauty are expressed in terms of light and colour:

1

tis sunset & the golden orb
has sunk behind the mountains far
& rises now the silver moon
& sparkles bright the evening star

2

but in the west an crimson light
above the horizon glows
tinting all nature with the bright
gay colours of the rose⁴

Sun, moon, and stars are frequently sources of joy and beauty, but Charlotte is equally entranced by the exotic sparkle of gemstones:

3 when the blue concave of the sky
is clear without a stain
& the bright arch of heaven on high
imparts to the wide main

4 its beautiful & saphire glow
while the suns golden light
makes all the western sky to flow
with streams like ruby bright

. . .

6 while mur'm'ring sounds of pomp & mirth
rise from the mighty walls
& wildly mingleing sweep forth
like thundring waterfalls

(No. 13, ll. 9-16, 21-24)

The "thundring waterfalls" of sound are by no means out of place here for they represent the intensity of the speaker's feelings. Charlotte is often forced to incorporate thunder and lightning and images of stormy seas to indicate the emotional heights she has reached. Similarly, the "gentle strains" of the flute mingle with the "sounding harp string," "merry bells," "ringing trumpets," and "thundring drum" (No. 15, ll. 1-16), producing not a cacophony, but the alternately sweet and then thunderous harmonies of a symphony.

Beauty and joy are not, however, Charlotte's only themes. She has a variety of narrative masks, each of which provides her with new eyes and a new voice. Although most of the early poems are joyful, Charlotte occasionally dons a melancholy mask in order to explore the thrills of gothic gloom:

Among those [tombs and gravemounds] there stood a figure
 Clothed in deep mourning from whose dark eye beamed
 The sad and wild light of insanity
 And as she stood she poured a thrilling strain
 Which echoed mid the churchyard from whose walls
 A soft response came forth . . . (No. 19, ll. 25-30)

Charlotte may, as she wrote, have recalled thoughts of her dead sisters ("I know my sister thou art gone," l. 31), and the gothic tone may again indicate a need to express intense emotion, but "The Churchyard"--with its romantic atmosphere of "British chivalry" (l. 16) and its ethereal, "slow and noiseless" (l. 56), insane heroine--seems to belong more to the world of fantasy than to the world of reality.

Two other Glass Town characters, Young Soult and Lord Charles Wellesley, allow Charlotte to view those "Churchyard" sentiments in a different light. Lord Charles, younger brother of the Marquis of Douro, is the voice of the cynic. He is clearly unimpressed by sorrow's "dismal howls . . . Her long black funeral array / Her veil which shuts out light & day":

I wish some eve as thus she's weeping

From out its grave a ghost woul[d] start
 And make her throat receive her heart
 And give her sore affright

Or catch her by the long black gown
 No matter how the lady screams
 Into the damp vault drag her down
 Where sun or moonlight never beams

(No. 42, ll. 1-20)

Here we see evidence of another kind of brightness--the sparkle of wit and laughter. In the real world of the parsonage, Charlotte's talent for gleefully cutting sarcasm would likely have been much restricted, but in her imaginary world there are no such boundaries and Lord Charles may speak as Charlotte wishes.

Glass Town does have rules of behaviour, however, as we see when Charlotte "borrows" the mask of Young Soult from Branwell (whose pseudonym it was). Young Soult had a penchant for sentimental effusions. He was (in Charlotte's mind, at least) given to unwarranted emotional outbursts and fainting fits. He was, in a word, undignified, as we

see in the following hilarious excerpt recording his process of composition:

Silver moon how sweet thou shinest
 In the midnigh[t] sky
 Hollow wind how wild thou whinest
 Through the vault on high

Very pretty especially the third
 line I declare (writes again
 seems puzzled--reads) -----

The heavens how beautiful they are
 Majestically dark
 They are bedecked with many a star

Oh! dear (I can't get on--
 (stamps & seems in a passion)
 shark--clark bark stark--
 mark lark. Ah that'll do
 (writes again. then reads)

Fit sojourn for the lark. (No. 36, ll. 1-16)

Possibly, Charlotte is to some extent satirizing her own tendency to overindulge her emotions; more probably, however, she is drawing a line between emotion for its own sake and emotion which, though it may only be imagined, is nonetheless sincere.

But the potentially contradictory nature of the emotional themes with which she experiments poses no difficulties for Charlotte. She perceives the universe as a harmonious unity in which paradox is not in itself a problem; the problem is discovering how the opposing forces fit into the balanced whole. In the poems I have discussed so far, Charlotte is clearly concerned only with the particular emotion at hand. Others, however, reveal her search for emotional unity, for

a state in which the various alternating moods of the symphony are refined to a point where they may be played in one harmonious chord: the serene beauty of the sunset mingling with the powerful grandeur of the thunderstorm, producing a pure and elevating, but no less intense, experience. The heart alone, however, is incapable of effecting this transformation; the action of the mind (reason, intellect, discernment) is needed to sort, judge, combine, and balance the heart's various experiences. As we will see, although Charlotte may seek to restrain her more exuberant emotions, she never for a moment (during this period, at least) considers exchanging her warm heart for cool rationality. Neither must have mastery; they must work together, informing each other to create experiences more noble and more fulfilling than either could produce alone.

The Marquis of Douro, the dashing young gallant who soon ousted his father in Charlotte's affections, is often her eyes and voice in those more introspective poems. In "THE EVENING WALK" (No. 34), for instance, the search for emotional fulfilment is discussed in pastoral imagery. As Douro walks, he notices the different moods of nature: the unrestrained wildness of the "impetuous flood" (l. 78) and dark primeval forest inhabited by "loathsome creature[s]" (l. 104) on the one hand, and the serene beauty of the "flowry plain" inhabited only by "the sk[y]lark" (ll. 105-06) on the other. "The quiet moon" rises, bathing "hills & tree's . . . With

floods of glory" (ll. 115, 121-22), and Douro stumbles upon "a haunted dell" (l. 132) whose "bottom" is not quite "peirced" by the "fair moons silver light" (ll. 141-44). Although he cannot see them, Douro knows that fairies and elves are in the dell, for he hears their music. Charlotte's desire to find that single harmonious chord is evident in this section: the music blends "sweetly" (l. 152), it is a "superhuman song / Pensive as a wind-harp's wail" (ll. 154-55, my emphasis), a "harmony . . . unseen" (l. 159), and it mingles with "the breeze" (l. 167). The song which the elves sing (ll. 169-96) combines "the music of the night-bird" with the "howling . . . [of the] wild winds" (ll. 179-80). Because it is a song, the sweet music mingling with the breeze is able to unite harmoniously the otherwise discordant moods which are its themes. In the ensuing silence and calm, Douro finally, "by light moon beams," sees the fairies as they "swiftly rose on high / Then slowly disappeared / And melted in the sky" (ll. 199, 203-05), providing a visual image of harmony with the elements. Charlotte must have suspected that the tumult would always lurk in the background, like "the Lion . . . In forest den couching till close of day" (ll. 227-28), and that complete restraint would be impossible. Nevertheless, a continuous effort is necessary, for the "raving" of the rushing waters which can "Ne'er in fixed calm . . . bask" (ll. 241, 251) is clearly undesirable.

"THE EVENING WALK" is a confusing poem because Charlotte seems unable to manipulate her imagery successfully. At only two points in the poem does she attain harmony: once when Douro stands in the moonlight to listen to the harmonious music of the fairies and elves, and again when nature becomes "Meek" (l. 120) and her two opposing moods seem reconciled and united by the "one continuous sheet" of moonlight (l. 118). For the most part, wildness and serenity--though possessing inner harmony--remain separate, as we see at the end of the poem when Douro contemplates the "loud harmony" of the "awful billows heaving" (ll. 270, 269). By then, "the lovely moon" had "veiled her beauteous head" (ll. 273, 276), and--although Douro had just been musing upon silence and noise, stillness and motion--without the moonlight, he could find no way to bring them together. The moon and stars guide him: he "reads" them, "Like wand'rer on the main" (l. 213). To some extent, then, we can see the moon as the muse or the poetic imagination which inspires Douro with those two images of harmony: "Meek nature" and the elves' song. When the moon disappears, Douro's musings and the poem both end.

Eventually, Charlotte seems to realize that she can use the moon as a unifying force, and in later years it becomes her favourite symbol of harmony. In "MORNING BY MARQUIS DOURO" (No. 40), Douro contemplates the beauties of evening when the "pensive strain" of "the night-bird singing lone"

(ll. 33, 30) is regarded lovingly by "silver-robed Luna" (l. 37), and music and moonlight seem the interlinked expression of the mystical music of the spheres, "Music not unfit for heaven / But to earth in mercy given" (ll. 47-48). Birdsong and moonlight seem to inform each other, and the harmony-inducing interaction of heart and mind are evident in the poem's closing lines:

Thou dost charm the mourner[s] heart
 Thou dost pensive joy impart
 Peerless Queen of harmony
 How I love thy melody

(ll. 49-52)

The grammatical antecedent of "Thou" is "the minstrel" (l. 43), but since her music has been given to her by heaven, it is safe to assume that Luna--who looks down from "the heavens on high" (l. 38) with such interest--was much involved with the gift. Again, Charlotte seems to cast the moon in the role of "inspirer."

The harmonious emotional chord, then, seems always linked with the supernatural: nature and birdsong can aspire to it in the moonlight, and the fairies (with whom the moon is also linked) can express it in their music. We must be very careful, however, when dealing with Charlotte's supernatural themes and images. Knowing her background as the daughter of a clergyman, we may be tempted to assign Christian interpretations to her supernatural references. This would, in most cases, be a mistake. Distinctions between reality, fantasy, and the supernatural are not very

important to Charlotte at this time. Glass Town itself was a fantasy, but its lands and people were no less real to her than Yorkshire's. The fairies and elves in "THE EVENING WALK" were not fantasy figures, but representatives of a higher reality which could under certain conditions exist on earth. (In Shirley, for example, the fairies can only exist in pre-industrial England.)⁵ The supernatural and the fantastic have much more immediacy and reality to the innocent child's mind than to the more experienced adult's simply because the child has less need to make distinctions between what is possible and what is not, and to Charlotte distinctions between various kinds of supernatural manifestation are quite insignificant: God or gods, angels or fairies, miracles or magic are merely different names for the same things.

Charlotte, with her strong emotions, vivid imagination, and need to reach out towards some higher, more serene and harmonious reality, was entranced by the supernatural in all its manifestations. One or two poems, however, have definite Christian overtones. "HARVEST IN SPAIN" (No. 16), for example, an early experiment in blank verse, refers specifically to God, so it is possible that in the following excerpt Charlotte is consciously using the sun as a metaphor for Christ, the "Son" of God:

. . . the great glorious sun which shines on high
 In bright & burning strength casting its rays
 to the far corners of the mighty land

enlightning & illuminating all
 making it glow with beauty and with joy
 & raising songs of gladness and of praise
 To God the Father & the king of all (ll. 15-21)

The phrase "enlightning & illuminating," in particular, suggests that Charlotte intended to convey a sense of spiritual as well as physical light.

In many other poems, Charlotte uses an image of the sun in what seems to be a very similar context: it is a glorious entity in whose presence nature "Calls on all things to rejoice" (No. 40, l.20). But in these poems, there is little basis for assuming any Christian metaphor since the sun is quite specifically "Apollo's burnished car" (No. 40, l. 5; also Nos. 19, 34, 42, 46, 60), or on one occasion, "Aurora in crimson robes" (No. 40, l. 3). While artists have been known to use mythological figures as metaphors for Christian counterparts, I feel we cannot make such assumptions here: throughout the poems of 1829 and 1830, Charlotte clearly and overwhelmingly prefers magical imagery, visions, dreams, fairies, and mythological figures to anything Christianity has to offer (except perhaps the poetry of the psalms and the rousing language of the Book of Revelation). Charlotte may have been raised in a pious atmosphere, but the Reverend Brontë's religion was always balanced by the maid Tabitha's fairy tales, and the Bible by the Arabian Nights, so it is not surprising that Charlotte had as yet no idea that--in nineteenth-century England, at least--God and gods, angels

and fairies, miracles and magic were not equally acceptable. It may well have been the strong Miltonic influence in "HARVEST IN SPAIN" which prompted Charlotte to assign the supernatural agency to the Christian God; however, for the most part during this period, she rarely makes overt Christian references, and when she does they seem not so much evidence of the notion that God is the Creator and centre of all harmony, as merely convenient metaphors for anything which passes "the bound of Nature's law" (No. 28, l. 39). "The Lord God made them all" would have held no special meaning for Charlotte. The child's mind is, after all, essentially pagan and amoral; discrimination comes only with understanding.

Balance and harmony, therefore, particularly between heaven and earth, are basic assumptions; the only problem is how to articulate what is known to exist. Moonlight and fairies are one solution for, as I have already pointed out, they seem able to act as intermediaries between nature and supernature (the higher, inherently harmonious reality). Another solution is the tower of all nations (in Glass Town) which seems to form a bridge between earth and the heavens:

thou seeme'st as silently I gaze
a pillar of the sky

the dome of heaven is oer thee
hung with it's silver star's
the earth is round about the[e]
with it's eternal bars. (No. 10, ll. 5-6, 9-12)

Pastoral imagery is another possibility. Charlotte experienced difficulties with it in "THE EVENING WALK" but is more successful in this very simple image:

The Willow waving o'er my head
 Waves also neath my feet
 Reflected in the rivers bed
 The heavens & branches meet. (No. 33, ll. 21-24)

The water seems to "reflect" images of a basic, universal truth: heaven and earth (silence and noise, stillness and motion) can meet if one only views them in the right way.

Finally, we must note one most interesting way in which Charlotte conflates her various worlds. Approximately two-thirds of the 61 poems she wrote during these seventeen months are composed in quatrains, and most can be sung to the tune of "All things bright and beautiful." Charlotte would have been very familiar with hymns of that structural type, and since many of her poems were intended to be songs (No. 2, for example, is sung by fairies and elves), the implication is obvious: these are Glass Town's hymns. In some poems, the hymn-like quality is further emphasized by Charlotte's use of archaisms: "hath not been seen" (No. 2, l. 4), "heark unto that trumpet swell / which soundeth" (No. 6, ll. 13-14), and "O thou great thou mighty tower . . . thou seeme'st" (No. 10, ll. 1, 5). Doubtless, Charlotte would have come across such word-forms in Shakespeare, but the language also has a strong Scriptural flavour of which she must have been aware. Possibly, she did not deliberately

set out to compose hymns for Glass Town based on those she sang in church. Unconsciously, however, she seems to have incorporated language, structure and imagery from Christian sources into the "scriptures" she (with the aid of the geni --Glass Town's "gods") wrote for the land which seemed to embrace every kind of "heaven" she could imagine.

Two poems written late in 1830 draw together and, to some extent, clarify many of the themes and images with which Charlotte had been involved during this period. "THE VIOLET BY CHARLOTTE" (No. 51) and "Reflections on the fate of neglected Genius" (No. 56) are both contained in a "volume" of poems ascribed to the Marquis of Douro. They are, therefore, Glass Town poems, but they are also personal works in which Charlotte explores the nature of poetic power, and confesses that, "Thoug[h] humble be my destined place," she still aspires to be "one of that bright band" of immortal poets (No. 51, ll. 120, 173).

I have already discussed the importance of nature to Charlotte--both as a source of beauty and as a metaphorical vehicle for discussing moods--so it is fitting that "THE VIOLET" should open with a sunset scene which is at once both literal and figurative. The vivid physical description of that "desert vast" (l. 9) provides a concrete basis for the action which occurs at the end. The lifelessness of this landscape, however, also reflects poetic infertility. The glorious tragic poets of ancient Greece and Rome are

long gone, and the speaker laments Greece's loss of glory: "Now desolate by time decayed / Thy solemn temples mouldring lye" (ll. 61-62). But all is not lost, for the muses who forsook Parnassus, "now in fair Britania shine" (l. 72). Strongly influenced, no doubt, by the eighteenth-century neoclassicists, Charlotte ascribes the greatness of British poets to their classical studies: "For deeply of the fount they drank / The sacred fount of Helicon" (ll. 111-12).

Poetic infertility is experienced not only by Greece, however, but also by the speaker. Possessing some talent, but lacking the power to use it, she (or he) prays to the "Mighty Mother" (l. 123): "Nature unveil they awful face / To me a poets pow'r impart" (ll. 118-19). The prayer is granted, "(But dim thy beam & faint thy ray)" (l. 178), and a token given--the violet, symbol of new fertility in both the poet and the landscape. Charlotte has obviously improved greatly in the seventeen months since those earliest naive efforts, for in completing so effectively the image she introduced almost two hundred lines earlier, she proves that "THE VIOLET" is indeed a symbol of her poetic power.

In "Reflections on the fate of neglected Genius" (No. 56), we find something rather different. The poem is, in both its structure and thematic development, somewhat vague and erratic, and it lacks the concrete setting and narrative completeness that make "THE VIOLET" so effective. Charlotte is apparently trying to come to terms with the nature of

"heaven," and "celestial." But during this early period, Charlotte almost invariably uses the word "heaven" only in its secular sense of "sky." Furthermore, those "other, mightier worlds" are clearly plural, while the Christian Heaven is singular. The notion of divine inspiration is certainly not antithetical to Christianity, as any reader of metaphysical poetry will know, but the "radiant light" (l. 12) of inspiration here does not come from God; it comes from "Genius." And who, or what, is "Genius"? Is it Mighty Mother Nature who tendered the gift of poetry in "THE VIOLET"? Is it the muse? Or is it "A spiritual essence pure divine" which is "enshrined" only in the hearts of poets (ll. 31-32)? The vagueness suggests that Charlotte is struggling to explore the undefinable, and it seems clear that in this, as in other 1829-30 poems, she uses supernatural imagery and themes mainly as vehicles for exploring extraordinary experiences and intellectual mysteries.

II. The First Farewell (1831-33)

In January 1831, Charlotte was sent away to Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, where (except for brief holidays) she remained until July 1832. She was not happy there. Although academically successful, she was a shy girl, unused to strangers and the constant grind of school discipline. This was not the first time Charlotte had left home for

boarding school, and her earlier experience had been a most painful one: when Charlotte was eight, she, Emily, Maria, and Elizabeth had been sent to the Clergy Daughters' school at Cowan Bridge, and it was there that the two elder girls contracted the illnesses from which they died shortly after returning home. At Roe Head school, lonely for home and family, and unable to forget that first unhappy experience, Charlotte lost her creative energy completely and, during her eighteen months as a student, wrote only three poems--two of those while at home for the Christmas holidays. At fifteen, Charlotte seems to have regarded Roe Head as marking the end of her childhood, so it is not surprising that over the Christmas holidays of 1831 she, her brother and sisters should have decided to give up their imaginary world. Charlotte seems to have mourned deeply the childhood innocence she was losing, and from 1831-33 her poems reflect this sense of loss. Although she continues to experiment with new forms for her poetry, she avoids that loose, irregular structure of, for instance, "THE EVENING WALK." Roe Head seems to have, if not destroyed, at least disrupted her happiness, peace, security, and balance, and the disruption makes her more uncertain and insecure. The tighter forms of her poems no doubt reflect her need to re-establish order and control. Charlotte at thirteen perceived the world as a place of wonders waiting to be discovered, explored, and enjoyed; at fifteen, she finds it less attractive and is not

so eager to rush forward into adulthood.

The poem detailing her first farewell to Glass Town (No. 63), for example, is most revealing. By Christmas 1831, Emily and Anne had already established a new imaginary land (Gondal) of their own, and Charlotte knew she would have to return to Roe Head after the holidays, so the family ties which had bound Glass Town together were disrupted. Thus, one might think that this would have been a logical point in Charlotte's life for her to bid a final farewell to those childhood games, but in fact the farewell is short-lived. Life provided her with no other vehicle for emotional or intellectual fulfilment, so she had nothing with which to fill the void left by Glass Town's dissolution.

For a while, she seems to view the farewell in a romantic, fictional light: this is merely one more episode in the unfolding story. But it is nonetheless a sad episode. The genii, magical rulers and protectors of Glass Town, "melted away like a dream of the night" (No. 63, l. 49), and the image suggests that the disruptions had seriously unbalanced Charlotte's world, reducing the hitherto very real land to the status of a mere dream. Upon awakening to adult realities and responsibilities, she discovers that her genii palace (home of her childhood realities) has "evanished in oceans of light" (l. 50), and she is left viewing a scene of utter desolation:

. . . the city lay silent & calm

bright city farewell" (l. 56) may be Charlotte's. Furthermore, at line 63, one feels that the "dreadfulness" of the desolation had suddenly broken upon her as she wrote, for she seems to panic and drop her narrative voice completely to bewail her loss: "The silence is dreadful. O city arise!" Although she attempts to echo Revelation and Exodus, the poem concludes with no offer of a "promised land" to come. In fact, Glass Town and its beauties are not destroyed; the only difference is that "The living are not there" (l. 84).

Two weeks later, Glass Town is still empty, but not deserted, for Charlotte returns for another, more regretful look. The wonders of the city are painted vividly--its beauties listed with an almost desperate energy. But all is "in vain" (No. 64, ll. 37-49, *passim*): "Mankind is dominionless portionless there" (ll. 50, 56). Yet seven months later, Charlotte is writing in both prose and verse of the marriage of Marian Hume and the Marquis of Douro. The farewell might never have been. The destruction of Glass Town had been an onstage event, but its revival takes place offstage: no manuscript, in either prose or verse, records any magical occurrence in which "The living" were restored to their land. The farewell was a fictional event; the revival, personal. Charlotte may have been unwilling or afraid to examine too closely her reasons for re-establishing the fantasy world: at sixteen, she must have been aware, at least to some extent,

that she could not hide from her adult responsibilities indefinitely.

Unfortunately, the restored Glass Town, like Charlotte's own life, is no longer quite what it was. She may try to ignore the disruption, but it has left its mark. Neither Haworth nor Glass Town seems so comfortable anymore. Charlotte's mood in the 1829-30 poems had ranged from that somewhat naively expressed joyful enthusiasm, to the more serene "pensive joy," sometimes sidestepping into satire, but only occasionally drooping to melancholy; between 1831 and 1833, she rarely composes a cheerful poem. Of the 26 poems (totalling less than 1,500 lines) that she writes during these three years, perhaps eight could be considered happy. Several others have happy endings, but they are basically sad, and the sudden resolution of difficulties in the last few lines often seems desperate and contrived. Overwhelmingly, the mood is melancholy, frequently sinking to desolate, and sadness is the rule rather than the exception.

The subject matter, of course, reflects the writer's mood, and themes of exile and desertion are common. Most of the 1831-33 poems are part of prose tales, and we often find women singing of lost lovers. One such female struggles against despair, but concludes, "Methought I heard the night wind breathe / That solemn word farewell" (No. 66, ll. 39-40). Charlotte's farewell to Glass Town echoes in these lines. There too we heard "The breath of the night-wind" as it

sighed and mourned (No. 63, ll. 52-53). The beloved, however, is rarely blamed for the misery his absence causes; responsibility seems to lie with "The voice of destiny" (No. 66, l. 10). Very probably, Charlotte holds this same vague but inexorable destiny responsible for her own misery, and she often seems to hide her sadness behind the fictional feelings of her characters. In "Lines on the Celebrated Bewick" (No. 68), a personal poem, she notes that "some pensive tears" are "soon . . . wiped away" (ll. 40-41), and sadness is buried as she turns "With fresh delight, to the enchanted page" with its "pictured thoughts that breathe and speak and burn" (ll. 42-43). One senses here that art has the power to comfort, and no doubt Charlotte was using her own art for the same purpose.

Under such circumstances, the theme of exile is an obvious one for her, since she had herself been "exiled" from home. In "St. John in the Island of Patmos" (No. 67), she notes in the very first line that he is a "holy exile . . . all desolate" (l. 1). "The Swiss Emigrant's Return" (No. 76) is basically a happy poem for the exile has been permitted to return home. Charlotte wrote this one in 1833, after she too had returned home, and it is likely her own homesickness that is expressed in the opening two lines: "Long I have sighed for my home in the mountain / Far have I wandered & sadly I've wept" (ll.1-2). Similarly, it is noteworthy that in writing of Richard the Lionheart in

"Richard Cour de Lion & Blondel" (No. 87), her final poem of 1833, she should choose his "exiled" imprisonment as her theme.

But by far the most prominent theme is death. It turned up in some of the earlier poems, such as "The Churchyard," but only rarely--Charlotte's main interest then was life. Now, although we sense that it is still a little distant and fictionalized, death seems to have become one of Charlotte's main pre-occupations (one might almost say that she seems obsessed with it). In no less than nine of those 26 poems, death plays a major role, and is a sub-theme in many others. I have already mentioned the "Lines on the Celebrated Bewick," a man whom Charlotte obviously esteemed, and who had died some four years previously. Only now, however, does Charlotte decide to say "Farewell Bewick genius" favoured son" (No. 68, l. 77). Another poem deals with the Marquis of Douro's visit to the grave of Justine, his childhood nurse. But Justine's death is not recent either: "O long & still hath been thy sleep beneath that grassy grave / Years have rolled on" (No. 71, ll. 9-10). "Lines written beside a fountain in the ground's of York Villa" (No. 83) is narrated by Douro, who ends with a death-wish: "by this lonely fount . . . / I would amid untroubled silence die" (ll. 25-26). And an earlier poem bewails Douro's murder: "Sound a lament in the halls of his father . . . Damp lies his corpse in the folds of the shroud" (No.

79, ll. 1,5). (Douro's death, like Glass Town's, does not last long; he, however, is revived onstage by the genii.) Death seems to pervade Charlotte's poetry now, and no doubt symbolizes in part her lost innocence of childhood.

However, in yet another graveside poem, the speaker asks a question which indicates a profound and new sense of uncertainty: "O mother! does thy spirit rest / In fairer worlds than ours?" (No. 85, ll. 5-6). This is not a theological question, so much as an inquiry into the nature of death. Usually, Charlotte slides over questions of death and the afterlife, availing herself of all the soothing euphemisms--eternal rest, sleep, peace, and so forth. On this occasion, however, she indicates not so much doubt (the tomb is "safe" and "still" at the end of the poem) as uncertainty. Charlotte is not only lamenting what is lost, but is manifesting her own sense of being "at a loss," for she has nothing with which to fill the void. The new connotations she attaches to the word "wandering," for example, are revealing. During the early period, verbs of motion tended to be strong and decisive: striding, dancing, springing, sweeping forth, bursting, and, in quieter moods, floating and gliding. The verb "to wander," on the rare occasions it appeared in the early poems, always indicated either a very temporary state, or an action which was merely unrushed rather than indecisive. "A blue stream wanders by" (No. 33, l. 6), for instance, and "the wandring moon / . . .

comes high journeying from afar" (No. 31, ll. 19-20). In the following lines from "THE EVENING WALK," Douro is uncertain, but only for a short time:

The plain, I wandred o'er
 Uncertain w[h]ere to go
 Until I heard before - - -
 A warbling streamlet flow

& my onward way I took (No. 34, ll. 126-29, 131)

In 1831 and 1832, there is little change, but by mid-1833, we find Charlotte "wandering" more frequently and in more despondent moods. This verb which was rarely used in the early days, now turns up everywhere: "I wander," "My beloved" may be "wandering near," a "soft Zephyr wanders," there are thoughts, waves, and even "faithful lovers" that wander, and of course there is "A wand'ring minstrel." These wanderings lack direction, and the uncertainty often seems linked with the sadness of loss: "dwellers of the tomb" wander, and a "wandering gale" chants Douro's requiem. We must note, however, that although "Far in the silent sky / Wandering worlds quiver," they still remain "Changeless for ever" (No. 84, ll. 13-14, 16). As I discussed earlier, Charlotte's question about the afterlife indicates uncertainty; she does not seem to doubt its existence.

Furthermore, the question does not strike so profoundly that it seriously disturbs Charlotte's general attitudes towards the supernatural. Her imagery is still that undifferentiated mix of myth, magic, and Christianity, and it

occurs no less frequently. Her world may have been shaken, but the roots are still intact. In "The Bridal" (No. 65), Charlotte gives Douro and Marian a pointedly non-Christian wedding: vows are exchanged in a pastoral setting, and the symbol of their union is a "mystic ring" (l. 81). Another poem equates "vernal Eden bowers" with "bright Elysian dreams" (No. 64, ll. 17-18), and since the bowers in question belong to Glass Town, we can infer that Charlotte already links the "Elysian dreams" of her imaginary world with the kind of ideal state represented by Eden. The link, however, is as yet unconscious: the metaphor is literary rather than theological. This is evident when, in "Lines written beside a fountain" (No. 83), the speaker (Douro) hears "the harmonious gates of heaven unfold" (l. 14) to reveal "Great ones who lived of old" (l. 16). Here, heaven is equated with immortality, and immortality with greatness. The reader will remember from "THE VIOLET" (No. 51) in 1830, that "bright band" of great poets, the "army of immortals," "favoured children of the sky," within whom "heavens own fire . . . glow'd" (ll. 173, 113, 174, 100). The basis of the "heavenly gates" metaphor is the same.

"St. John in the Island of Patmos" (No. 67) is, of course, an exception to the rule of undifferentiated supernaturalism. Themes, language, and imagery all have a solid Christian base. Most of Charlotte's writings were "private," shared only with her brother and sisters. The "St. John"

poem may have been "public," suitable (because Christian rather than Glass Town) for sharing with others--most probably the Reverend Brontë--or it may simply have been an experiment with a new subject. Charlotte wrote only four poems that year (1832), and one of the remaining three was "Lines on the Celebrated Bewick" (No. 68), so it is possible that she was trying to broaden her creative horizons without quite knowing why. Whatever the reasons for its composition, however, the experiment was not repeated--it is the only Christian poem of this period.

The particular subject Charlotte chose is, of course, significant: I have already mentioned that St. John was a "holy exile" (l. 1), but we should also note that the main subject in the poem is the saint's "wondrous trance" during which "from his eyes a veil is rent away" (ll. 49, 21). The parallels with those earlier works dealing with visions of a higher reality are obvious. Moreover, we cannot help but notice the similarities between this poem and earlier Glass Town poems. The "proud, all-beauteous temple's lofty form" (l. 14), for instance, is very reminiscent of the genii palaces, and the "armed hosts" and "trumpet's tone" sound very familiar (ll. 25, 31). Of course, Charlotte was heavily influenced by the Book of Revelation when she wrote those early poems, but the process works both ways: "St. John in the Island of Patmos" now seems to echo the Glass Town poems. Judging by Charlotte's treatment of the subject, "God" might

just as well be a geni with a new name.

There is one brief reference to "Sinners" and "righteous men" (ll. 38-39) which might cause concern (Glass Town being basically amoral), but it is by no means so significant here as it is in other places. There is after all nothing unusual about the introduction of such terms in this particular context, and Charlotte's interest clearly centres on the awe-inspiring splendour of the scene, rather than on any theological, or even moral notions. We know by the "armed hosts" that this is a battle, and "Sinners" and "righteous men" are names which identify two opposing sides. We can discover nothing about Charlotte's attitude towards the events taking place, except that she finds them exciting.

By early 1833, however, we can detect a subtle new moral note entering some of the poems. The Marquis of Douro laments beside Justine's grave because he has broken a vow he made to her. The poem does not explain the nature of those "withering crimes" (No. 71, l. 32) of which he accuses himself, but he is probably referring to his having made Mina, Justine's daughter, his mistress instead of his sister as he had promised (l. 28). Douro claims he is too proud for repentance, and here we have a foreshadowing of the very complex character he is to become as Duke of Zamorna, but these "withering crimes" are by no means so serious as the ones he will later commit. Charlotte's awareness that pride prevents Douro from doing "the right thing" (repenting)

indicates her concern with moral issues, but Glass Town's amorality is still more than capable of embracing Douro's action.

The theme of wickedness and its rewards is continued in Charlotte's next poem, a short horror story (which bears a remarkable resemblance to Sir Walter Scott's Wandering Willie's Tale). Lord Rowan made a "dark contract . . . in years gone by," lived "guarded by a spirit's might," and now on his death-bed, "fien[d]ish whispers sound / Calling his soul with awful summonings / To stand e're morn before the King of Kings" (No. 72, ll. 25, 38, 22-24). Certainly, the "rewards of evil" theme is evident in the poem, but Charlotte is delightfully vague about the identity of this "King of Kings." The moral note is present, but she seems more concerned with horrific thrills than with theology.

The theme of morality is most evident, and most interesting, in the penultimate poem of 1833 (No. 86), where it is presented in what I can only describe as a fictionalized theological context. This is another of those graveside poems, but this time the mourner is Alexander Percy, a Miltonic Lucifer figure, "All bright with beauty dark with crime" (l. 28), who is leader of "a Pirate band":

Stern ruthless sons of slaughter
 And not a hearth on hill or vale
 Round all that salt lake's border
 But echoed to the long death wail
 Or bore the stain of murder

. . .

He led those hell-hounds to the land

And while sharp death-shrieks round him rung
Smiled at the scene of blood

(ll. 64-69, 71, 76-77)

But Percy once had potential for improvement, for "His heart yet answered to the thrill of loves all conquering power" (l. 80), and where there is love there is hope for redemption. His bride, however, (Mary, usually called Maria), dies, and at her grave Percy mourns:

To think that what has been
Can never while the clear stars shine
While man is sinful God divine
Can never be again

And Hell's own pangs rend Percy's breast
To see her in the heaven of rest
To know himself denied (ll. 168-71, 175-77)

This is clearly, and incontestably, a statement of Christian theology, Mary is good and has gone to heaven; Percy is wicked and will go to hell. He has lost her not only on earth, but in the afterlife as well.

Had the poem ended at this point, there would be little more to say. But it does not, and it is because of the closing sixteen lines that I maintain that Charlotte's theological statement is fictionalized, not personal. Tortured by the thought that he is separated from his beloved Mary forever, Percy considers repentance--"Can all his crimes be yet forgiven" (l. 185)--he weeps, and his "Pale lips . . . moved in prayer" (l. 188):

But ere the mute petition rose
 Again his softened feelings froze
 Dried on his cheek his tear
 Again the infidels black night
 Closed o'er that glimpse of heaven's own light
 Lord Percy turned away
 He left with death his buried bride
 And filled with the storm fiend of pride
 Went on his homeward way (ll. 189-97)

Percy clearly considers and then rejects redemption, going on his "homeward way" to hell. At first glance, we are tempted to write this off as merely a short morality tale pointing out the terrible consequences of pride. As such, it would have been acceptable as a personal theological statement. But in order for the "morality tale" theory to work, we need a Lord Percy who evokes little or no sympathy --and this is clearly not the case. Charlotte may begin by describing him as "the angel-like in form / The fiend in heart" (ll. 29-30), but his love for Mary and his gentle wooing of her suggest that his heart must be capable of more than fiendishness. It is the pain of losing her, after all, (and not his fear of hell) which brings him to contemplate repentance. Furthermore, can we avoid the implication that if Mary had lived, her goodness might have won him over? Can we avoid the evidence of the narrator who tells the story from Percy's point of view and clearly sympathizes with his sufferings? After all, Charlotte too had suffered from the loss (both by death and by physical separation) of those she loved.

As I suggested earlier, Charlotte is no doubt channeling

her feelings into her characters, and I think we must view this poem as an expression of emotion, rather than a statement of theology. It is simply too ambiguous in its sympathies, and whereas Charlotte later becomes very ambiguous--even antagonistic--towards Christianity, there is no evidence of that now. Earlier, Charlotte had concentrated on exploring light and joy; now, having discovered pain and loss for herself at Roe Head, she explores the darker side of human nature, using Christian theology only as a suitably convenient element of the plot. The "real world" implications of the doctrines she plays with have not yet filtered through to her awareness, and within that magical world of the imagination, everything is still possible--and anything is permissible. These first few introductions of sin and morality, however, suggest that the process of "enlightenment"--which would soon turn Charlotte's bright dreams to tortuous nightmares--has already begun.

Chapter Two: Haunted Dreams (1834-37)

In Chapter One, we examined the poetry of Charlotte's adolescence. We saw how exile to Roe Head school affected her mood, themes, imagery, and creativity. Although her basic attitudes towards her fantasy world remained unchanged, her poems became more melancholy--focusing on death, loss, and uncertainty--and we sensed that the simplicity and bright dreams of childhood were increasingly giving way to the complexities of adulthood. Charlotte's farewell to Glass Town was a symbolic gesture signifying her awareness of the changes in her life; her retreat back to Glass Town seven months later suggests that those changes were not attractive.

By the time Charlotte turned eighteen in April 1834, she had been home from Roe Head for almost two years, and it is now that we find the earliest evidence of a coming crisis. The supernatural imagery becomes confused and equivocal, and the theme of idolatry makes its first tentative appearances. In July 1835, Charlotte returned to Roe Head, not as a student but as a teacher. Her wages were needed to help pay the costs of educating Emily, who was to accompany Charlotte to Roe Head, and Branwell, who was to study art in London. Charlotte cannot have been too happy at the prospect of returning to Roe Head even for such a worthy cause, but by

1836 she was desolate:

The sacrifice to which she had consented, believing it to benefit the two beings she most loved in life [Emily and Branwell], had lost its purpose. As Branwell's prospects of making a way for himself dwindled, and Emily's inability to live away from home became all too apparent, her own position suffered a radical change; what she was doing was no longer a voluntary gesture prompted by love, but an obligation to earn a living in place of others. As she found that she had neither patience nor talent for the work in hand, the role of teacher soon became abhorrent to her.¹

Exiled once again, and under more miserable circumstances than before, Charlotte had very few to whom she could turn for moral support. Paradoxically, the friend upon whom she most relied was in many ways responsible for Charlotte's crisis. As G erin says of what she calls Charlotte's "religious melancholia," "the contributing factor . . . was the paramount influence of Ellen Nussey":

The more Ellen advanced her conventional tenets in order to console her friend, the further she drove Charlotte into a re-examination of her beliefs--a confrontation which brought nothing but distraction and misery in its wake.²

"Distraction" and "misery" seem almost understatement when we consider the agony and frantic desperation which are evident in the poems of 1836 as Charlotte despairs of either happiness in this life or salvation in the next. Many artists seem to produce their best works in times of most suffering, and Charlotte was no exception. As the height of her crisis passed, so the quality, and eventually the quantity of her

poetry began to decline, until finally she turned from it altogether.

I. The Uncertain Light of Dreams (1834)

In 1834, however, Charlotte was, if not unequivocally optimistic, at least hopeful, for she was still at Haworth. By 1833, she had recovered from the creative block Roe Head had imposed on her, and during 1834 she wrote sixteen poems, totalling over 1,300 lines. Only one poem consists entirely of quatrains; many have mixed or irregular stanzas or rhyme schemes, and two poems are composed in Spenserian stanzas. The appearance of new stanza forms, such as the Spenserian, suggests that Charlotte was still willing to experiment with poetic technique. It is difficult to say, however, whether the irregularities of some of the other poems indicate a conscious attempt at the organic form of "THE EVENING WALK" (1830) or not. One poem (No. 89) is a fragment, and another (No. 93) seems unfinished, so it is possible that Charlotte was having trouble maintaining her concentration.

She was, of course, still suffering from the disruptive effects of her exile to Roe Head, and the melancholy and uncertainty which we saw in the 1833 poems are still present. There are, it is true, several light-hearted poems, a couple of patriotic songs, and one satire on Thomas Aird whose energy and wit are equal to the best of those early satires

written in Charlotte's carefree days. Death, however, is still a major theme, dominating almost half the poems, and it seems by degrees to be gaining reality for Charlotte. In 1833, for instance, the poems concentrated on the sufferings of the survivors: Douro bewailing his broken vow to Justine, Percy mourning his dead wife, Charlotte consoling herself with the dead Bewick's art. But in 1834, poems such as "Death of Darius Codomanus" (No. 94) and "STANZAS ON THE FATE OF HENRY PERCY" (No. 95) deal at least as much with the one who is dying as with those who remain. Although these deaths are still somewhat distanced by the lofty tone (the tragedy lying more in the fatal betrayals than in the deaths themselves), Charlotte is obviously becoming more aware of the implications of human mortality: previously, death struck offstage and was only reported in the poems, but now the process of dying is presented onstage.

This growing awareness of death as a real fact rather than simply an element of plot can hardly have improved Charlotte's state of mind, so it is not surprising that the old themes and moods of serenity should suffer accordingly. The reader will remember from Chapter One that many of the earliest poems dealt with Charlotte's attempts to discover and articulate that serene and harmonious higher reality. In 1834, we find that serenity is still coupled with the supernatural, but it appears very infrequently, and seems less certain, less enduring than before. Occasionally, a

short lyric conveys that sense of magical peace and joy we became familiar with in the 1829-30 poems: "The gale that breathed from that blue sky . . . Had magic in its softest sigh" (No. 92, ll. 8-10). More often, however, serenity is attained with difficulty and lasts but a short time. In "Saul" (No. 99), for example, the king "Seeks for rest, and seeks in vain" (l. 11). At fourteen, Charlotte had found serenity in the beauties of nature, but for Saul, "Nature's calm, and stormless brow, / Wakes in me no sympathy" (ll. 52-53). The subject of the poem may dictate the speaker's attitude, but then as I have already noted, Charlotte's own feelings usually dictated her choice of subject. It is therefore significant that the serenity Saul reaches for at the end of the poem is both uncertain and short-lived:

[The son of Jesse] has many a sacred air
 Many a Song of Holiness
 That perchance, may soothly bear
 Even to me, one hour of bliss. (ll. 77-80)

The dominant mood in this poem is "Full of God-cursed misery" (l. 60); bliss is a mere consolation, a brief escape from life's woes.

The reader may, at this point, be wondering whether Charlotte too felt her life was "God-cursed." It is, after all, an interesting choice of words, and one not altogether in keeping with Christian humility and obedience. But, as we saw in "St. John in the Island of Patmos" (No. 67), such terminology is appropriate to the context, and is less

significant here than it would be in a secular poem. While Charlotte's subjects and word-choices are no doubt informed by her subconscious attitudes, they are not conscious personal statements, for she has not yet been forced into any minute self-examination. In another poem, written late in 1834, for instance, Charlotte's speaker (who is unidentifiable) expresses quite conventional, but equally impersonal, religious sentiments on martyrdom:

Lament for the martyr who dies for his faith

Who see's . . .
 God & his captain the Saviour nigh
 Who sees the mighty recompense
 When soul is conquering flesh & sense
 Sees heaven and all its angels bright

At the black close of that agony
 Which sets the impatient spirit free

(No. 102, ll. 1-10)

The speaker laments the martyr's physical suffering and the need for his death, but extols his faith, and points out that his spirit will be rewarded. The martyr, however, is only a secondary figure in the poem: he is faithful, like the soldier (ll. 13-25) and the holy sage--Socrates?--(ll. 26-45), and all three act only as foils for the "Seductive . . . treachery" (l. 56) of Maria Stuart. The question of her own faith and salvation may by now have crossed Charlotte's mind, but will not "haunt [her] unceasingly" (No. 108, l. 110) until she leaves Haworth.

There are signs, however, that she is beginning to

examine the nature of the supernatural. We might note, for instance, that references to the previously much-favoured fairies, elves, genii, and mythological figures are now most notable by their absence. A more mature awareness of the distinctions between the possible and the impossible in the real world may have prompted Charlotte to rid her fantasy world of such beings in order to make it more plausible. Supernatural forces have by no means disappeared, but they have become vaguer and more ambiguous. The first poem written in 1834 (No. 88) is an Angrian song which contains one brief reference to "God":

I [the moon] see the proud hill swelling
 Where foot has never trod
 The snows eternal dwelling
 Beheld alone by God (ll. 29-32)

Can this be the Christian God? It is possible, and it is certainly significant that there is only one God. Six months later, however, in another Angrian poem, the supernatural reference is probably not Christian:

Gods of our land withhold the radiant scourge
 Chain the young lion in his darkling den
 Hush the proud storm, & soothe the wild white surge
 & call us back to peace & rest again
(No. 96, ll. 10-13)

Once more, we have that link between peace and the supernatural, and these lines are suggestive of Christ calming the storm on the sea of Galilee (Mark vi.47-51), but more than this we cannot say.

"A National Ode for the Angrians" (No. 97) can, to some degree, help clarify the problem, if not provide an answer. At the end of the poem, the audience is commanded, "Through all God's mighty Universe shout back "Arise! Arise'!" (l. 64). Again, the "God" is vague, but "God's mighty Universe" suggests either that the universe which contains Angria, like the real--Christian--world, now has only one God, or that Angria is in fact a part of the real world. Without doubt, such notions must have been present in Charlotte's subconscious, but as yet they are vague and confused.

Nevertheless, Charlotte's new interest in "source" themes suggests that the first seeds of the conflict between the two worlds are already germinating. Source themes are, of course, very relevant to any question of idolatry: the Israelites who worshipped the golden calf were guilty of idolatry because their "god" was of their own making. The speaker of that first 1834 poem (No. 88) seems much concerned with origins and makers:

In that calm hour I blessed the Giver
 The Source whence ray & moan were brought
 And while they gleamed & while they sung
 I gave them life life & soul & tongue (ll. 7-10)

The immediate sources of "ray & moan" are "The lustrous moon the wailing river" (l. 5), but "Giver" indicates the existence of a previous, more general source. The vagueness of the terms suggests that Charlotte is trying to avoid specifics.

The last line of that quotation is, of course, the poet's

(and the Angrian singer's) self-conscious statement that poets give "life & soul & tongue" to their subjects. Possibly, Charlotte is just beginning to consider the notion of herself as "creator." In "THE VIOLET" and "Reflections on the fate of neglected Genius" (both from 1830), the poet was inspired--sometimes by the muse or Mighty Mother Nature, and sometimes by Genius, which (although only vaguely defined) was nonetheless closely linked with some supernatural force ("a spiritual essence pure divine" which is "enshrined" in the poet's heart). Now, however, the poet names herself sole creator, an acknowledgement which may well have led her to consider the implications of the process by which she creates not only poems but people. No doubt, when this idea eventually occurred to Charlotte, she would have had to face the fact that infusing "soul" into a poem is not at all the same process as infusing "soul" into a person. The one is the province of the artist; the other, of God.

"Death of Darius Codomanus" (No. 94) is a significant poem because it contains passing references to a number of supernatural themes--references which are vague and tantalizing in their ambiguity. Darius' last words are a clear statement of his unswerving belief in Persia's god: "I may not longer stay, / For Mithra calls my soul away!" (ll. 236-37). Two lines later, however, the narrator comments, "His soul soared to its awful Giver" (l. 239). That vague--and again capitalized--"Giver" suggests that the narrator is

unwilling to commit herself to either acceptance or denial of Mithra's existence. Earlier in the poem, another supernatural reference is not only vague but confusing: "The hallowed blood of / Liberty . . . Makes to the Gods its stern appeal" (ll. 164-65, 167). Since the appeal "summons Grecia's sons of steel" (l. 168), we might assume that these are the gods of Greek myth. On the other hand, can we be sure that "the Gods" have not become a mere rhetorical device which saves Charlotte the trouble of thinking too much about the subject?

Vagueness and ambiguity are common not only in Charlotte's supernatural references, but also in her earliest uses of idolatrous language and themes. "Henry! she looks to Heaven, . . . Are her thoughts travelling to their home in thee?" (No. 95, ll. 100, 102) may imply that Henry is her heaven, an idolatrous concept because heaven should lie with the Creator, not the creature. The Marquis of Douro (now Duke of Zamorna) is described as "God-like" (No. 101, l. 43), and the tomb of Percy is "shrine-like" (No. 93, l. 22). In the following lines, Charlotte seems to toy with the idea at arm's length:

What is a single transient mortal's worth
Though he be noble even of kingly birth
A very God for majesty & might

. . .
the worshipped of the fair the idol of their sight
(No. 96, ll. 40-42, 45)

"[T]heir sight," of course, refers to the Angrians, and Charlotte is not so much stating a fact (that the Angrians'

love is idolatrous) as tentatively exploring the question of human worth. Nevertheless, idolatrous language seems to be creeping into her poems, as we see in these lines:

. . . the hallowed ground
 Where, Percy! thy cold ashes lie
 . . .
 Where, journeying from their far-off home
 The wandering feet of pilgrims come,
 And worshipping, their forms they bow
 . . .
 Thy tomb has grown a mighty shrine,
 Thy name a feared, yet worshipped sign.
 (No. 100, ll. 63-64, 66-68, 102-03)

"Pilgrims," "shrine," and "worshipping" might have been appropriate in some contexts, but are--if not blasphemous--at least inexplicable when applied to Percy, who in 1833 was described as "the angel-like in form / The fiend in heart."

Percy has not changed, but the fantasy world in which he resides has altered drastically--the old Glass Town could never have given rise to such strange sentiments. The "mighty empire" of Angria had been established at the close of 1833, and the Marquis of Douro had become Duke of Zamorna. But Zamorna changed more than his name. He is no longer the bright young hero, but rather a complex character who becomes more and more like Percy in nature. We saw a slight hint of this change in one of the 1833 poems when Douro, lamenting beside Justine's grave, accuses himself of "withering crimes" (No. 71, l. 32). Now, however, Zamorna is a "strange vision" (No. 95, l. 169), "the Arch-fiend in a shape of man" (No. 103, l. 10). He is dangerous, most particularly to women:

opens with a lengthy description of a "calm," "sweet," "holy" landscape (ll. 3-8):

The far, blest Islands of the stormless sea
 Those happy shores, where man may cease to mourn
 Where, all is peace & bliss and harmony

. . .
 Glowing, and fresh, and fair, and Eden bright
 (ll. 47-49, 53)

The scene and mood are by now familiar, but as Henry sleeps, the mood changes: "some sad dream is on him . . . Some unseen influence, . . . Some mournful memory will not let him rest" (ll. 64-67). The dream becomes a vision--"And now, he saw her" (l. 82)--of Marian betraying him with Zamorna:

Yes, it is love, but not such love as thine,
 Not that pure, young affection of the breast
 That used to breathe of peace and bliss divine,
 And o'er her white brow fling a shade of rest
 (ll. 109-12)

The "peace & bliss and harmony" of the landscape give way to the sad, disruptive vision, and the "peace and bliss divine" of Marian's innocent young love, to the deadly attractions of Zamorna. As I have noted before, Charlotte is no doubt lamenting vicariously her own lost innocent bliss, but the scenario is not quite so simple as it has previously been, for Marian is not so guiltless in this matter as was, for example, Maria when she married the fiendish Percy. Marian is deserting a loving husband, and she does so consciously. She chooses Zamorna in spite of "passion's waves of conflict" which "o'er her rush" at "Some saddenning touch of memory's

holy might" (ll. 160, 175).

But the destruction of peace and bliss is not yet complete. The mood of the poem's opening was destroyed by the dream; now, the scene of the vision--which had been "a lofty chamber" full of "rich silent light" where "Calm, tenderly and pure the moon was shining, / Through one vast window" (ll. 82, 90, 91-92)--also changes, becoming horrific and sinister:

At once the chamber fades, in slow decay,
 The lights are quenched that erst so softly shone
 The dream revolves, the vast hall melts away
 And gleaming arch, and golden lamp are gone
 And all is dim, and imageless, and lone
 . . .
 Now o'er the scene a mighty wood is sweeping
 . . .
 Rays of the moon, the spectral boughs are steeping
 . . .
 And when a sudden wind amongst them played
 They swung like giant-phantoms on the grass
 All their boughs trembled, all their foliage swayed
 Ghosts such as they, in cloudy gloomy might pass
 Amid the gleaming pomp, of some dread wizards glass.
 (ll. 127-31, 136, 138, 149-53)

In the vision, peace and bliss are never restored, for:

. . . never from that vision woke
 The journeyer of the deep
 Ere the pale light of morning broke
 He slept his final sleep (ll. 217-20)

In the poem, some semblance of peace (in death) and bliss (in the promise of vengeance) return--but of course Henry can enjoy neither.

Confusion seems to plague Charlotte in 1834. The sad-

ness and uncertainty of the previous year have become more serious and distressing. She has not yet become convinced of her sinfulness and is therefore not yet haunted by her dreams. But in the stanzas I quoted describing the change of scene in the vision, "The dream revolves" (l. 129) suggests that it has assumed a power of its own and is no longer under Charlotte's control. The following lines point out that Charlotte is reaching back for an earlier simplicity which she has now lost:

Was there no strange, no haunting sound
 That o'er his soul brought wondrous gleams
 Not like th' uncertain light of dreams
 & not like wildering memory's beams
 But quick & clear & bright
 Of what was once, but is no more
(No. 93, ll. 59, 62-66)

Dreams are "uncertain" and memory "wildering," and in her confusion Charlotte almost pleads to be haunted by the bright clarity of childhood.

II. The Vision's Spell (1835)

1835 was a sad year for Charlotte, probably the saddest she had experienced, for at the end of July she was back at Roe Head: "I am sad, very sad at the thoughts of leaving home but Duty--Necessity--these are stern mistresses who will not be disobeyed."³ As was the case in 1831, Roe Head had a stifling effect on her creativity, and during this

year she produced only four prose tales and three poems. The first two poems were originally part of a "public" volume of poems (written "in a good, plain and legible hand,"⁴ and dealing with suitable themes, so that outsiders could read them); the third is the often-quoted "We wove a web in childhood," perhaps Charlotte's best-known poem.

Since the first two poems were "public," we would not expect them to contain anything too personal. Nevertheless, they hint at the concerns uppermost in Charlotte's mind. "Memory" (No. 104) deals with "thoughts [of the dead] that are torment" which "man, from his heart may not banish" (ll. 16,15). The speaker asks "Oh! why should the spirit remember?" (l. 23), but the answer, which closes the poem, is unconvincing:

Because, that the fire is still shining,
Because, that the lamp is still bright,
While the body, in dust is reclining,
The soul, lives in glory and light. (ll. 25-28)

This may (if one stretches a point) account for the continued existence of the now-dead in the memories of the living, but it in no way explains why the memories should be so tormenting. An earlier (non-public) version of the poem does not have that final stanza, so Charlotte may either have been trying to convince herself that answers could be found in religion, or she may simply have adopted the conventional stance to protect herself from too close a "public" scrutiny.

The other "public" poem (No. 105) seems to have been

written at Roe Head, and is more convincing because the emotions it expresses are mixed. Charlotte is unclear, probably unsure, but "Some sense" (l. 12) brings happier memories to cheer her:

Through Fancy's realm of imagery
Some strange delight is ranging free
Some joy that will not prisoned be

. . .
It hurries back and brings the Past
Sweetly before my soul

. . .
Pleasant the thoughts its pinions chase
And bright though vague the dreamy place
(ll. 13-15, 17-18, 21-22)

The delight is "strange" and "vague," but welcome because it brings relief from "the weary hours of strife . . . the scenes of pain" (ll. 27-28). Clearly, Charlotte already resents what she has undertaken out of "Duty--Necessity":

Two hours I yet may number ere
Full glaring day brings tumult near
And lets intrusive labour care
Disturb my humble home (ll. 5-8)

Her choice of words conveys the message: work is tumultuous, intrusive, and disturbing. The first forty lines seem to stress the soothing qualities of memory and the imagination. In the final stanza, however, some doubt is cast over the efficacy of this consolation:

'Tis bitter sometimes to recall
Illusions once deemed fair
But in this golden moment all
Doth fairy gilding wear

And fond and fast the pulses beat
 Departed Passion's shade to greet
 Rising in transient vision sweet
 To colour empty air

(ll. 41-48)

At the moment of speaking, the images wear "fairy gilding," but the final lines express a sense not only of transience, but of unreality--the air remains "empty" despite its brief colouring. Furthermore, this stanza introduces the word "illusions" which suggests both unreality and deception--a concept which, in her relationship with her fantasy world, will trouble Charlotte for many years.

By far the most significant poem of this year--indeed of any year so far--is the one Charlotte writes at the end of her first teaching period at Roe Head, "We wove a web in childhood" (No. 106). It is in many ways a beautiful and fascinating work, but its major significance lies in the fact that it is a personal poem: for the first time, Charlotte puts aside her narrative masks and attempts to evaluate honestly her fantasy world. The "source" imagery which had begun to appear in 1834 is now more consciously and more fully developed: "We wove a web in childhood . . . We dug a spring in infancy" (ll. 1,3) is Charlotte's acknowledgement that she, her brother and sisters were the source of that web of dreams. Web and spring rapidly develop into images of growth which are both organic and overtly biblical: "We sowed in youth a mustard seed / We cut an almond rod" (ll. 5-6). The mustard seed is an image of heaven (Matt. 13.31-

as we saw in the poem by that name (No. 104). In my discussion of "STANZAS ON THE FATE OF HENRY PERCY," I suggested that Henry's vision seems to have a life of its own: "The dream revolves" and the implication is that nothing can stop it. In "We wove a web," Charlotte seems to sense that she is losing control of her creations. "Faded! the web is still of air / But how its folds are spread" (ll. 13-14):

Dream that stole o'er us in the time
 When life was in its vernal <clime>
 Dream that still faster o'er us steals

Oh! as thou swellest and as the scenes
 Cover this cold worlds darkest features
 Stronger each change my spirit weans
 To bow before thy god-like creatures

(ll. 39-41, 45-48)

In the opening stanzas, the active agent was "We"; here, it is the dream which "o'er us steals," which swells, and exerts an ever-stronger influence over her spirit, weaning (alienating) it into idolatry. Now, it is Charlotte, not an Angrian, who bows "before thy god-like creatures." Exiled at Roe Head, "With nought I knew or loved around me," she was defenceless against her addiction to the dream: "Oh how my heart shrank back to thee / Then I felt how fast thy ties had bound me" (ll. 50-52).

The poem itself stands as a fascinating testimonial to the power of the fantasy world. By line 83, for example, "The vision's spell had deepened o'er me / Its lands its scenes were spread before me." Ten lines later, "through

the curtained portal strode / Some spurred & fur-wrapped
 Demi-God [Zamorna]" (ll. 95-96). His meeting with his "lady-
 love" (l. 109), his "self-invited Guest[s]" (l. 124), and his
 young son, "a little child" (l. 137), are all described as
 if by one who had observed--perhaps in fact, perhaps in a
 dream. Suddenly, however, we come upon the line "I went out
 in a summer night" (l. 157). The speaker is now a partici-
 pant rather than an observer, and the reader moves with her
 into the vision, into that summer night and away from "the
 cold autumnal gloaming" (l. 54) of reality. The poem ends,
 but the vision continues, moving fluidly into a prose passage
 which begins "I now heard the far clatter of hoofs on the
 hard & milk-white road." There is an immediacy in the word
 "now" which deepens "The vision's spell" over us, the readers.
 We are as disappointed and as irritated as Charlotte must
 have been when the vision ends abruptly: "'Miss Brontë what
 are you thinking about?' said a voice that dissipated all the
 charm & Miss Lister thrust her little rough black head into
 my face, 'Sic transit' &c." From this point on, the intru-
 sions of "Duty--Necessity" would continue to dissipate all
 the charm in Charlotte's life.

III. A Strange Commencing Strife of Dream and Truth (1836)

. . . I hope, I trust, I might one day become
 better, far better, than my evil wandering thoughts
 my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to

the flesh will now permit me to be. . . . [I am] uncertain that I have ever felt true contrition, wandering in thought and deed, longing for holiness which I shall never, never attain If Christian perfections be necessary to Salvation I shall never be saved, my heart is a real hot bed for sinful thought and as to practice, when I decide on an action, I scarcely remember to look to my Redeemer for direction.

I know not how to pray, I cannot bind my life to the grand end of doing good. I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires, I forget God and will not God forget me? And meantime I know the greatness of Jehovah. I acknowledge the truth, the perfection of his word. I adore the purity of the Christian faith, my theory is right, my practice horribly wrong.--⁵

Thus, in a letter to Ellen Nussey towards the end of 1836, Charlotte reveals her despair, her sense of sinfulness, and her horrifying fears of the "shadows of Spiritual Death!"⁶ Much of her correspondence with Ellen during this year is in a similar vein. She is sometimes "in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty," sometimes "wretched and hopeless," sometimes "almost . . . blasphemous, atheistical," and frequently "Weary with a day's hard work, . . . exhausted and dispirited."⁷ Exiled and guilt-ridden, hurt more than helped by her pitifully inadequate mentor, Ellen, Charlotte's life becomes a battle-ground in which the forces of the heart are ranged against those of the mind. The balance, which in earlier years she had strived for and believed in, is utterly destroyed. The pleasures of the imagination are tested against those duties and necessities of reality--Zamorna on the one hand, God on the other. And Charlotte suffers from

the wounds inflicted on both sides.

In contrast to previous years, Charlotte's exile to Roe Head now seems to encourage her to write, probably for relief from the tensions of her crisis. Ironically, however, that very relief can only have aggravated the conflict she was experiencing, for most of the 1836 poems are Angrian. But although Charlotte attempts to hide behind the masks of Angrian narrators, she cannot conceal her sense of the sinfulness of the activity. The changes which had begun to take place in the fantasy world become more pronounced, and one impressively long poem (which I will discuss more fully later) details a terrible turn of events in Angria. Zamorna, sent into exile by the rebellious Percy, revenges himself by deserting his wife Mary--beloved daughter of Percy--knowing that his desertion will kill her, thus breaking her father's heart. Zamorna is Charlotte's voice. Like her, he despises himself, but can neither refrain from, nor repent of his sin.

In her first poem of 1836 (No. 108), the notion of repentance is clearly very much on Charlotte's mind. She envies the martyr Stephen's "holy glow" which "brightened death for him" (ll. 5-6), and laments that she cannot share his "lofty faith" (l. 9), and so must "weep that all below / Is grown so drear & dim" (ll. 7-8). She questions her ability to repent:

And is it now a contrite heart
That brings me Lord to thee

Or is it but the goading smart
Of inward agony? (ll. 13-16)

Charlotte implies here that her "contrition" is likely prompted more by a desire to avoid further suffering than by true sorrow for her sins.

The exact nature of her sins is, like Douro's "withering crimes," more hinted at than specifically stated. She introduces Stephen, for example, because she seems to feel that faith and repentance would for her too involve a kind of martyrdom:

And could my spirit heavenward spring
And could my mangled relics cry
. . . Jesus Saviour graciously
Thy martyr's soul receive! (ll. 17, 21, 23-24)

The exclamation point indicates not a statement of possibility, but a rhetorical question to which the answer must be "no." For Charlotte, "hope's divine repose" (l. 12) would involve a figurative death on earth, and it is safe to assume that it is her Angrian fantasy and creative life which would have to die.

She laments her loss of innocence because it has brought sin into her life. There was, as I have previously noted, little distinction for the adolescent Charlotte between heaven and Glass Town. Her fantasy world was a wondrous, joyous place quite free from any sense of sin--it was her conception of heaven. But maturity has brought awareness of

of sin, and by the time Charlotte realizes that her excessive attachment to her imaginary world is sinful, it is too late. The misery which had forced her to lean more and more on imagination for comfort, has itself effected changes in the fantasy world: joyously amoral Glass Town has become tragically immoral Angria. Immorality had to be introduced because only thus can Charlotte express the suffering she herself has experienced. Terrible things can happen in an amoral climate, but real misery can only result from a sense of wrong. Hence, the "bliss" and "pure happiness" of childhood are linked to ignorance: "I [then] felt a blind, but ardent glow / Of love for piety" (ll. 79-80).

The possibility of her own imminent death, prompted no doubt by her new awareness of human mortality, terrifies Charlotte because--without repentance--she would be damned. Driven by "sinful terrors . . . I almost feared to pray," and the thought of God's wrath (symbolized by the "awful frown" of the church tower) makes her retreat in horror: "I thought of God & heaven no more" (ll. 87-93). She cannot sacrifice all that is worthwhile in her earthly life, but neither can she escape her sense of sinfulness by denying the existence of God. Thoughts of the dilemma in which she is trapped have a "ghastly power . . . [a] grinding tyranny," they "haunt me unceasingly" (ll. 105-10). The past tense used throughout this section suggests that Charlotte is discussing a subject long past, and she emphasizes this in the

following transitional stanza between a discussion of the horrors she experienced in her childhood readings and an Angrian vision:

Such were my dreams in infancy
 I have other visions now
 Which touch not the nerve so painfully
 But yet fever the blood in its flow
(ll. 169-72)

We must not, however, be misled by this distancing device. As we saw with her 1831-33 poems on death, Charlotte tends to recall past events as vehicles for the expression of current feelings, thus sparing herself some of the pain of immediacy. No doubt, she is now imposing her present awareness and anguish onto dim memories of some "strange & vague" (l. 167) sense of horror or awe she experienced as a child.

Charlotte badly needs to distance herself from the incalculable horrors of unrepented sin, as we see in the middle section of the poem. She first returns to the safer horrors of her childhood readings (ll. 113-68), and then--by means of that transitional stanza--moves directly into the Angrian vision. "I see . . . I step within" (ll. 181, 185), and once more we are whirled away to join "A youthful [Angrian] lady" (l. 196). But the vision is precarious, and Charlotte's repressed conscience increasingly informs the dream. The youthful lady "dreams . . . And dreads" (ll. 197, 201). She, like Charlotte in the utter loneliness of her misery, is stirred by "A longing for some kindred heart /

To blend its fire with hers" (ll. 227-28). She dreams of what she hopes will be her "future destinies" which "tell her time of love" (ll. 231-32), but "Is bliss the theme of that prophesy / Which comes with so wild a tone" (ll. 235-36)? A negative answer is implied as we leave the lady to her "haunted dream" (l. 237). Charlotte is again overcome by conscience and "may not dare not tell" us any more (l. 240). In a desperate attempt to make the sacrifice demanded by Duty to God, she tries to convince herself that "'Tis all delusion!"--that she is only deceiving herself with this imaginary world. The harder she tries, however, the stronger becomes the vision:

'Tis all delusion!--yet again
 The curtain falls & shews
 Another scene as bright as vain
 That too must clearly close
 'Tis all delusion, still once more
 The glancing lightning glows
 And brighter than the flash before
 Its fitful glory throws

Succeeding fast & faster still
 Scenes that no words can give
 And gathering strength from every thrill
 They stir, the[y] breathe, they live
 They live! they gather round in bands
 They speak, I hear the <tone>
 The earnest look, the beckoning hands
 And am I now alone (ll. 241-56)

There is, in fact, a crisis in these two stanzas: "They live!" is simply and unequivocally a statement of their reality. Charlotte has finally given utterance to the reason for her inability to repent: she cannot disbelieve

in Angria--any more than she can in God, and those "bands" which "gather round" her are likely the chains whose "bright links" she is unable to break at the end of the poem (ll. 423-24). As her conflicting beliefs tear her back and forth, she appeals to the vision to take on permanent reality, knowing that it cannot and that she is doomed to the conflict:

Oh stay! Oh fix! Oh start to life
Flash out reality
Methinks a strange commencing strife
Of dream & truth I see (ll. 285-88)

The vision fades, "the dream declines" (l. 296), and "wakening Reason" (l. 326) tries to convince Charlotte that "the solace felt / Of Fancy's pictured play" (ll. 333-34) is tied to Haworth, and therefore to childhood. But logic only brings Charlotte back full circle as she remembers those days, remembers her seat beneath the tree whose blindly pious associations she recalled at the beginning of the poem (ll. 32f), and "remembers" a "little dark-haired child draw near" (l. 371) who will die steadfast in his faith: "'I know that my Redeemer lives' / A blessed hope to cherish!" (ll. 419-20). The problem, of course, as the intervening stanzas make abundantly plain, is that the child is Zamorna's son. Realizing, no doubt, that she has once more linked redemption with Angria, Charlotte breaks off: "Dreamer awake & close the strain / A summons has been spoken" (ll. 421-22)--though the identity of the summoner who insists

that she "must depart" (l. 423) is unclear. Again Charlotte considers that final sacrifice--"so burst the chain / And leave the bright links broken" (ll. 423-24)--but it is futile. Only a few lines later, she closes the poem: "Oh cheer thee with the prospect sweet / Of eve again returning!" (ll. 431-32). Once "The task the toil the hum of day" (l. 427) is over, she will return to the "dreams of night" (l. 426)--dreams of Angria, dreams of darkness.

Given the stage which has been set by this introductory poem, the remaining poems of 1836 contain few surprises. Despair is a common theme as Charlotte cannot commit herself entirely to either fantasy or reality: "hope I repress / Vain is this anguish fixed and deep / Vainer desires or dreams of bliss" (No. 111, ll. 2-4). She briefly dedicates herself to "Reason" in one poem:

Come Reason--Science--Learning--Thought
 To you my heart I dedicate
 I have a faithful subject brought
 Faithful because most desolate
(No. 111, ll. 21-24)

But her commitment is born of despair, not repentance, and Reason cannot console her so well as the dream, and she very soon returns to it:

But once again, but once again
 I'll bid the strings awake
 Just one more strain, just one more strain
 For ancient friendship's sake
(No. 112, ll. 1-4)

In this opening stanza, Charlotte attempts to rationalize her return to "the strings": "For ancient friendship's sake." But she cannot remain coolly distant, and as confusion overtakes her, she seems to conflate Haworth and Angria. At times she seems to be addressing her brother and sisters whom she would soon leave to return to Roe Head, but the "comrades" in the following stanza could just as easily be the Angrians:

And there I'll meet you comrades
 And we'll shake hands again
 Though twenty miles between us lie
 Of night & wind & rain (ll. 66-69)

In fact, the inhabitants of that dream world seem quite as real to her as her own family:

Somewhere--somewhere all the dream
 Lives breathes in glory that I know
 I feel its truth in sudden gleam
 Flashing around me Lord! . . . (ll. 193-96)

The identity of the "Lord" whom she addresses in the last line is unclear. It could equally well be God or Zamorna.

The theme of idolatry is, in this poem, almost painfully obvious. She cannot give her affections to "strangers" (l. 86), for "My hearts nor wide nor roomy" (l. 91) and can encompass "Just us & those we've formed in dreams / Our own divine creations" (ll. 94-95). This consciously idolatrous statement is elaborated even further in the lines which follow:

Shake hands dark Percy! breathe & live
 Shalt thou in nothing perish?
 No flesh & life & soul Ill give
 And faithfully in thee believe
 And still thy memory cherish (ll. 98-102)

Here there can be no doubt what Charlotte means by the word "soul," for the passage is a clear echo of the act of creation in Genesis. Moreover, these creatures are now worshipped as gods by at least one of their creators:

He [Zamorna]'s not the temple but the god
 The idol in his marble shrine
 Our grand dream is his wide abode
 And there for me he dwells divine
 . . .
 Others as mighty rest around
 The great Pantheon has many a god
 But to his altar I am bound
 For him the consecrated ground
 My pilgrim steps have trod
 . . .
 At time's by Percy's pedestal
 More deeply awed I worship low
 But grovelling in the dust I fall
 Where Adrian's shrine lamps dazzling glow
 (ll. 154-57, 164-72)

We heard the same language earlier when the Angrians became pilgrims to the shrine of Percy's tomb, but Charlotte now--prompted by despair--briefly presents "my open unmasked brow" (l. 135), and admits the idolatry as her own. Furthermore, the circle of creation-idolatry-creation is completed as the creature "creates" his creator:

And he [Zamorna] has been a mental King
 That ruled my thoughts right regally
 And he has given me a <steady> spring
 To what I had of poetry
 . . .

He's moved the principle of life
 Through all I've written or sung or said
 (ll. 140-43, 150-51)

He has in fact been the Prime Mover in the poetry which both embodies and is inspired by the fantasy world. He has given Charlotte the only happy "life" she has on earth.

But although Charlotte sees Zamorna as her god and inspirer, he is also her alter ego. He is the heroic mask by means of which she can rework her troubles into a more noble and more meaningful form. That long poem on Zamorna's journey into exile (No. 116) which I mentioned earlier echoes precisely the same moods Charlotte had dealt with in her two personal poems (Nos. 108 and 112). Her reckless affirmations of her idolatry are confessed in poems which might have been shown to her brother and sisters, but certainly to no one else. On board the Rover (Percy's pirate ship), Zamorna also confesses:

. . . like a dying man to heaven
 Anxious alone to have his sins forgiven
 . . . giving full & free & fearless way
 To secrets that the fear of death has torn
 From his concealing bosom where they lay
 Scorching the soul in which their sparks were born
 Aye Alexander just so recklessly
 I give my dreams to the wild wind & sea
 (ll. 7-8, 11-16)

Like Charlotte, he is horrified by what he has done, but cannot repent, and like her he suffers "pains that heaven had dealt / On devotees to crime, sworn slaves of guilt"

(ll. 39-40). The sense of sin and guilt is emphasized by his reference to Angria as "our own infernal West" (l. 64); several weeks later, Charlotte too, in her journal, calls Angria "the infernal world."⁸ Charlotte's loss of balance has turned her Eden into Hell. Mina, Zamorna's mistress, is the "lost fated God-abandoned" (l. 512) kind of martyr that Charlotte must feel herself--each gave up her religion to be Zamorna's "Faithful devoted martyr" (l. 493).

Blasphemy is in fact permitted full and reckless rein in this poem, and the bitter black humour is very reminiscent of Byron's Don Juan whose stanzaic form Charlotte adopts. King (alias S'death), captain of the Rover and here blasphemously referred to as "the hoary saint" (l. 160), suggests to Zamorna that instead of merely deserting Mary and leaving her to die of a broken heart, it would have been better to bring her along, wait until she was asleep, and then--on some "heavenly, holy tropic summer night" (l. 161)--throw her overboard: "It would look well says Sdeath to see her sinking . . . Calmly subsiding to eternal sleep / Dreaming of him that's drowning her" (ll. 175, 178-79). King may be right. Since Zamorna has, in effect, murdered Mary, it would have been kinder and more honest to do it thus.

Zamorna, guilt-ridden and anguished, but unrepentant, is even more blasphemous: "I've pledged my faith / To break her father's heart by Mary's death / A holy resolution and it will be visited upon me thirty-fold" (ll. 126-29).

He, like Charlotte, uses sacred language to describe a deed which breaks the laws of Nature and of God. But he is reckless, for of course it no longer matters: "neither from Hell nor Earth nor Righteous heaven / Can rest or comfort to my heart be given" (ll. 405-06). Bitterly, impiously, almost insanelly, he invokes "the doom from the most high":

His curse upon my head in fullest measure
 I'll fit me for a passage to the sky
 By heaving overboard my choicest treasure
 Yea I'll leave all, take up my cross & follow
 All Flesh is grass all joys are vain & hollow
 (ll. 459-64)

His, and Charlotte's, bitter recklessness are born of despair, and her "voice" speaks her own hopelessness:

All that breathes happiness seems to forsake
 His blighted thoughts, a demon hand unseals
 That little well so treasured in man's breast
 Whose drop of hope so sweetens all the rest

And out it flows & slips unseen away
 Trickling to nothingness & leaving gall
 Rank gall behind. (ll. 565-71)

IV. The Cold destroying Finger (1837)

Despair, in various forms, continues to characterize the poems of 1837. Charlotte is still teaching at Roe Head, and still suffering, but the intensity of her crisis seems to be fading. Her poetic output is prolific--36 poems, totalling over 2,000 lines--but many are fragments and un-

finished drafts of poems she will later rewrite. Homesickness, death, idolatry, sin and despair are the predominant themes, and although Charlotte is still bound as fast as ever to her fantasy world, she often feels her dreams are deserting her when she most needs their comfort. She writes to Robert Southey (then poet laureate), hoping for some encouragement to write professionally. She would then be able to legitimize her creative life, restoring some sense of balance and harmony to her worlds by combining creativity with Duty (earning a living). The effort is futile, however, for Southey insists that creative writing is not a woman's proper duty: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be."⁹ Bereft of even that forlorn hope, Charlotte's despair and sense of worthlessness begin to undermine both her worlds.

She feels frustrated by her inability to be pious and good like Ellen, and by the real world's inability to satisfy her emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual needs. In the following lines, for example, "thy spirit" (l. 45)--probably her own--tries to reach beyond the mere sensory experience of the stars to that fulfilling, glorious vision of a higher reality which she had long ago experienced:

Oh! it longed for holier fire
 Than this spark in earthly shrine
 O! it soared & higher higher
 Sought to reach a home divine

Hopeless quest, soon weak & weary

. . .

. . . again in sadness dreary
 Came the baffled wanderer home
 (No. 128, ll. 51-58)

"Baffled," perhaps by a sense of her own unworthiness, but more likely by the apparent coldness of God and reality, Charlotte's spirit turns back "for soothing / To the half-finished broken dream," and feels it "nightly healing / Each dark day's despondency" (ll. 59-60, 65-66).

Her letters to Ellen Nussey suggest that Charlotte has indeed tried sincerely to fix her love on God, but God cannot comfort her with visions the way her sinful dreams can: "how bright and glorious the pages of God's holy word seemed to me [just now]. But the 'foretaste' passed away, and earth and sin returned."¹⁰ Even the sinful bright dreams, however, are "fading fast away" (No. 153, l. 65):

My dreams, the Gods of my religion linger
 In foreign lands, each sundered from his own
 And there has passed a cold destroying finger
 O'er each image & each sacred tone
 (No. 137, ll. 19-22)

That "cold destroying finger" symbolizes the many forces which have combined to undermine the dreams: her separation from home and family, the harsh, miserably lonely realities of "Duty--Necessity," her sense of sinfulness, and of course her wretched future prospects both in life and after death. Furthermore, that image of the "cold destroying finger" recalls the "fingers of a man's hand" which wrote upon the wall at Belshazzar's feast (Dan. 5.5), foretelling

the destruction which God would bring down upon the land as punishment for the king's pride and blasphemous deeds. No doubt, Charlotte must have considered the possibility that her sufferings and the fading of her dream world were God's punishment for her pride and blasphemies. Yet she cannot help comparing the dreams with reality, and when they come they bring "wild regret & wilder longing / I felt impatient that my life / Was so unmarked, unloved & fated" (No. 133, ll. 46-48). Condemned to a life of mundane drudgery--which, as we have seen, is constantly intruding on her dreams--Charlotte feels like an outsider in the glorious imaginary world she created: "Resting at many a lordly gate / That oped not to relieve my wandering / And turning desolate away" (No. 133, ll. 57-59).

Of course, one of those "lordly gates" could well be the gate of heaven which also seems closed to her, leaving her "wandering" and "desolate" without either of her gods. In Chapter One, we saw how "wandering" was at first confined to unhurried movement or very transient uncertainty, then in 1833 began to take on connotations of a more profound uncertainty. By 1836, "wandering" was equated with sinfulness: "my evil wandering thoughts," "wandering in thought and deed" (letter to Ellen Nussey),¹¹ "[Reason,] Fear not a wandering feeble mind" (No. 111, l. 25), "My thoughts will wander far from home [to Angria]" (No. 108, l. 179). Now, in 1837, "wandering" seems to have gone beyond sin to the weary

despair of one who feels rejected on all sides.

Some weariness seems to be creeping into the theme of idolatry also: although references to it are still common, the bitterly reckless blasphemies, which we saw in poems such as the one on Zamorna's exile, are often missing. At times, Charlotte's sense that the dream world is "fading fast away" seems responsible for the weary blasphemies:

Young noble Idol, I have given
My last at thy exacting shrine
And thou hast lavished an earthly heaven
Upon me in thy love divine
True it is all past & all is vanished
Into forgetfulness with thee

(No. 133, ll. 103-08)

Charlotte may feel with Mary that Zamorna has chained her to him with "Glimpses of all on earth that's worth possessing," and then forgotten her: "& all my anguish scorning / You go & bid me hope for no returning!" (No. 118, ll. 242, 245-46). But she obviously cannot forget him.

Her work at Roe Head was exhausting, particularly since her heart was not in it, and this no doubt accounts for that slight weariness of tone. But the anguish of the crisis had not entirely abated, and the bitter blasphemies return in an early version of a poem (No. 134) which Charlotte would eventually rewrite and publish in 1846 under the title "Apostasy." The speaker in this poem could well be Zamorna's deserted wife, Mary, but the sentiments are clearly Charlotte's. On her deathbed, the speaker confesses to the

"solemn priest" (l. 2) that she has "sold" her "early truth" for the "encircling ring" of marriage (ll. 15-16). The priest tells her she must "cease to think of him [her husband] / For he is far away" (ll. 23-24). But she cannot, and she sees him, "So fixed so clear so burning bright" (l. 43) in a vision. Her "childhood's faith" (l. 49), that early truth of the "sinless child" (l. 9), "To him . . . is given" (l. 49). She denies both God and heaven, and states that she will "die an infidel" (ll. 51-52); her only bliss and rest are in her husband's arms, in his love (ll. 55-56). She completes the awful blasphemy by kissing the priest's cross, employing the "sacred sign" (l. 57) in a profane act of worship of her own earthly heaven--her husband. After her death, the priest comments: "A sad farewell to thee / An awful God will not forgive / Such dark apostasy" (ll. 66-68). Charlotte no doubt considered herself similarly doomed.

Many of the poems which follow "Apostasy" (composed at the end of May 1837) deal with the consolations of religion, but the sentiments are unconvincing. In one poem, for example, she tells herself:

Kneel & look up & pierce with prayer
 The far, clear hollow, arched above
 And ask thine unseen Father's care
 To fill the void of earthly love

(No. 135, ll. 21-24)

God's love, if she could feel it, would lead her safely and "triumphantly" to "haven" (ll. 25-27), but her choice of

words suggests that her prayer will be both difficult and futile; it must "pierce" the "hollow" heaven to reach the "unseen Father." The "void of earthly love" seems to be matched by an equally void heaven. Other poems rely on conventional biblical images and language--"Beulah's bowers" (No. 143, ll. 9, 15), for example, and these lines from "Stanzas On the Death of a Christian" (No. 151): "Dust! to its narrow house beneath; / Soul! to its place on high" (ll. 5-6). The words are cliched and almost meaningless, reflecting Charlotte's inability to personalize her religion now that it can no longer be linked with bright dreams.

Chapter Three: Hollow Dreams (1837-46)

By the end of 1837, Charlotte's crisis had passed its height. Sometime during 1837 or 1838, Miss Wooler moved her school from Roe Head to Dewsbury Moor,¹ and although Charlotte continued to teach, the strain of her inner conflicts had taken its toll both emotionally and physically. Her health "shattered," she returned to Haworth for the solace which only home and family could provide. Her exhaustion is evident in the letter she writes to Ellen Nussey:

A calm and even mind like yours, Ellen, cannot conceive the feelings of the shattered wretch who is now writing to you, when, after weeks of mental and bodily anguish not to be described, something like tranquillity and ease began to dawn again.²

But for Charlotte "tranquillity" and "ease" were elusive states of mind. Duty and Necessity, those "stern mistresses" of her conscience, forced her back into governessing, the only occupation open to her. Having refused the (probably too-impersonal) marriage proposal of Henry Nussey, Ellen's brother, Charlotte seems to have considered herself doomed to spinsterhood. The idea did not appeal to her warm heart, but it was the chilling realities of the teacher's position --particularly in private homes--which tried her most severely. While engaged by the Sidgwicks in 1839, for instance, she complains of being overworked and "not considered as a

living and rational being," referring to her situation as "my term of bondage."³ In 1840, she writes to William Wordsworth in another futile attempt to reconcile the worlds of Duty and of Creativity. By the end of that year, however, she seems discouraged and worn out, claiming "Mediocrity in all things is wisdom--mediocrity in the sensations is superlative wisdom":⁴ a far cry indeed from the adolescent Charlotte who hungered for adventure and strove to experience every sensation to the fullest.

A philosophy of mediocrity is, of course, unlikely to foster creativity, and Charlotte's poetry declined noticeably in both quality and quantity during these years. The despair--frequently religious--which had characterized many of the poems written during the religious crisis period was a direct result of the intense suffering generated by Charlotte's profound emotional and spiritual conflicts. Paradoxically, this despair was immensely productive, forcing Charlotte to stretch her creative powers to the limits in order to relieve the pressure. But there is another kind of despair, a passive variety, which is linked more to apathy than to agony, and this numb, exhausted hopelessness becomes the more dominant mood by the end of 1837.

I. Farewell to Angria (1837-39)

For Charlotte, the numbness and philosophy of mediocrity

were, no doubt, psychological defenses against the pain she no longer had the strength to bear. A handful of fragmentary poems probably written during the Christmas holidays of 1837-38 (Nos. 154-61) are often too short and too vague for the narrator to be determined. Some, however, are obviously discarded attempts to begin another of those sustained, intensely personal, soul-searching works such as "We wove a web." But, as we can see in the following fragment (No. 155 (a)), the result is usually only a weak echo of the impassioned themes of 1836:

Long, long ago--before the weight of pain
 Made life a weary burden--I would dream
 Of such a time as this--and now again
 Comes memory with that faint and doubtful gleam
 Her faded taper yields, and shews how vain
 Is Hope--Anticipation--Checked the stream
 I thought would flow forever-----.

(ll. 1-7)

"Weary," "faint," "doubtful," "faded": the words speak of one who is almost too tired for despair, and the loss of momentum which halts the poem in the middle of the seventh line suggests that the "stream" of creative power is indeed "Checked."

The deterioration of Charlotte's creative power is closely linked to the fading of her dreams. Her fantasy world seems to be deserting her, and even the identifiably Angrian poems are fragmented. One, which seems intended as the opening of a long narrative (No. 156), is tightly structured for the first three stanzas but breaks off in the

middle of the fourth:

Turn lady to thy--halls, for singing shrill
 Again the gust descends--again the river
 Frets into foam--I see thy dark eyes fill
 With large bitter tears--thy sweet lips quiver
(ll. 19-22)

We cannot know why the lady weeps because the narrator falls silent before answering the poem's opening question, "What does she dream of[?]" (l. 1). Charlotte seems unable to reach the lady, to merge with the mask and allow it to speak for her. The "lordly gates" of her dream world have closed (No. 133, ll. 57-59). She cannot enter, and thus cannot see into the lady's dream.

Nevertheless, Charlotte cannot give up the consolations of her imaginary world, and clings almost pathetically to Angria, trying to recapture the serenity and brightness of Glass Town simplicity. Almost all the 1838 poems are Angrian, and in the poem I quoted in the preceding paragraph (No. 156), we hear faint but clear echoes of the distant past. Fairies had long since disappeared from the poetry, but now we hear again "Her fairy step upon the marble [fall] / With startling echo through those silent halls" (ll. 5-6). The silence suggests an emptiness and desolation which is emphasized by the lack of any "life-like tone" in the "still dim night" (l. 3), and by those "barren Northern wolds" (l. 9) in the next stanza. We sense that this lady is a mere ghost of the past--"Her fairy step" an anomaly and hence "startling."

But, silence and barrenness notwithstanding, we find again that old symbol of supernatural harmony and serenity, the moon, shining "Full, brilliant . . . lifted on high / O'er noble land and nobler river flowing" (ll. 13-14). A brief description of the twilight landscape follows, recalling those earliest pastoral poems, but Charlotte seems unable to maintain the mood as the narrator commands the lady to turn aside from those images of harmony, serenity, and nobility, and go back to her silent halls. The poem ends abruptly because Charlotte cannot recapture the reality of the dream world.

The poems of 1838 are dominated almost entirely by this attempt to return to pre-crisis Angria. In one (No. 168), for example, Charlotte seems to be trying to defeat time by reviving one of the earliest Glass Town characters, Lady Helen Victorine, first wife of the Duke of Zamorna (then Marquis of Douro). Like No. 156, this poem opens with a woman alone who also mourns, although at this point she sleeps to escape her sorrow. The scene, however, is quite different, the stormy moonlit evening having been replaced by "the Siesta's languid hour," "this burning noon" (ll. 1, 22). "[E]vening skies" and "a rising moon" do appear in the poem (ll. 23-24), but only as elements of the landscape in Helen's dream. She seems considerably more real than the previous lady--less anonymous, less startling, and less ghostlike--but her dream is ended so quickly that we are

permitted only the briefest glimpse of the moonlit skies and a landscape which seems more nostalgic than noble. The development of the poem--the sudden cessation of that barely-examined dream--suggests that Charlotte could only achieve reality for the fictional woman at a price: Helen had to be brought out of her own time, where nobility and harmony were attainable, and into the present, where she sits wearily "by the dial-piece" (l. 41)--symbol of time-- "wait[ing] & watch[ing] & mourn[ing]," as Charlotte feels she too must do, "Till life is past away!" (ll. 47-48).

As we have seen many times before, these Angrian characters become the outward manifestations of the inner workings of Charlotte's mind. The male narrator of poem No. 163 lies dying, his "burning fever" (l. 25) the counterpart of the burning sun in the Lady Helen poem. His dream, however, provides no softly moonlit relief. In a "vision wild" (l. 29), he is visited by a phantom figure of the woman who shunned his passionate love and seems to have been the cause of his mortal wound ("If she for whom I and bled," l. 67).⁵ The phantom's actions suggest that she has undergone a change of heart, but even the agonized lover cannot quite believe her reality:

Is it delirium shews her now
 With pitying aspect nigh
 I see the dark curls o'er her brow
 With love in that deep eye? (ll. 53-56)

He would give his own life, or take another's, if he could

have her love, but Charlotte carefully avoids a direct statement of idolatry: the lady's love would be his paradise only "if an Angels voice divine / From God" (ll. 69-70) should let him choose his own "bright heaven" (l. 71). Unfortunately, no angel appears to make the offer, and although the man's fevered brain shows him "glorious thoughts, like golden dreams" (l. 59), they seem "Hollow & vapour-like" (l. 57), and he knows he "must wake" to a reality in which she shuns his adoration (ll. 61-64). Waking, "He felt himself alone, he knew / All the cold lonely-room around" (ll. 85-86) --but once again we are doomed never to find out what "he knew," for the poem breaks off, leaving the now-hollow dreams of the passionate man to die with him in a cold, uncaring reality. As with the Lady Helen, Charlotte must pay a price for recreating Angrian characters: no longer able to join them in their world, she must bring them into her own where they cannot survive any more than her creative nature can flourish in what seems a cold, uncaring world.

By 1839, Charlotte's creative power seems as hollow and faded as the dreams to which she still clings. Angria's long rule finally ends this year, "not with a bang," as Eliot would say, "but a whimper," and with the ending Charlotte's creative flame seems to flicker and die. Elizabeth Hastings, another minor Angrian character, seems to voice the rationale behind this termination:

She vowed to leave her visions

And seek life's arousing stir
 . . .
 How fruitless then to ponder
 O'er such dreams as chained her now
 Her heart should cease to wander
 And her tears no more should flow
 The trance was over--over
 The spell was scattered far
 (No. 173, ll. 5-6, 9-14)

But though the trance is over, we can claim no glorious victory of conscience over sin for Charlotte. She gives in with sadness, resignation, and regret:

How sweet to tell each feeling
 The kindled soul might prove!
 How sad to die concealing
 The anguish born of love! (ll. 21-24)

By the end of 1839, Charlotte has dissolved the magical land forever and exiled its people to a well-guarded limbo.

II. Interregnum: The Black Swan (1840-45)

Once indeed I was very poetical, . . . but I am now twenty-four approaching twenty-five At this age it is time that the imagination should be pruned and trimmed--that the judgment should be cultivated--and a few at least, of the countless illusions of early youth should be cleared away. I have not written poetry for a long while.⁶

When Charlotte wrote these words to Henry Nussey early in 1841, she was not exaggerating: since dissolving Angria in 1839, she had penned only one short poem in February of 1840. In losing Zamorna, she lost her "mental king," the prime mover of the "principle of life" in her poetry, and had her

dreary, dutiful mode of existence not been interrupted, she may well have given up her art altogether.

In February 1842, however, Charlotte and Emily travelled to Brussels to study at the Pensionnat Heger, hoping to improve their education enough to be able to open their own school. Scholars, biographers, and sensationalists have made much of the ambiguous circumstances surrounding Charlotte's "relationship" with M. Heger. On the one hand, it is highly unlikely that Charlotte's conscience would have permitted her to become sexually involved with a married man --or even an unmarried one, if it comes to that. It is quite possible, however, that she was at least a little in love with her professor: it would have been difficult for her lonely heart not to be affected by one who recognized and encouraged her intellectual ability. But the only thing we can be sure of is that during Charlotte's two sojourns in Brussels, M. Heger's friendship became very important to her: at the end of her stay, she considered him her "true, kind, and disinterested . . . friend."⁷

We will probably never know exactly why Heger chose to cut Charlotte off when she returned to England, ignoring her heartbroken pleas for a few words from him: "Dîtes-moi enfin ce que vous voulez mon maître, mais dites-moi quelque chose" ("Tell me, in short, my master, what you will, but tell me something").⁸ For a while, Heger seems to have acted as a real-life "mental king" for Charlotte, as William

Crimsworth does for Frances Henri in The Professor and Paul Emmanuel for Lucy Snow in Villette. Charlotte signs herself Heger's "élève très dévouée" ("his very devoted pupil"); he is her "maître." Her attachment may have been spiritual, intellectual, romantic, or some confused mixture of the three, but in a poem which definitely seems inspired by her feelings for Heger, her love--which she describes only as "The truest" (No. 180, l. 25)--seems to give her new life: "Through my veins with quickened start / A tide of life did pour" (ll. 27-28). Ironically, however, it is the destruction of her love which returns the principle of life to Charlotte's art: the five or six poems she writes in 1845 are a rich harvest compared to the dearth of the preceding five years.

The two best, and longest, of those poems (Nos. 180 and 181) explore the deserted-lover theme: the adoring female betrayed by the cold, cruel male. In the first, she traces the growth of that "truest love," from attention and interest to affection and devotion, and duty becomes a joy under a respected master: "Obedience was my heart's free choice" (l. 11). But the adoring female allows her imagination too free a rein:

I dreamed it would be nameless bliss
 As I loved--loved to be
 And to this object did I press
 As blind as eagerly

(ll. 33-36)

The rude awakening which follows is at least partly the

result of her impetuosity in chasing rainbows "as in a dream" (ll. 48-50). The narrator carefully avoids holding the man directly responsible, placing the blame on "My rival's . . . jealous frown" which "transfused / Strong poison in his veins" (ll. 63, 65-66). The reader might wish to argue that there is no proof that Charlotte was writing here of her own experience with Heger, and of course this is true. Nevertheless, there is in this poem a strong sense of reality which earlier deserted-lover poems lacked. The voice of personal experience can be heard in her examination of the growth of love and of her own jealousy. Perhaps, loth to lose it entirely, Charlotte had unconsciously imposed the shreds of her dream world on Heger, the real-life man to whom she romantically refers (in a letter to Branwell) as "The black Swan."¹⁰ Obviously, it was the dream-like quality of her feelings which attracted her, and in the poem's closing stanza one senses that Charlotte laments more for the loss of that rainbow-tinted dream than for the man himself:

She [the rival] seemed my rainbow to have seized
 Around her form it closed
 And soft its <iris> splendour blazed
 Where love & she reposed (ll. 73-76)

The personal pronoun "He" (l. 72) has been replaced by the rainbow image and by the equivocal "love."

A series of verse fragments (No. 183), probably written later that same year (1845), reflect the gloominess and

aching loneliness which seem once more to be settling over Charlotte's spirits--no doubt as a result of the loss of Heger's friendship. These 49 lines seem to represent three attempts to begin the same poem. In all three, "the Autumn moon gleams quiet" (ll. 6, 37, 43), but it is "dead October's moon" (l. 1), and has no power to overcome the "wan and phantom hue" (l. 12) of the landscape. The moonlight can penetrate the windows of the silent house, but cannot overcome the "vacant gloom" (l. 24). Charlotte seems to be saying that her life is too dreary, too colourless ("there is but shade and gleam," l. 27) for her to escape, or "vary," her "tinted dream" (l. 28) of Heger. All she has left is "Hollow silence" (l. 32). In view of the "tinted dream" and "rainbow" images Charlotte is now employing, we cannot help but remember these pre-crisis lines:

And fond and fast the pulses beat
 Departed Passion's shade to greet
 Rising in transient vision sweet
 To colour empty air (No. 105, ll. 45-48)

She sensed then that her dreams were no more than tinted "empty air," but at that time was still able to evoke sweet, if transient, visions. Now, however, the emptiness has become unavoidable and overpowering. She cannot believably recreate the dream she built on Heger, because the reality which supported it has gone. The "Departed . . . shade" of this passion can never comfort her again, and without a dream to provide such comfort, she has only hollowness.

III. The 1846 Volume: The Violet Blooms

"But dim thy beam & faint thy ray"¹¹

Sometime during 1845, Charlotte persuaded her sisters to join her in publishing some of their poems. This was a highly secretive venture--probably even the Reverend Brontë was unaware of it--and to protect their identities Charlotte, Emily, and Anne adopted (respectively) the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. The volume, published in 1846, represented in one sense the culmination of Charlotte's fondest ambition--to become a published poet. However, the culmination was but a feeble shadow of her once-rosy dreams: the volume sold very poorly and Charlotte's contributions to it were by no means her best works. True, it was an important and probably necessary stepping stone for all three Brontë sisters on their road to literary success; for Charlotte, however, it seems to have marked the end of her efforts to join the "bright band" of great poets, "favoured children of the sky" ("THE VIOLET," No. 51, ll. 173-74).

It is not surprising that Charlotte selected none of the 1836 crisis poems for publication: the necessary revisions would have evoked too many painful memories, and such exposure of her sinfulness would have been unthinkable. Most of the poems Charlotte contributed to the 1846 volume date from 1837 or 1838, and some of the themes are very

familiar. "THE TEACHER'S MONOLOGUE" (No. 191) and "PARTING" (No. 201) reflect the desolation which always threatened to overwhelm Charlotte whenever she contemplated her lot as teacher/governess. "THE TEACHER'S MONOLOGUE" is by far the more mournful of the two, recalling those "Sweet dreams of home" that seemed to "vanish into vacancy" (ll. 11, 28), and offering only this brief, bitter consolation: "Well, such a life at least makes Death / A welcome, wished-for friend" (ll. 87-88). "PARTING" is determinedly--though not convincingly--cheerful, relying heavily on the consolations of memory: "Though we are condemned to part: / There's such a thing as keeping / A remembrance in one's heart" (ll. 2-4).

The benefits of memory are also the main theme of "WINTER STORES" (No. 199) and "EVENING SOLACE" (No. 200). Like "PARTING," "WINTER STORES" emphasizes the soothing powers of happy memories in times of suffering: "'Tis she [memory] that finds, in summer, treasure / To serve for winter's food" (ll. 47-48). "EVENING SOLACE," however, presents another viewpoint:

. . . thoughts that once wrung groans of anguish,
Now cause but some mild tears to flow.

And feelings, once as strong as passions,
Float softly back--a faded dream (ll. 15-18)

Here, memory seems to have the power to transform real experiences into dreams where "Our own sharp griefs and wild sensations, / The tale of others' sufferings seem" (ll. 19-

20). For Charlotte, unable to find consolation in the present, this twofold combination of memory and dreams is her main solace: the brightness of early dreams may fade in memory, but this loss is balanced by the transformation of painful experiences into equally faded, dream-like memories.

The line between dream (which exists only in the mind) and vision (which has external existence) is not always clear in Charlotte's poems, although in those poems I have just been discussing, dreams seem overwhelmingly unreal (and therefore unable to exist outside the mind). Other poems in the 1846 volume, however, possess a more visionary quality. "PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM" (No. 189) is, like "St. John in the Island of Patmos" (No. 67) and "Saul" (No. 99), based on a biblical story. On the eve of Christ's crucifixion, Pontius Pilate's wife dreams:

. . . when the dawn shall shine
 Pilate, to judge the victim will appear,
 Pass sentence--yield him up to crucify;
 And on that cross the spotless Christ must die.

I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,
 Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.
 (ll. 39-42, 47-48)

Awaking, she hears "Dull, measured, strokes of axe and hammer ring" (l. 31) and, through her window, sees men raising a cross "On yonder stony mount" (l. 28). She does not doubt that her dream was in fact a vision--"Dreams, then, are true" (l. 43)--and assumes that it must have a purpose: "Surely some oracle has been with me, / The gods

have chosen me to reveal their plan, / To warn an unjust judge of destiny" (ll. 44-46). According to the Scriptural account, Pilate's wife does indeed warn her husband, but the warning is vague, delivered by message rather than in person, and therefore unlikely to be heeded by a weak man surrounded by chief priests and elders crying for Christ's blood (Matt. xxvii.19-20). Charlotte does not carry the story this far in her poem, preferring to leave Pilate's wife uncertain whether or not she should deliver the warning:

Ere night descends, I shall more surely know
 What guide to follow, in what path to go;
 I wait in hope--I wait in solemn fear,
 The oracle of God--the sole--true God--to hear.
(ll. 153-56)

Although, like so many of Charlotte's, Pilate's wife's dream has faded--"some unknown cause / Has dimmed and rased the thoughts" (ll. 99-100)--this is not the reason for her uncertainty. Charlotte permits us no opportunity to doubt the reality of this vision. Pilate's wife hesitates because she does not know whether she is meant to save Christ from crucifixion and Pilate from his "dreadful doom" (l. 104) by terrifying her husband with details of the "appalling vison" (l. 93), or whether she has merely been blessed with a vision of "a world remote, an age to come" (l. 116) illumined by the "purer light" (l. 129) of Christ--to which Christ's crucifixion and Pilate's "dreadful doom" are a terrible but necessary prelude. In view of the Scriptural account, we

must assume that Charlotte saw Pilate's wife as a small, but important agent of destiny, receiving and delivering the warning which was fated to be ignored.

In "GILBERT" (No. 185), we find a very similar situation, but here the tone is quite different. As in "PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM," the main character (Gilbert, in this case) experiences a vision--sent from we-are-not-sure-where for the purpose of we-are-not-sure-what: "Oh! whence its source, and what its mission?" (l. 227) are questions which the narrator leaves dangling. Of this much, however, we can be sure: the vision, brought by Misery personified (ll. 177-84), is unequivocally dark, chaotic, ghastly, and terrifying--noise, wind, storm, ocean, a drowned woman, and debris from a shipwreck (ll. 225-80). No glimpse of future good follows, as it does in "PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM."¹² This could be merely a vision of events that have been or are yet to come, were it not for one small clue: as the gloom and "tumult strange" (l. 209) which precede the vision sweep over the uncomprehending Gilbert, the narrator asks, "Was such sensation Jonah's doom, / Gulphed in the depths of ocean?" (ll. 223-24). Clearly, the narrator is implying that Gilbert's vision has been sent as both a warning and an opportunity for salvation.

Indeed, despite the fact that there are distinct similarities between Gilbert and Angrian characters such as Alexander Percy and Zamorna, Charlotte obviously wants her readers to see Gilbert as man in dire need of salvation. He

shares with Percy and Zamorna that often-fatal attraction for women, and we assume (although we cannot be certain) that his desertion of the adoring Elinor (the drowned woman in the vision) is responsible for her death. But, even though Percy and Zamorna were undeniably wicked at times, they were both complex characters for whom we often felt much sympathy. Gilbert, on the other hand, has no redeeming qualities whatsoever, and Charlotte works hard to emphasize how unworthy he is of any sympathy. The warmth of "the parlour atmosphere" (l. 129) contrasts sharply with the coldness of Gilbert's heart. He cares only for worldly prosperity: "gathering gold," reaping "homage . . . from all the world," and cultivating his own "spotless name" (ll. 101, 325-26). His wife and children are nameless, mere adjuncts to his comfort and ego. He is incapable of love, impassioned only by the power he has over women like the hapless Elinor. He destroys her soul, enslaving her to feed his all-consuming self-love. The narrator permits him to damn himself in his own words:

He says: "She loved me more than life;
 And truly it was sweet
 To see so fair a woman kneel,
 In bondage, at my feet.

There was a sort of quiet bliss
 To be so deeply loved,
 - To gaze on trembling eagerness
 And sit myself unmoved.

I knew myself no perfect man
 Nor, as she deemed, divine;

I knew that I was glorious--but
 By her reflected shine;

Yet, like a god did I descend
 At last, to meet her love;
 And, like a god, I then withdrew
 To my own heaven above.

(ll. 53-60, 69-72, 77-80)

He exults in his perfidy, knowing that "her blinded constancy / Would ne'er my deeds betray" (ll. 85-86). And, unlike Percy and Zamorna, the thought of repentance never crosses his mind:

There is no sorrow in his smile,
 No kindness in his tone;
 The triumph of a selfish heart
 Speaks coldly there alone

(ll. 49-52)

When God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and "cry against" its wickedness, Jonah fled, boarded a ship for Tarshish, faced imminent disaster when a mighty storm blew up, recognized the tempest as God's wrath against his disobedience, had himself thrown overboard in order to save the crew, was swallowed by a great fish--prepared by God, in His mercy--and was thus brought to repentance (Jonah 1-2). The parallels are obvious: Gilbert's vision, in which he is engulfed by a stormy ocean, is his opportunity to repent and thus save himself. But Gilbert, incapable of love, is also incapable of repentance. The narrator begs, with tongue in cheek, a "pitying god" to have mercy: "abridge the time / Of anguish, now his fate!" (ll. 293-96). The prayer, of course, is bitterly ironical, for Gilbert's "anguish" has

nothing to do with remorse:

He pitied not that shadowy thing,
When it was flesh and blood;
Nor now can pity's balmy spring
Refresh his arid mood. (ll. 309-12)

His first reaction is to deny the reality of the vision:

"He says 'twas all a dream; / He strives his inward sight to blind / Against truth's inward beam" (ll. 306-08). Indeed, Gilbert probably does not need to "strive" too hard, since it seems obvious that he is incapable of understanding the truth when he has seen it. "Dark Percy" (in No. 86) knew of his own sinfulness and the damnation to which it would lead, and--however briefly and for whatever reasons--contemplated repentance; Zamorna (in No. 116) bitterly embraced his damnation with conscious blasphemy, for he knew himself incapable of repentance; Gilbert cannot repent because he has no conception of anything beyond this world and the pleasure it can afford him. The only pain Gilbert suffers is his crushing fear of discovery and "threatened shame" (l. 328)--before men ("the world," l. 325), not God.

There are echoes here of the old amoral world of Glass Town, but the joyous innocence has given way to despair and bitterness. Charlotte does not end the poem with the irony of unredeemed, uncomprehending Gilbert finally willing to accept the vision's reality, but misinterpreting it as a blessing in disguise: an assurance that, since Elinor is dead, he is now free from the threat of dishonour, "No

longer Terror's slave" (ll. 313-24). For the next ten years, Gilbert prospers in the world, "Without or tear or stain" (l. 336). Arriving home from a journey late one night, expecting to be greeted by his wife and children, he is confronted instead by "A woman, clad in white":

Lo! water from her dripping dress
 Runs on the streaming floor;
 From every dark and clinging tress,
 The drops incessant pour.

. . .
 There's sand and sea-weed on her robe,
 Her hollow eyes are blind (ll. 364-68, 373-74)

Her "dripping dress," blind eyes, and the message she brings, proclaim her as Elinor transformed into a figure of Justice. She brings "Heaven's stern but just decree: / 'The measure thou to her didst mete, / To thee shall measured be!'" (ll. 390-92). This justice is cold, untempered by mercy. The "timbers from a wreck" (l. 273) which appeared in the vision suggest that Elinor may not have committed suicide, but certainly she died dishonoured if not dishonourably. The decree of "measure for measure," however, requires that Gilbert be similarly dishonoured by committing suicide, thus losing the only two things he values, his mortal life and his "spotless name."

Again, the deserted lover theme suggests that "GILBERT" was heavily influenced by Charlotte's sufferings over Heger's treatment of her. This poem, however, differs considerably from No. 180 (discussed earlier, pp. 94-95) where the

supernatural element was confined to those rainbow-tinted dreams the adoring female cherished, and responsibility for their loss seems equally divided between the impetuous narrator and the jealous rival. In "GILBERT," the supernatural is a very real and unusually active presence. Not since the days of the Glass Town genii has Charlotte permitted such deus ex machina interference onstage, and although Gilbert tries to convince himself that the vision is only a dream, we--the readers--must not allow ourselves to be similarly deluded.

It is true that Charlotte seems to have originally viewed the vision as a psychological rather than a supernatural phenomenon--a product perhaps of Gilbert's guilty conscience:

His mind had failed beneath the weigh[t]
 Oft its own dark creation
 Had not at length relenting fate
 Ordained the dream's cessation
 (No. 181, ll. 120-23)

But Charlotte edited these lines from the final version, and thus removed the only credible suggestion of a non-supernatural source for the vision. The following lines clearly establish the imaginary nature of the vision, but the imagination in question is not Gilbert's:

He sees--but scarce can language paint
 The tissue Fancy weaves;
 For words oft give but echo faint
 Of thoughts the mind conceives.
 (No. 185, ll. 205-08)

The voice here is the poet's, expressing her often-stated feeling of inadequacy, and the authorial intrusion is designed to emphasize the horror of the vision by pointing out the inadequacies of language in such situations. In the poem's closing stanzas, there is no suggestion that the supernatural visitation is not real. Gilbert may be "Impelled by maniac purpose dread" (l. 399), but his insanity is supernaturally induced: he is possessed, "wild as one whom demons seize" (l. 395). If divine justice is to be satisfied, Charlotte has no other choice: Gilbert must commit suicide, but would never do so willingly. Therefore, his will must be usurped.

This usurpation of Gilbert's will, however, brings us to the main problem in this poem--the question of responsibility--a problem which is compounded by the narrator's frequently ironic attitude. In the opening section, for example, we find Gilbert placed in a deliberately Edenic setting. Part I is entitled "THE GARDEN": "a plot of ground / Where flowers and orchard-trees were fenced / With lofty walls around" (ll. 2-4). It is Gilbert's garden, that first stanza tells us, and he walks there alone, musing "where the moonlight shone" (l. 8). Once more, we have the old symbol of supernatural harmony and serenity, but here the mood is not broken--as it has so frequently been of late. Instead, the following eight lines emphasize and enhance the almost visionary quality of the scene:

This garden, in a city-heart,
 Lay still as houseless wild,
 Though many-windowed mansion fronts
 Were round it closely piled;
 But thick their walls, and those within
 Lived lives by noise unstirred;
 Like wafting of an angel's wing,
 Time's flight by them was heard. (ll. 9-16)

The realities of time and space seem suspended, and Gilbert, in his walled garden, is separated and protected from the noisy world of the city. The "wafting of an angel's wing" hints at Paradise, a suggestion that is reiterated in Part II of the poem as the narrator takes us into "THE PARLOUR" and presents a scene of domestic bliss and harmony:

His wife, with pleased and peaceful eye,
 Sits, kindly smiling, near.
 . . .
 The beauty that in youth he wooed,
 Is beauty still, unfaded,
 The brow of ever placid mood
 No churlish grief has shaded.
 . . .
 And smiles seem native to the eyes
 Of those sweet children, three;
 They have but looked on tranquil skies,
 And know not misery.
 (ll. 151-52, 157-60, 173-76)

This "Eden" is of course an illusion, set up to emphasize through irony Gilbert's utter devotion to the "goods" of this world: his "love" is directed only at things (wife and children included), and his "innocence" depends upon his own ignorance of sin, and his fellow mortals' ignorance of his true character. However, no reader who has ever suffered from the turmoil of this noisy, chaotic world can entirely

deny the attractions of Gilbert's little paradise, and--were we permitted to feel even a little sympathy for Gilbert--we might be strongly tempted to blame, and even resent, Misery-Elinor-Justice for the destruction of peace and bliss.

The question is, given the narrator's attitude towards the events that occur in the poem and those (both human and non-human) who participate in them, can we blame Gilbert--or indeed anyone? Gilbert is clearly a detestable fellow--his pride, cruelty, and selfishness are almost overemphasized--but does he have a choice? His apparent inability to understand the wrongness of his actions and thoughts suggests that he is a mere victim of Fate, perhaps the same Fate which (in the original version of "GILBERT") relented and "Ordained the dream's cessation," the Fate which--since it had the power to halt the dream--was perhaps also responsible for its beginning. Gilbert ignores the dream's warning, but again, does he have a choice? It is apparently his nature to blind himself to "truth's inward beam," and God shows no true mercy, for the dream ends as it began in an ambiguous roar of "raving seas" and "rushing gloom" (ll. 279, 271): its "source" and its "mission" are so vague and unexplained that Gilbert needs make no effort to avoid the truth. Had God been truly merciful, He would have clarified the warning so that Gilbert could not misinterpret it and would at least have had the choice of saving or damning himself. Instead, we find the narrator ironically praying God for the only

kind of "mercy" Gilbert understands--the abridgement of his immediate pain.

A cold, perhaps Calvinistic, sense of predestination seems to inform the whole poem. Divine love and mercy are nowhere to be found, Christ (the Redeemer) is never mentioned, and God seems completely uninterested in the proceedings: His only act, if indeed it is His act, is to send His agent to fulfil "Heaven's stern but just decree." This is barely one step away from a mechanical universe ruled by an impassive, inexorable Fate. As far back as 1832, Charlotte had seemed inclined to blame "The voice of destiny" (No. 66, l. 10) for her troubles, and now--the fabric of her real and dream worlds in tatters--she seems to sense a void in the heavens. The almost meaningless cliches behind which she tried to hide at the end of 1837 ("Dust! to its narrow house beneath; / Soul! to its place on high," No. 151, ll. 5-6) were too empty to be convincing, and Gilbert is doomed from the start because Charlotte has no hope: try though she may, she finds no evidence of God's mercy, or even His interest, in her own life.

The world in "GILBERT" may seem cold and cruel, but we can at least console ourselves with the knowledge that Gilbert's punishment was just, if not merciful; in "FRANCES" (No. 190), however, both the cold hollowness of the heavens and the consolations offered are far more complex. The main character here (Frances) is female, and the poem's first 36

lines seem merely a technical device designed to establish a fictional figure through whom Charlotte may then safely speak on her own behalf. Although an early draft (of ll. 213-27) dating from 1837 indicates the Duchess of Zamorna's sufferings over her husband's desertion as the original inspiration for the poem, the final version seems more personal, more an expression of Charlotte's own sense of loss and hopelessness. She brings together in "FRANCES" the three things in which she had once believed: her dreams, her religion, and Heger. Frances "will not sleep, for fear of dreams" (l. 1): the dreams gave her "the sweet hope of being loved . . . And the heart ventured to believe, / Another heart esteemed it dear" (ll. 129, 135-36), but the dreams proved to be "Traitors!" (l. 224), for "I am not loved--nor loved have been" (l. 222), and they must therefore be banished. There is no point in memory holding onto the "hollow dream" (l. 160).

In one of the late 1837 poems (No. 135), Charlotte tried--somewhat unconvincingly--to console herself for the loss of her dreams with the possibility that God would "fill the void of earthly love" (l. 24), and here we find Frances examining that possibility much more honestly. Her "grievous need" drives her to prayer: "God help me, in my inward pain; /-Which cannot ask for pity's méed, / Which has no license to complain" (ll. 37-40). With Frances we have little sense that her suffering is the result of any sin on her part, yet

still she feels unworthy of God's mercy. By allowing her dream of love to delude her, Frances may have been at least partly to blame for the trouble she now faces, but--unlike Gilbert--she has injured no one except herself. It seems, therefore, most cruel that God refuses to answer her humble and anguished prayer: "She waited--as for some reply; / The still and cloudy night gave none" (ll. 49-50). The cold, almost mechanical impassiveness of the divine power that we may have sensed in "GILBERT" is in "FRANCES" clearly stated: "For me the universe is dumb, / Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind" (ll. 61-62).

In 1833, when Lily Hart stood at her mother's grave and asked "O mother! does thy spirit rest / In fairer worlds than ours?" (No. 85, ll. 5-6), Charlotte seemed to be indicating some sense of uncertainty about the nature of the after-life; in 1836, both her dreams and her hopes of salvation faded and darkened as she faced "the very shadows of Spiritual Death";¹³ now, in "FRANCES," she stands at the ultimate abyss--the bleak horror of the "nothingness" that accompanies a complete loss of faith:

. . . and when I die,
 What follows? Vacant nothingness?
 The blank of lost identity?
 Erasure both of pain and bliss?

I've heard of heaven--I would believe;
 For if this world indeed be all,
 Who longest lives may deepest grieve,
 Most blest, whom sorrows soonest call.

(ll. 77-84)

Frances considers the consolation that would be man's could he be sure of exchanging the disappointment, doubt, weariness, worthlessness, fear, imperfection; and grief of this life for hope, fulfilment, rest, love, mercy, certainty, and bliss after death (ll. 85-116). In the past, Charlotte would have clung to such thoughts; now, however, she summarily dismisses "this vain and barren dreaming / Of death, and dubious life to come" for she sees "a nearer beacon gleaming / Over dejection's sea of gloom":

The very wildness of my sorrow
Tells me I yet have innate force;
My track of life has been too narrow,
Effort shall trace a broader course.

When, lorn and loveless, life will languish,
But courage can revive the flame.

(ll. 189-96, 203-04)

Activity, involvement, "New scenes, new language, skies less clouded, / May once more wake the wish to live" (ll. 209-10), and Frances closes her long soliloquy with a decision to leave all her dreams behind and bury her grief in the challenges of a new life.¹⁴

At first glance, "THE MISSIONARY" (No. 187) may seem diametrically opposed to both "FRANCES" and "GILBERT," but these three poems are more closely related than one might think. Like Frances, the missionary soliloquizes, and although, unlike her, he seems deeply committed to his religion, he too feels forced to leave his old life and seek "New scenes":

Where altered life, fast-following change,
 Hot action, never-ceasing toil,
 Shall stir, turn, dig, the spirit's soil;
 Fresh roots shall plant, fresh seeds shall sow,
 Till a new garden there shall grow,
 Cleared of the weeds that fill it now (ll. 6-11)

The "weeds" he must "struggle to forget" (l. 15) are "Mere human love, mere selfish yearning, / Which, cherished, would arrest me yet" (ll. 12-13). Both the missionary and Frances have been parted from their loved ones. His love was "axe-struck" (l. 40); hers, "lightning-struck" ("FRANCES," l. 178).

The difference between the two poems, of course, centres on the circumstances under which those partings took place. Frances is the deserted lover, whereas the missionary is the deserter, and were it not for the fact that he names his lady as "Helen" (l. 49), we might strongly suspect that these two poems are companion pieces--two sides of the same story. Indeed, apart from the respective ladies' names, the two stories mesh well together: Helen, like Frances, seems to have suffered much at the parting, for the missionary (who, like Frances' beloved, is nameless) had to "dare" her "tears" and her "scorn" (l. 51); Frances could not discover "whence that wondrous change of feeling" (l. 161), and the missionary seems to be making belated explanations to the absent Helen now, so perhaps she too was ignorant of his motives; finally, the only thing Frances seems to have learned of her beloved since their parting is that he "went a roving / To sunny climes, beyond the sea" (ll. 205-06)--just like the missionary.

One cannot help wondering whether Frances would have been much consoled had she felt that the one she loved did reciprocate her love but had sacrificed it to dedicate himself to saving the world.

Charlotte had, in 1836, confessed to Ellen Nussey, "I cannot bend my life to the grand end of doing good,"¹⁵ and it would therefore be logical to assume that she is vicariously pushing herself to that "grand end" in "THE MISSIONARY." I must confess, however, that the poem troubles me. In the first place, the meshing plot elements of "THE MISSIONARY" and "FRANCES" force us to question the missionary's qualifications as a saviour, for Frances has lost her faith through her beloved's desertion. In the second place, even if we ignore the links between the two poems, the missionary still remains a somewhat questionable character. He deserted Helen whom he claims to have "loved well" (l. 37), yet he seems blind to her suffering, concerning himself only with his own "great sacrifice" and "soul-felt pain" (ll. 33, 39). He believes he sees with "the spirit's vision clear" (l. 61) that he is duty-bound to take "the healing creed" and "heal the sickness sore / Of those far off and desolate" (ll. 71, 89-90). Certainly, these are noble aspirations, but one cannot help noticing how entranced he seems by his "vision" of himself as a martyr:

Hurling hell's strongest bulwarks down,
Even when the last pang thrills my breast,
When Death bestows the Martyr's crown,

And calls me into Jesus' rest.
 Then for my ultimate reward--
 Then for the world-rejoicing word--
 The voice from Father--Spirit--Son:
 'Servant of God, well hast thou done!'

(11. 152-59)

As a character created to provide Charlotte with a "voice," the tenor of the missionary's statements is understandable: Charlotte always tried too hard whenever she attempted to convince herself of the desirability of martyring herself, sacrificing the pleasures of love in this world for a "grander end."¹⁵ As a persona in his own right, however, the missionary seems blinded by an exaggerated sense of his own worth, and may even be compared to Gilbert: that detestable character's ends were, of course, completely ignoble, but the means the two men employ to attain their ends are remarkably similar, and neither seems to care about the woman's sufferings. We find the same situation in Jane Eyre: St. John Rivers would gladly sacrifice Jane Eyre's happiness, and even her life, on the altar of his ambition.

Nevertheless, other poems in the 1846 volume indicate that Charlotte wanted to see the missionary as her new hero, her new "mental king"; the fact that we may not find him entirely convincing is evidence more of our quite different viewpoint than of Charlotte's insincerity. She seems to have determined to exchange her old dreams for new--her wicked, worldly nobles for men whose nobility lies in their

dutiful spirituality. In her preparation of the poems for publication, for example, Charlotte frequently aimed her editorial pen at the old, Zamornaesque heroes. The 1837 version of "THE LETTER" contained these lines:

But still some feelings vague descend
 Of youth wild & warm
 That strengthen as you longer bend
 Your gaze upon that form

. . .
 The eyes you well might deem
 A wild hawk's

. . .
 And then so broad & white a brow
 And features grandly cast
 In such a mould as tells us now
 Of times & heroes past

(No. 141, ll. 57-60, 62-63, 65-68)

The published version is devoid of all trace of "youth wild & warm," and "times & heroes past" are replaced by times and heroes present:

A stalwart form, a massive head,
 A firm, determined face.

Black Spanish locks, a sunburnt cheek,
 A brow high, broad, and white,
 Where every furrow seems to speak
 Of mind and moral might. (No. 194, ll. 59-64)

Externally, we might still recognize Zamorna in those "Black Spanish locks" and "sunburnt cheek," but the inner man has changed completely.

Similarly, the "wide halls" and "gilded domes" of the early, Angrian version of "THE WIFE'S WILL" (No. 157, ll. 39, 41) are swept away with none of the fanfare which accompanied

the dissolution of the genii palaces, "evanishing" in "oceans of light" so long ago; in the new version, they are simply not there. And the "dark eyes, . . . divine / To me, [in] their full and haughty shine" (ll. 51-52) also disappear completely, and are replaced only by the spiritual worth of the new hero:

. . . Thy love has joy,
 Pure--undefiled with base alloy;
 'Tis not a passion, false and blind,
 Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind;
 Worthy, I feel, art thou to be
 Loved with my perfect energy.

(No. 198, ll. 49-54)

Charlotte could not see that in many ways the "perfect energy" with which she embraced her new hero was quite as "blind" as her "enchainment" to the old. She could change his name to William (as she does in "THE WIFE'S WILL," and others), she could alter his character to conform to the demands of "Duty--Necessity," she could even dedicate herself to this new ideal, but she could not love him. He is a hollow shell, a negative image of a lost dream rather than a positive image of a new one. In Jane Eyre, the missionary reaches fulfilment as a character in St. John Rivers, and although Jane admires his worth, she condemns his coldheartedness. Happiness comes to her only when she can reconcile the demands of duty with those of her heart and return to Mr. Rochester, the embodiment of an only-slightly-reformed old hero.

Before closing, there is one last poem from the 1846 volume which must still be examined, for in the final, much-edited version of "APOSTASY" we can see clearly the hollowness and loss of momentum which had been slowly but steadily eroding the quality of Charlotte's poetry since 1837. One cannot help wondering what prompted the clergyman's daughter, apparently determined to follow the path of Duty, to select poems such as "APOSTASY" and "FRANCES" for publication alongside poems such as "THE MISSIONARY." What surprises one most, however, are the strange and drastic changes which take place when Charlotte prepares "APOSTASY" for publication. Although, as I said in Chapter Two (pp. 82-83), the earliest version (1837) is probably Angrian, Charlotte does not rewrite the poem in order to remove Angrian references, for there are none. Some of the alterations are only minor rewordings, and some date from a second version of the poem (also composed in 1837), but the most significant changes occur only in the published poem. In the intermediate version, for example, the blasphemous kissing of the cross is softened to a simple denial of its virtues: "Depress again the sacred sign . . . Lay down the cross thou deem'st divine / Its virtue I deny" (No. 134, second draft, ll. 59, 61-62). But the blasphemous ritual, the denial of the cross's virtue, and even the cross itself all disappear in the final version. It seems almost as if Charlotte had simply wearied of the whole subject.

Confusion, uncertainty, and weariness are certainly evident in her reworking of the poem's conclusion. As the reader will remember, the original poem ended with the priest sadly commenting on the apostate's inevitable damnation. The second (1837) version omits the original's last stanzas, and halts abruptly after the denial of the cross's virtue, leaving the apostate still alive. Stanzas added at a later date, probably when Charlotte was preparing the final version, indicate her indecision, for they are heavily amended and there are many variants. Nevertheless, these are the lines which form the basis of that strange and ambiguous conclusion we find in the published poem:

Now go; for at the door there waits
 Another stranger guest:
 He calls--I come--my pulse scarce beats,
 My heart fails in my breast.
 Again that voice--how far away,
 How dreary sounds that tone!
 And I, methinks, am gone astray
 In trackless wastes and lone.

I fain would rest a little while:
 Where can I find a stay,
 Till dawn upon the hills shall smile,
 And show some trodden way?
 'I come! I come!' in haste she said,
 ''Twas Walter's voice I heard!'
 Then up she sprang--but fell back, dead,
 His name her latest word. (No. 192, ll. 65-80)

The priest has disappeared altogether as if he were of no importance anymore, and the stunningly dramatic certainty of the apostate's damnation is also gone--perhaps that too is no longer important to Charlotte. We are left with the

feeling that the woman was merely rambling in the final delirium of her illness, for her confusion is evident in her desire to "rest a little while" until things become clearer. Without the priest's judgment, we cannot tell whether the woman will be damned or not. Her sudden death seems anticlimactic, and although she dies with Walter's name on her lips, the idolatry is much weaker here than it was in the 1837 original. The apostate is not so much denying God, as ignoring Him. Perhaps Charlotte, who had suffered much over her losses in both the real and the imaginary worlds, had in her weariness come to feel that there was no longer any point in pursuing either earthly or divine love. In fact, "love unfulfilled" seems to be the major theme informing most of these 1846 poems, and one pictures Charlotte after their publication tying up her "hollow dreams" in bundles and pushing them to the back of the drawer as she prepared to make her way unsupported in the barren world as best she could.

Conclusion

Sixteen years before the publication of the 1846 volume of poems, Charlotte believed that she was destined to be a poet, if only a "humble" one. When she wrote "THE VIOLET" in 1830, she was filled with enthusiasm, for the world was bright, balanced, and harmonious. Her first sojourn at Roe Head dampened her enthusiasm somewhat, and her naive optimism gave way to uncertainty. Throughout 1834 and 1835, the demands of duty steadily eroded the brightness, balance, and harmony of Charlotte's life, and in 1836 misery and terror drove her to despair. She could not repent of her idolatrous love of her dream world and was horrified by the prospect of eternal damnation. But the conflict itself rapidly destroyed her dreams, and so she felt herself doomed to a lifetime of misery--unable to seek consolation in either imagination or religion. As the intensity of the crisis eased, Charlotte found both her dreams and her religious faith in ruins. For a while she clung desperately to the dreams, and then in Brussels seemed to find new hope in Heger. By 1846, however, having lost both the dreams and Heger, she faced the "dumb, / Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind" universe with a new resolution: she would rely only on herself, seeking a new life and, in the absence of any help from God, creating a new hero to guide her on the path of Duty. But that new

spiritual hero, in the form of the very moral husband or the missionary, was too cold and lifeless: Jane Eyre could not love him in St. John Rivers but, like Charlotte, was prepared to sacrifice part of herself to him in the name of Duty. Unlike Charlotte, however, Jane was rescued by Mr. Rochester's need which allowed her to be dutiful without sacrificing herself.

Two of Charlotte's final group of poems echo this theme of duty accomplished without excessive martyrdom. No. 205 (from The Professor) and No. 209 (from Jane Eyre) both have their origins in No. 180, the poem detailing the growth and destruction of the impetuous speaker's rainbow dreams of love. In No. 205, however, there are no rainbow dreams and no hints that the speaker, Jane (actually Frances Henri), is too impetuous. She is dutiful, attending to her studies and admitting only to "gratitude" (l. 4) not love, and although her assertions of her professor's affection for her may be wishful thinking (at that point in the novel), she accepts the final parting with "bitter grief" (l. 115) but without recriminations. The poem itself is sad, for its final stanza offers only a small hope of a re-union, but in the novel, Frances's quiet, stoical pursuit of duty is rewarded with the fulfilment of her love. The other poem (No. 209) is Mr. Rochester's starry-eyed profession of love for Jane Eyre. But here the impetuosity and rainbow dreams return (ll. 24-26), for this love is an illusion, based on

Rochester's concealment of his first marriage. The poem ends happily, but in the novel, fulfilment cannot come until both parties have suffered, been parted, and learned to rebuild their relationship on more realistic grounds--shorn of Jane's idolatrous worship and Rochester's pride. Neither has had to make excessive sacrifices because both have eventually followed the dictates of Duty: Jane, when she refused to be Rochester's mistress, and Rochester when he "began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom."¹

Several other poems indicate that Charlotte is still struggling to find some consolation in religion. In one (No. 208, from Jane Eyre), the poor orphan is consoled by the friendship of God. We must note, however, that the song itself provides little consolation for the poor orphan Jane Eyre. No doubt, Charlotte was remembering her own sufferings when she was "of . . . kindred despoiled" (l. 18) at Roe Head: vague promises of future happiness in heaven could not console her then for the loss of her earthly joys. In fact, despite the faith she appears to profess at the end of Jane Eyre, Charlotte does not seem to derive any more consolation from promises of heaven at thirty than she did at twenty. In No. 210, for example, Charlotte returns to themes of idolatry and lost love, and no doubt the "idol cut in rock . . . The granite God" (ll. 13, 15) is Heger. She pleads with heaven to "heal the wound which I still deeply

feel" (l. 21), and seeks God's "forgiveness comfort, grace" (l. 24). There is a hint of repentance in her request for "forgiveness," and we cannot doubt that her prayer is sincere, but her faith in that "comfort" and "grace" seems precarious. In the first place, her "dark remorse" and "darker shame" (l. 17) seem unconnected to any sense of sin: she feels alienated "from my kind" (l. 18), not from God. The creeds expressed in the last three stanzas are not so much statements of belief as rationalizations. In almost every line, she attempts to convince herself that what she fears is not really true: "Thy gorious hosts look not in scorn on our poor race / Thy King eternal doth no iron judgment deal / On suffering worms" (ll. 22-24). This is that same cold, impassive, merciless universe we saw in poems such as "GILBERT" and "FRANCES." It is the "ebon horror" of the bleak prospect depicted in No. 206 (l. 12), where all nature seems to be in mourning for "the dead" (l. 24). Here Charlotte's references to "My life's light's parting streak" and "The West" (ll. 16, 17) hint at long-lost Angria (see Zamorna's "our own infernal West," No. 116, l. 64). Without the dream, earth and heaven seem equally desolate, and at the end of No. 210, Charlotte hides her lack of conviction behind meaningless religious clichés again: "the soul redeemed may mark Time's fleeting course round earth / And know its trial past--its sufferings are gone / And feel the peril past of Death's immortal birth"

(ll. 30-32). It is impossible to say whether Charlotte intended that verb "may" (l. 31) to indicate uncertainty or not, but it is disturbingly ambiguous.

By mid-1849, Charlotte had given up poetry altogether. Her last three poems are brief, fragmented laments on the deaths of Emily and Anne. This was a time of terrible trauma for Charlotte: she lost her brother and both sisters in the space of just nine months. In January 1849, less than a month after Emily's death, she wrote to Ellen: "I look where you counsel me to look--beyond earthly tempests and sorrows--I seem to get strength if not consolation."² Religion, or perhaps her firm belief that it was her duty to believe, provided Charlotte with a crutch to lean on in times of great need. After her crisis in 1836, however, it seems never to have brought her comfort or joy again. In those last three poems, she laments "the aching void the withering chill" (No. 211, l. 5) and "Life's lone wilderness" (No. 212, l. 15). There is "small relief" and consolation must be torn from the depths of "despair / & wasting misery" (No. 212, ll. 12, 4-6). The following lines again are not a statement of belief, but a desperate plea: "God relieve us through our misery / And give us rest & joy with thee / When we reach our bourne!" (No. 212, ll. 22-24). By the time Anne's death delivers the final blow, Charlotte seems to have succumbed to despair: "There's little joy in life for me / & little terror in the grave" (No. 213, ll. 1-2).

Religion seems to have lost its power even to support:

And then to thank God from my heart
 To thank him well & fervently!
 Although I knew that we had lost
 The hope & glory of our life,
 And now benighted tempest tossed
 Must meet alone the weary strife. (11. 10-15)

Is this gratitude expressed to God for relieving Anne of her sufferings? It sounds more like anguished bitterness. God seems to be providing no consoling friendship for this poor orphan.

There are hints of Charlotte's anguish and desolation in her novels which may go unnoticed by those unfamiliar with the themes and imagery of her poetry. Charlotte never ceased to feel the loss of those early bright dreams, and the greater her troubles in later years, the more keenly she felt that loss. Fairies and elves, for example, were frequent inhabitants of Glass Town and were associated with the joy and innocence of childhood, but for Jane Eyre they have gone, never to return: "The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago . . . [and] I don't think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more."³ Assailed by misery and fear, a much younger Jane Eyre discovers that the mythical lands of Gulliver's Travels undergo a strange transformation in her mind. She had long since concluded that the elves "were all gone out of England to some savage country," but believed Lilliput and Brobdignag to be "solid parts of the earth's

surface." After being locked in the haunted "red room" by Mrs. Reed, however, she finds "the charm" of those lands gone: "the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies malevolent and fearful imps, Gulliver a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions."⁴ This transformation parallels exactly the changes which take place in Charlotte's attitudes towards her fantasy world during her crisis of 1836.

Soon after Anne's death, Charlotte completed Shirley, and at the end of that novel she describes industry's devastating effects on the landscape: "the manufacturers' day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes--the cinder-black highway, . . . a mighty mill, and a chimney ambitious as the tower of Babel." Once, however, the area had been different: "A lonesome spot it was--and a bonnie spot--full of oak trees and nut trees," a spot where the housekeeper's mother "had seen a fairish (fairy) . . . and that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this countryside (though they've been heard within these forty years). . . . It is altered now."⁵ Charlotte's bright dreams have been as devastated as this landscape. There are no more "bonnie spots" and no more "fairishes."

Notes

Introduction

¹ For a full discussion of the problems involved in collecting and editing Charlotte's poetry, see Victor A. Neufeldt's Introduction to The Poems of Charlotte Brontë (see Chapter One, note 4), pp. xxii-xxxiii.

² Charlotte Brontë, Preface to The Professor (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1888), p. iii.

³ Charlotte Brontë, Shirley (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974), p. 1.

⁴ Margaret Blom, Charlotte Brontë (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 55.

⁵ Valentine Cunningham, Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 125.

⁶ Blom, p. 40.

⁷ Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1977), p. 384.

⁸ Fannie Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1941), p. 106.

⁹ Winifred Gérin, Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 102.

¹⁰ Christine Alexander, The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 145.

¹¹ Gérin, pp. 118, 121.

¹² Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey in The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, 4 vols, eds. Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1933), I, 147. This letter is quoted more fully in Chapter Two, pp. 65-66. Charlotte's conception

of "Duty" was also closely linked to the parable of the talents (Matt. xxv.14-30): "the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account" (Shirley, p. 317). Doubtless, Charlotte reasoned that since she seemed destined to teach, then teaching must be her "talent."

Chapter One

¹ Ratchford, p. xv.

² The imaginary lands of Glass Town and Angria were both situated in Africa--a suitably exotic setting for magical beings and fantastic events.

³ "All things bright and beautiful," The Church Hymnary, revised ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1927), p. 24.

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, poem No. 5 in The Poems of Charlotte Brontë, ed. Victor A. Neufeldt (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985). All references to Charlotte's poetry are to this edition and are indicated by title where applicable, and by poem and line numbers in parentheses within the text. With a few minor exceptions, I have retained Charlotte's spelling and punctuation (or lack of punctuation) throughout.

⁵ See Conclusion, p. 128.

Chapter Two

¹ Gérin, p. 98.

² Gérin, pp. 98, 100.

³ Correspondence, I, 129.

⁴ The Reverend Brontë's directive to Charlotte appears on the first page of this "volume" of poems. See Neufeldt's commentary for poem No. 87 in Poems, p. 408.

⁵ Correspondence, I, 147-48.

⁶ Correspondence, I, 147.

- 7 Correspondence, I, 140, 143, 141.
- 8 Roe Head Journal, quoted by G erin, p. 103.
- 9 Robert Southey's letter to Charlotte, quoted by G erin, p. 110.
- 10 Correspondence, I, 153.
- 11 Letter quoted earlier in this chapter on pp. 65-66.

Chapter Three

¹ The exact date is, as Edward Chitham points out, "shrouded in mystery." For his discussion of the reasons for this mystery, see Bront  Facts and Bront  Problems (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p. 32.

- ² Correspondence, I, 166.
- ³ Correspondence, I, 178-81.
- ⁴ Correspondence, I, 221.
- ⁵ There is a blank space in line 67 of the manuscript.
- ⁶ Correspondence, I, 224.
- ⁷ Correspondence, II, 3.
- ⁸ Correspondence, II, 68 (translation, p. 70).
- ⁹ Correspondence, II, 18 (translation, p. 19).
- ¹⁰ Correspondence, I, 297.
- ¹¹ "THE VIOLET" (No. 51), l. 178.
- ¹² Charlotte may have had Paradise Lost in mind when she wrote "PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM": the vision in her poem parallels the vision Michael shows to Adam of horrors followed by a better world with Christ's coming. In "GILBERT," however, "paradise lost" is followed by no promise of "paradise regained."
- ¹³ See Chapter Two, note 11.

¹⁴ In the penultimate stanza, Frances seems to contradict herself by saying "Of God alone, and self-reliance, / I ask for solace--hope for aid" (ll. 227-28). However, "Of God alone and" is the last (unfinished) line of the early draft which Charlotte inserts almost unchanged. She may not have noticed the contradiction implied, or she may have intended us to suspect that Frances' faith in her "self-reliance" was as much a "barren dream" as her faith in God or her lover's love. Without some such explanation the stanza makes no sense.

¹⁵ See note 13.

Conclusion

¹ Jane Eyre, p. 424.

² Correspondence, II, 299.

³ Jane Eyre, p. 118.

⁴ Jane Eyre, pp. 20-21.

⁵ Shirley, p. 511.

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