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# ***The Victorian Novel***

## **Course pack for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study**



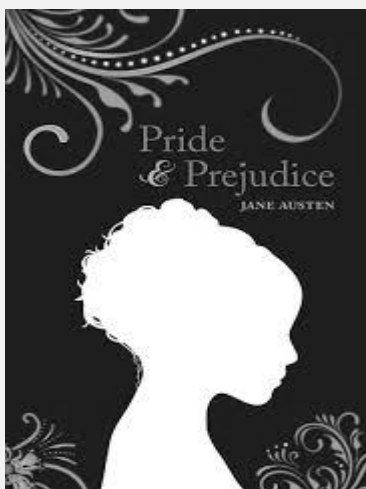
## I. Jane Austen

(1775- 1817)

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### *Pride and Prejudice*

*“Three or four families in a Country  
Village is the very thing to work on”*



Jane Austen, the daughter of a clergyman, was born in 1775 at the village of Steventon, Hampshire. In 1809 her family settled at Chawton and most of her novels were written after this year. Even though not affluent, her family were gentry and well connected. Her childhood seems to have been happy and early marked by literary attempts. She remained unmarried but did not lead the life of a spinster, surrounded as she was by relatives (the “universal aunt”, as she was nicknamed), and when she died at 42 she had provoked a little fame for herself.

Sir Walter Scott wrote at her death: “That young lady had a talent for describing the involvement of feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with...”. The fact that Jane Austen was contemporary with Sir Walter Scott may seem rather paradoxical to the modern reader and that is because the latter placed his English, Scottish and French characters amidst historic events and settled his fictional province in hundreds of years of European history. He thus established a literary tradition that was followed by generations of novelists, such as Balzac, Dumas or Tolstoy.

On the contrary, writing about provincial ladies and restricting the focus of the novel on small social groups and limited geographical areas, Jane Austen has but recently gained a sudden rise in her reputation. In an often-quoted passage she wrote: “Three or four families in

a country-village is the very thing to work on". The recent shift of critical perspective on "Miss Austen" is probably due to what has come to be known as the "pure novel". Walter Allen describes the characteristics of such writings:

"The writer of the pure novel sets out to delight us not by prodigality of invention, the creation of a large gallery of characters, the alternation of a large number of contrasted scenes, but by attention to the formal qualities of composition, to design, to the subordination of the parts to the whole, the whole being the exploration of the relation between the characters or of their relations to a central situation or theme. What we may call the pure novelist's criticism of life is an aspect of his design, his composition." (108)

A superficial judgement of "pure art" may lead to the false assumption that it is over-preoccupied with technique, with distorting reality at the expense of the human quality. The work of pure novelists, such as Jane Austen and, later, Henry James and James Joyce, is after perfection and they are the first to admit that such an aim is never reached without the acceptance of severe limitations. Writers of this type are necessarily aware of what they are doing as they are amongst the most sophisticated creators. Even though Miss Austen lived a retired life, in an age that was not remarkable regarding the self-consciousness of writers, she wrote her novels as if she had been familiar with the theories of fiction to be later stated by Flaubert and James.

Jane Austen's preoccupation with "ordinary life" contrasted deeply with the eventful life in Europe and elsewhere, if we are to mention at least the French Revolution, the Imperial Expansion, the Napoleonic Wars. She constantly avoided grand events of the world history but concentrated instead on equally important matters: social class, the questioning of the relationship between personal merit and power, the shattering of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century prevalent concept that class superiority was not only inherited but also deserved. Yet, Jane Austen's attack on such concepts is not aggressive and bellicose since she seems to pay enough deference to superior classes. What she actually underlines is the fact that any type of hierarchy is simply a matter of tradition, a social construct, having nothing to do with value, intellectual and moral. When virtues and brains do not back up social position, this becomes ineffectual, even ridiculous. Mrs. Elton in *Emma* is clearly not a lady like Jane Fairfax, even though she is the wealthiest in the group, Mr. Rushworth is the richest and most powerful man in *Mansfield Park* even though not quite a gentleman himself, at least when compared to Sir Thomas Bertram or Henry Crawford. Obviously, the grandest figures in Jane Austen's novels

are those who combine wealth with high social position, as Mr. Darcy and Lady Catherine de Bourgh are in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The genius of Jane Austen is to be exploited in this strictly limited scale of social status since, within this ready-made system she is able to demonstrate “how the fine sensibility and intelligence of her best characters operate in contrast to the blundering insensitivity of her worst. It is a splendid framework rather than a prison” (R. GARD, 15). Taking into account these major topics of her novels, one may conclude that Jane Austen was a moralist and this is “a universally acknowledged truth”. However, her style is not dry and didactic as in the case of most moralists, but ruthless and untouched by sentimentality. Her manner is intransigent, verbally annihilating the stupid and the affected. In *Persuasion*, for instance, she cynically comments on the fate of a family (and this is generally considered as one of her most ‘benevolent novels’):

“The real circumstances of this pathetic piece of family history were that the Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome hopeless son and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his 20<sup>th</sup> year...”

The morbid scorn with which such characters are exposed turns into a moral comment, at times mixed up with something like affection. Thus, Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park* or the Eltons in *Emma* are merely puppets of ignorance, falsehood or snobbery. Two main sources of Jane Austen’s moralising attitude are Richardson and Fielding, even though her world is contracted and her focus directed towards minute details of the “world of the parlour”, that of the ladies’ salon. She continues Fielding’s exploration of the potency of irony, concentrating more on manners, which Walter Allen views as “morals in microcosm” (111). As a moralising voice, the writer establishes a set of principles according to which she judges her characters: self-command, proper appreciation of others and oneself, knowledge of any type acquired by solid education, and responsibility for one’s social role. These are summarised in a statement from *Mansfield Park*:

“The politeness she had been brought to practice as a duty made it impossible for her to escape; with the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education made her miserable under it.”

One of the key-words here is **education** and it represents a cornerstone in the moral criterion according to which characters are “judged” as many of their errors are rooted in a

faulty education or in the irresponsibility of parents. Thus, the elopement of Lydia Bennet is viewed as the result of both her mother's stupidity and her father's carelessness.

Undeniably, the world in which these characters function is a highly formalised one, with an elaborate class-structure and a rigid code of behaviour. **Society itself, as Peter Conrad puts it, is "an insecure fiction"** that can be maintained only by a co-operative effort of imagination. **The novel of society** thus turns into a domestication of the Gothic, replacing mystery with crafty mystification and the detection of crimes with the more appalling intuition of emotional secrets. In her first novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* (for *Pride and Prejudice*, though written at the same time, was worked over again and again before its publication) she exposes this very **comic confusion between fiction and life**. Charlotte, the protagonist of the latter novel, is terrified with imaginary bloody deeds, past or present, failing to acknowledge the falsity and meanness of the people around her. Hunting for thrilling experiences, she consequently loses touch with reality to be ultimately awoken by the bitter realisation of the essence of all her horrifying experiences and perceptions: her own modest social position.

### ***Pride and Prejudice***

Still the most popular of Jane Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, owes this popularity mainly to the singular creation of Elizabeth Bennet who stands for the baffling form intelligence may take. The reader cannot help admiring the protagonist and sharing with her the satirical vision of the closed universe she investigates. The caustic portraits of the servile Mr. Collins, the foolish Mrs. Bennet, and the sublimely insolent Lady Catherine are sensed as the creations of Elizabeth herself. However, granted that the reader can identify himself/herself but with Elizabeth and since her reformation is not complete until near the end, the reader tends to feel himself/herself in a moral limbo. The idea that a sophisticated intellect is not enough in the process of grasping "reality", that sensibility itself is eroded by pride and prejudice, might bring forth the accusation that the novel exhibits virtues and vices promiscuously mixed, that it confuses good and evil. Yet, it is this very perplexing message that still makes critics compare *Pride and Prejudice* with Mozart's music (Marilyn Butler) in its generosity of polyphony and richly inventive character delineation.

JANE AUSTEN'S

# Pride & Prejudice

*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.*

*However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.*

*'My dear Mr. Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'*

*Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.*

*'But it is,' returned she; 'for Mrs.*



## 1. The functions of irony in *Pride and Prejudice*

*Pride and Prejudice* opens with a cliché:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

This simple act of statement is subjected to ridicule later in the progress of the story because, rather than fantasising her way to marriage, Elizabeth Bennet detaches and distances herself from this “universal” goal by the stealthier method of irony. **Irony** is not here “**the incognito of the moralist**” (as Kierkegaard called it) but of the *amoralist* – of Mr. Bennet wishing his wife dead when he says, during a dispute about the entail, that he may yet manage to outlive her, or of Elizabeth, when charged with her contradictory change of heart about Darcy, arguing that “in such cases a good memory is unpardonable”. This idiom is specifically the **romantic irony** that Jean Paul Richter venerated in Sterne, seeing it as a “**metaphysical talent**”, an **aptitude of self-overcoming**, and a **miniature replica of the sublime**. As Peter Conrad comments, “acknowledging our littleness, we triumph over it (in the sublimatory ecstasies of the romantic confrontations with the landscape) or (in the ironist’s subtle palaver) negotiate our way round it” (451). Elizabeth cannot overthrow the dictatorship of Lady Catherine; she can outwit her. Mr. Bennet cannot extenuate his failings as a father, or the follies of his offspring; he decides, though, to delight in them and pretend that they are of his choosing. He elects the reprobate Wickham as his favourite among his sons-in-law and determines in advance to find Collins unbearable, at least divertingly so.

The pain **of irony** is that it is a **confirmation of impotence and spiritual loneliness**. Jane Austen herself looks to the novel to provide her with a fortress of solitude where she can speak her mind –the equivalent of Mr. Bennet’s sacrosanct library or of Elizabeth’s daily walks. The acme of irony is that the only character that remains unharmed by Jane Austen’s or her characters’ attacks is Mrs. Bennet who triumphantly gets rid of her eligible daughters. Mrs. Bennet, the representative of aggressive mediocrity, is the one who wins it all because, in the case of Jane Austen, irony is at once comic evasion and tragic capitulation.



## 2. Epistolary Technique in *Pride and Prejudice*

One of the multiple ways in which Jane Austen defines the small world of Hertfordshire, which constitutes the social context of the novel, is through the constant exchange of letters. Austen includes some **twenty letters** in her narrative, suggesting the importance of correspondence in a closed social circle with few amusements other than **the exchange of news**. These letters imply much about the social convention in the English countryside in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century –**the concern with polish, politeness and place**, as well as the preoccupation with the minute details of daily life. Each letter also provides a glimpse into its writer's character. For instance, Caroline Bingley's betrays a hint at her essentially frivolous and catty nature:

“If you are not so compassionate as to dine today with Louisa and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day’s tête-à-tête between two women can never end without a quarrel.” (Ch. 7)

The hyperbole and the archly sophisticated tone sketch a portrait of a flighty and snobbish young lady indulging in a whim.

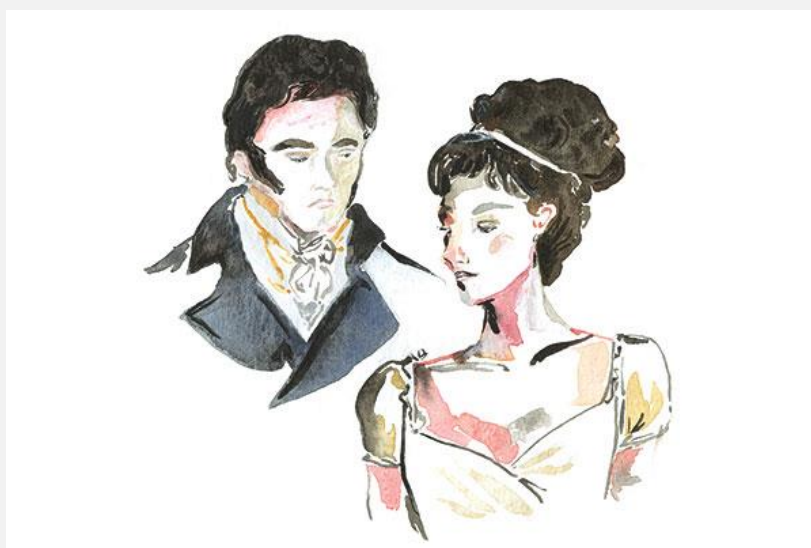
Perhaps the most telling instance of characterisation via letter is Mr. Collins’ lengthy note of introduction to Mr. Bennet. The circumlocutions, the left-handed compliments and the self-aggrandising style all reveal the clergyman as a ridiculous popinjay who, as Mr. Bennet anticipates, will provide amusement for the company:

“There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him.” (I, 13)

In a similar way, every other letter in the novel reveals something about the inner self of its writer. Jane’s letters to Lizzie are loving, cheerful and brave; Mr. Gardiner’s letters to Mr. Bennet sensible, businesslike, tactful and generous, while Mrs. Gardiner to her warm and encouraging. The letters of Mr. Darcy tell about his reserve, pride, warmth and compassion, which are underscored in his crucial explanatory letter to his lover. From the icily correct opening (“Be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter”) to the closing, which betrays his affection (“I will only add, God bless you”), the epistle demonstrates the complexity and richness of his character.

**Darcy’s letter indicates a third function** of the correspondence in the novel: that of **propelling the plot forward by means of revelation and explanation**. The small mysteries and misunderstandings which abound in the early part of the novel are dispelled by means of a series of letters addressed to Elizabeth: Darcy’s letter defending his conduct against the bitter charges, Jane’s letter describing Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, and Mr. Gardiner’s describing Darcy’s benevolence in rescuing Lydia from disgrace. All three operate to establish Darcy’s character in Elizabeth’s eyes and to change her feelings towards him. Darcy’s letter is in fact the turning point of the entire novel, in that it forces Elizabeth to acknowledge the truth about others and herself. There is no paradox that, on concluding her reading of Darcy’s letter, she exclaims: **“Till this moment, I never knew myself”** (II, 13).

Letters thus function on several levels of the novel: they are the vehicles for both **comic caricature and profound characterisation**, both **trivial gossip and major revelations**. Most broadly, they define the social world of Hertfordshire as a minuet of gestures and responses, of emotion controlled and channelled through language.



### 3. Property and Propriety

Love and property are treated as interdependent interests rather than conflicting claims. Though the novel emphasises the importance of emotional integrity, it never minimalizes the fact that in Austen's society **marriage is an economic event**.

Given this central proposition, the Bennet marriage must be viewed as a failure on two counts. Mr. Bennet has exhibited both a lack of emotional integrity in his youthful infatuation with a woman lacking in common sense and good will, and a lack of financial sense by spending his income in the prospect of a male heir. As a consequence, a real disaster befalls the Bennet household: Lydia's shameful escapade is the indirect result of her father's abdication of his responsibility. The moral of this story is passed on by Mr. Bennet himself to his favourite daughter: "My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life" (III, 17).

Another failed marriage is the alliance between Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins. Although suitable in terms of fortune and social position, it is a union without affection. His main aim in marriage, as in everything else, is to please his patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, while Charlotte's motives spring from her practical assessment of her chances in the marital marketplace:

"Without thinking highly either of men and matrimony, marriage had always been her objective; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small

fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want” (I, 22).

Elizabeth’s reaction to Pemberley, the Darcy family estate, might seem at first unrelated to the marriages and alliances discussed so far. However, her response sheds new light on her whole relationship with Darcy. Up until this time, Elizabeth has indicated not the slightest interest in money: she has refused both Collins, who would have ended the problematic entail on her family’s estate, and Darcy, who would have made her **a mistress of £ 10, 000 a year**. However, as she admires the natural beauty of Pemberley she becomes aware of the splendour of such a great house:

“To be mistress of Pemberley might be something!” (III, 1)

The 18<sup>th</sup> century novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott went so far as to say that it is the sight of Darcy’s estate that secures Elizabeth’s love for him. This is perhaps overstated, given the fact that Elizabeth’s heart has already been affected by Darcy’s letter, yet Austen gives Pemberley importance in the development of the protagonist’s feelings by according it a lengthy description and a significant part in the narrative. In the union of Darcy and Elizabeth Austen clearly demonstrates the proper congruence between love and social position. In this happiest of endings, the couple combines all the comfort and security that Pemberley offers with deep personal affection.



#### **4. *Pride and Prejudice* as a Comic Novel**

On the broadest level, the novel conforms to a classical pattern of comedy: a rigidly ordered society is first disrupted by the forces of romantic illusion and misunderstanding, and finally reintegrated through the cohesive powers of marriage. The arrival of Bingley and Darcy at Netherfield Park creates in the neighbourhood of Hertfordshire a turmoil, which does not subside until the end of the book when both men are properly matched. In the disruptive effect of the scoundrel Wickham on the Bennet household, Austen explores the serious consequences of romantic illusion, with Wickham and Lydia forming a dark contrast to the happier matches. The pairing off of Jane with Bingley and of Elizabeth with Darcy provides the happy ending required by the genre. Furthermore, the double marriage, a common feature of romantic comedy, suggests the social dimension of romantic love, which extends beyond the individual's lot to comprehend a generation's future.

In addition to the generic and structural elements of comedy, *Pride and Prejudice* also possesses features of the comedy of manners. Central to the idea of the comedy of manners is the sense of a game being played out according to the rules of social conventions. In Austen's universe, the rules can easily rigidify into comic obsessions. In Mr. Collins's pomposity and Mrs. Bennet's frivolous whims, Austen creates caricatured images of the human propensities to self-interest and self-importance. This is placed in contrast to the witty repartee of Darcy and Elizabeth, especially the latter. Although she is a participant in the game of social manners, she is at the same time a detached observer who can move freely outside the limits of the game. Her acerbic comments on the subjects of love, music, the accomplished gentlewoman, and the proper gentleman display sympathy between her temperament and that of the ironic narrator. Thus, Austen uses comedy both to capture a particular society and to place it within the context of rational judgement.

“I declare after  
all there is no  
enjoyment like  
reading! How much  
sooner one tires of  
any thing than  
of a book!”

### 5. The Quixotic Readers of *Pride and Prejudice*

The danger to which readers of Jane Austen have always been exposed is the almost addictive impulse to identify themselves with the characters, obviously the witty and seemingly unaffiliated ones. The more exemplary a character, the more intimate the relationship with the reader. This “quixotic reading”, i.e. **the projection of the reader into the self and experiences of a novelistic being**, as if existing on a similar plane of reality, is a risky business as distinctions between *self* and *other* are completely blurred. The more in the case of Jane Austen’s novels where the result is but an artificial hybridisation: since she never meant her protagonists to be “exemplary” the alternative “self” that the reader builds up is to be constantly eroded by irony and anticlimactic narrative movements. A novel character is disconcertingly free to let others inhabit it and quixotic reading is not possible without a strong emotional relationship to characters. Yet, many critics state that Jane Austen has had the readers she does not deserve, readers who treat characters as “real” people, while **what she actually deserves is readers who attempt at allegorical interpretations, at universalising the experiences described.**

If the reasons for abandoning such naïve avenues to Austen’s fiction are obvious in the present-day academic environment, they were completely different in the age when Austen

wrote her novels. By the time when she had her novels published, fiction reading had become a complex political affair. Part of the alarms associated with reading arises from the perception that women are new members of the writing fraternity. They first published anonymously or under male names, but as we advance towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we can see that the reader is increasingly imagined as female. This **feminisation of the novel** has much to do with **the power of the marketplace to produce novels and it has perhaps nothing to do with any benevolence towards women**. Historians have noted that the development of mercantilism and of a world of business in the early Victorian age moved women even farther away from “real” life. In the previous ages blue blood could override gender in the social system, but now, in a commercial one this was no longer possible.

If the 18<sup>th</sup> century has been credited with inventing the “**private sphere**”, the realm of the “**domestic**”, the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to turn the domestic and the private into the civic, that is, to turn the home centre into a vortex of energy that should draw foreign elements toward it. Thus, **the private becomes the public** in Jane Austen’s masterpiece as the supposedly home-centred family, the Bennets, have its girls rushing out to establish connections with representatives of high aristocracy, local gentry, clergy and army.

The success of Elizabeth Bennet as a character may be explained by the above-mentioned feminisation of the novel, but also because its creator is a woman writer, i.e. Elizabeth is no longer a “female impersonator” drawn by a male writer. Another obvious explanation for the successful career of the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* is provided by the socio-political context of the novel. England was a colonialist, militaristic and expansionist nation at the time and men were supposed to be rational and strong. Inner perturbation, anxieties and dilemmas were naturally evicted from the description of male characters in an age that viewed manhood only in terms of rational success. But women can be sensitive, intelligent, weak and benevolent beings who encounter undeserved hardships, who are allowed to change their mind and undergo any kind of transformation. That is why Elizabeth Bennet comes to represent the cultural repository of imagination, feeling and even social criticism.

Since it is safely assumed that the female characters need not be stupid to be ignorant of the world she is entering, **Elizabeth’s voyage outside her home** is a picaresque adventure in which she can voice her anger over the poverty of her family, over arranged marriages, class incompatibility a.s.o. Where does this anger come from? The question is not simply melodramatic since one can easily see that all the struggles of Elizabeth to avoid subjection are

eventually annihilated by a preposterous happy ending that undercuts the very realistic basis on which her character has been built.

The domestication of the so-called realistic novel is not a matter of gender only, nor of gender and class, but of gender, class and race. **Shutting out aliens** becomes the major postulate of these realistic novels and this is where Elizabeth's anger is anchored, this is perhaps the explanation of **the impressively militaristic atmosphere that surrounds the domestic space** with such an unscrupulous guardian as Wickham or such an ineffectual *pater familias* as Mr. Bennet. The fear of social reversals pervades *Pride and Prejudice*, reflected, for instance, in Lady Catherine's inflammatory discourse she delivers in front of the spiteful Elizabeth, or in the comic lament of Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* that "young people would be in such a hurry to marry –and to marry strangers too".

An important aspect of the so-called "family romance" is **the discovery of the inferiority** or at least **mistakes of one's parents**, who belong to an obsolescent set of values, which requires not only personal but cultural change. **Exogamy and strangehood are favourably seen** in *Pride and Prejudice* as they encourage bonds that go beyond familial groupings. That is why Collins is discarded, the Bennet daughters being encouraged to approach persons whose style of life and fortunes would otherwise remain "foreign".

**Crossing boundaries** is in *Pride and Prejudice* the crossing of life thresholds but also more subtle **demarcation lines** between family and the outside world, between social classes and the associated feelings of pride or shame, carefully **masked as "prejudices"**. When she first leaves her home Elizabeth tastes the experience of "becoming dirty", which has perhaps no connotation of shame but might be viewed as a kind of baptism in the ways of the world. The incident brings about the scandalised comment of Bingley's sisters: "I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud". Elizabeth, who has just crossed a border to join her sick sister (and inevitably Darcy, too) at Netherfield, has passed through dirt. Walking, as her detractors put it, "above her ankles in dirt" she has been baptised in the world of love and suffering and, in crossing the wet fields, has shown herself a sexual being, and not a cultural construct.

Her painful struggle with the **mud also alludes to the precarious social status of her family**. No matter how smart she may appear, she is **the victim of primogeniture** that will render her homeless as soon as her father dies. Her heroic opposition to the Law is emphasised by this less-than-heroic passage which seems to suggest that the material conditions of life generally required the tainting of the character's self – by **enslavement, by marriage**.

Because, as Nina Auerbach writes in *Communities of Women*, “the quality of the Bennet household is determined by the realisation that the period of waiting is not a probationary period before life begins: waiting for a male is life itself”.

That is why Pemberley is given material substance in the novel. By closing the plot with romantic love and ownership of the impressive estate the relationship between men and women is frozen at the moment when it is most flattering to women’s desires, at the moment when they seem to exercise greatest power. However, the power romantic love confers on women is entirely fictional, an escapist consolation to the actual needs of women as social beings.

Obviously, *Pride and Prejudice* has been approached from many other points of view. Thus, many critics consider that the young wilful heroine eventually curbs her emotional and imaginative energy under the rational guidance of the man she marries, while others view the happy ending as a utopian equilibrium of gender forces. All these are instructive ways of reading Austen’s novel as long as we keep in mind the fact that they do not exhaust the possibilities of meaning production. As Elizabeth states, “people themselves alter so much that there is something new to be observed in them for ever”. The same with “paper beings”, as Barthes names literary characters, who alter according to the ever changing cultural perspective that unavoidably attaches its bias onto them.

## II. Introduction

### *Victorianism and the Victorian Novel*

#### I.1. Victorianism

On a regular basis, literary historians have put forward conflicting, sometimes perplexing, information of the Victorian Age and that is due, for the most part, to the extremely long span of time in which Queen Victoria had utmost authority over England and the Empire that was said to exercise dominion “over palm and pine”. Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and bestowed her name upon her age, which lasted until the turn of the century (1901). Queen Victoria inherited the throne of Great Britain at the age of eighteen, and three years later married Albert, prince of Saxe-Coburg Gotha (1819– 1861) – who became her moralistic, progressive, if rather sanctimonious and intellectually shallow, personal advisor in the years to come. After Albert’s death a desolate Victoria remained in self-seclusion for ten years as the “Widow of Windsor” (in Kipling’s terms). Her genuine but fixated mourning, which would become a favourite occupation for the rest of her life, played an important role in the evolution of what we call nowadays the *Victorian mentality*. Her Majesty’s disconsolate self-exile transmitted to a whole nation the message of the graciousness of monogamy, of the supremacy of family duty. In 1876 she was crowned Empress of India, although her popularity was at the lowest ebb. Still, her golden jubilee in 1887 turned into a splendid national celebration, as it also happened with her diamond jubilee in 1897 that marked the glorious twilight of one of the longest reigns in the history of European monarchies. At her death, H. G. Wells grasped the essence of Victoria’s reign that provided security and wealth yet put a ceiling on imagination and sentiment:

“Queen Victoria was like a great paper-weight that for half a century sat on men’s minds, and when she was removed their ideas began to blow about all over the place haphazardly” (q. in CURTIS, 1971: 100).

Such a remarkably long government by one monarch amalgamates in a natural manner a fervent avant-garde proclivity with embargoed cognitive impulses, reformist pressure with a compulsion to preserve the establishment, virulent attacks against stereotypes and

unimaginative acceptance of the paradigm. These mystifying views of the age are first of all ensuing from eyewitness accounts that are alternately jubilant and disquieting.



For instance, whereas Tennyson describes his age as “an awful moment of transition” (KLINGOPULOS, in FORD, 1990: 13), J. A. Fronde’s depiction has a convincingly dissimilar touch: “It was an era of new ideas, of swift if silent spiritual revolution” (Ibid.). Likewise, G. M. Young perhaps overestimates the Victorian Age when he notes down in his *Portrait of an Age*, “of all decades in our history, a wise man would choose the eighteen-fifties to be young in”, at the same time as Anthony Trollope describes the period in his well-praised **Autobiography** (1883) as an age of bleakness, certain to move toward dire mediocrity. D. H. Lawrence, writing on the same subject towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - therefore from a retrospective, detached viewpoint -, pinpoints the repulsive and the disturbing as two underlying traits of the epoch: “Meanness and formless surroundings, ugly ideals, ugly religion, ugly hope, ugly love, ugly furniture, ugly houses, ugly relationships” to disconsolately summarise the picture as it follows: “ugliness, ugliness, ugliness” (KLINGOPULOS, Op. Cit.: 16). Robert Furneaux Jordan also comments upon the dilemma of style that Victorian architecture had to cope with:

“The architecture of the Victorian Age tells us more about the men who made it than does any other architecture in history. It made such very definite statements about life; it was all so self-assured and vulgar that it never leaves us in doubt. It never diluted itself

(...) with inhibitions about style or taste. The Victorian architect knew what he wanted to do and, good or bad, he did it” (in MORDAUNT, 1987: 98).

The indecision of the Victorians on the topic of their own era is quite understandable since it is ever particularly difficult to appraise coherently the time one lives in. The problem is that this confusion has been propagated until recent times and one commonsensical explanation for this ricochet lies in our vanity that often impels us to brand names on vast cultural phenomena and thus hypothesize that we are in command of one of the most vibrant and prosperous period in the history of English literature, to turn it into a freeze-frame image that will easily submit to our preconceived postulates.

Thus, the student of Victorian literature will discover the constancy of clichés in each and every discourse on Victorianism. For instance, *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* surveys some of the so-called basic traits of Victorianism: “sexual prudishness, earnestness of spirit, middle-class smugness and stuffiness, self-righteousness, moral conservatism, class prejudice, Anglo-ethnocentrism” (1996: 557). These largely derogatory labels are still believed to be germane to the portrayal of the stable ingredients of the Victorian spirit. For much of the twentieth century the term *Victorian* conveyed connotations of “prudish”, “repressed” and “old fashioned”. Although such associations have some basis in fact, they do not adequately indicate the nature of this complex, paradoxical age that was the second English Renaissance. Akin to Elizabethan England, Victorian England saw great expansion of wealth, power and civilization. Yet, on examining modern evaluations of Victorianism one discovers that sarcastic and inflated categorizations are thought to better control a social and cultural stage that appears to have dealt with the type of problems that we tend to associate with the modern or postmodern reality, too. Since rapid *cultural change* may be said to be the salient characteristic of Victorianism, it is natural enough that contemporary scholars should relate it to the postmodern mind and existence. Readers of Victorian literature sooner or later comprehend the fact that many anxieties that the Victorians had to face have reappeared or been emphasized in actual fact as crucial issues in postmodernity.

Several key terms may help us better outline the Victorian Age. The tumultuous change was so astounding that we ourselves might get caught in its coils if we do not map carefully the territory under inquiry for, as Peter Conrad notes, “in England, romanticism was chastened by the incorrigibility of the real” (1987: 461). First of all, we should rid ourselves of prejudice because a bird’s eye-view over the period reveals it as not at all apocalyptical; what makes it look like that is the Victorians’ acute sense of social responsibility, a basic attitude that

obviously differentiates them from their immediate predecessors, the Romantics. It is now that *education* is likely to become organized in a national configuration for the first time, with religious schooling still in a crucial position. One fundamental indecision here was generated by the debate over the direction education should take: was it to meet with the requirement of “hard facts”, i.e. preparing the youth for jobs in industry or was it to satisfy the need for “ideas”, i.e. a freethinking education stimulating both intellect and emotion? Without a doubt, the debate is still feverish in our own times but has recently shifted its spotlight from the issue of *technological* versus *liberal education* to “politically correctness”, to feminism and multiculturalism. Instruction, whatever the course it might take, was a stable preoccupation of the Victorians. The social stage was populated with boisterous ascending middle-class individuals who endeavoured to shape respectable self-images, despite a manifest anxiety.

The Reform Bill of 1832 and 1867 extended the right to vote onto the working class in the English towns. Furthermore, the Trade Union Act of 1871 acknowledged unions as segments of the mechanism of modern life and working people as no longer dependent on philanthropic activities of upper classes. On the contrary, they had come to regard themselves as “masters” of their own destiny and were regarded as such by Tennyson, for instance, who however urged the necessity of “educating the poor man before making him our master”. “In the noon of industrial life, wealth surpassed birth as the *passe-partout* to high society, as Dickens so often reminds us; and as capital and power settled in the mid-section of society, affording the nameless and the landless stunning opportunities for material acquisition, the upper and middle class looked increasingly alike” (VLOCK, 1998: 81). Yet, the question that the intellectuals of the age had to answer was: were labourers capable of upholding self-government or, if not, could they be “educated” with this definite purpose? The present book will examine the way in which the Victorian writers came to consider it their chief mission to educate the middle class and the urban working classes who had but newly come to be regarded as “emancipated”. As a result, Victorian writers combined Romantic emphases upon self, emotion, and imagination with Neoclassical ones upon the public role of art and a corollary responsibility of the artist.

*Freedom* is by consequence another key word in a comprehensible depiction of the Victorian Age as it adds to the *sine qua non* aim of education, namely assisting the individual in his/her pursuit of self-interest and happiness. The two major trends of Victorianism, *Utilitarianism* and *Evangelicalism*, however antagonistic they might have initially been, were basically united by this imperative stress on *individualism*. The individual discovers the

pleasure and peril of reading (starting with the **Bible**), but also the pleasure and peril of doing anything one desires as long as this desire does not represent a serious menace to *property* and *propriety*. And so we draw near two other noteworthy principles of Victorianism: respect for private ownership and for social conventions.

In ideology, politics and society, the Victorians created astonishing innovation and change: democracy, feminism, unionisation of workers, socialism, Marxism, and other modern movements took form. Comparable to other 18<sup>th</sup>-century theories, *Utilitarianism* had as a focal point a unique stance of human nature, i.e. the so-called “economic man”. Utilitarians favoured, at least notionally, the economic and social practice of *laissez-faire*. This concept came to stand for well-organized and centralized administration, effectual civil service and serious backing of the individual in his inborn motivation to satisfy his needs. There is however a flagrant inconsistency at the very heart of this policy since Utilitarianism - supposedly the creed of the evolving middle-classes - is based on *atomism*, on the individual’s compulsion to better his social standing. Concurrently, the principle of *laissez-faire* was often thought to be the worst form of oppression, masking the less humanitarian indifference towards one’s neighbour. As Thomas Carlyle (1795 1881) bitterly commented:

“It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched; many men have died; all men must die (...). But it is to live miserable and know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire” (in DAICHES, 1991: 953).

Utilitarianism is often held responsible for the disorientation of readers of Victorian fiction as they find it difficult to bring the confidence in a liberal democracy together with the insignificant intervention of policymakers in individual economic crises. As Matthew Arnold writes:

“The world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.”

Utilitarianism is conceivably to blame for the substantial amount of over-romanticizing in the Victorian novels, too, since all the moralists of the age can be described as severe opponents to this doctrine, so they unsurprisingly tended to grow touchy as they delineated the

“heroic” individual struggling through in a completely non-heroic epoch. John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold appreciated that inhuman social conditions could be compensated through a zealous faith in education only. Education was the more necessary in a Utilitarian setting, which has in itself the germ of insurgence. That is why John Stuart Mill felt the need to classify freedom as the right of “pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it”.

On the other hand, *Evangelicalism*, the religion of the middle class, set the tone of decorum, clothing, and every kind of likes and dislikes, which were accepted without delay by the lower classes and consolidated as *the norm*. While the Utilitarians, such as Jeremy Bentham in **Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation** (1789), considered that man’s task is to “seek to increase their pleasures (...) and to avoid what is painful or bad”, religious teaching, with its constant worry on the topic of spiritual progress and self-abjuration could no longer slow down this unanimous inclination towards earthly gratification. This clash between Utilitarianism and religious conviction, as well as the ever-increasing influence of science, are accountable for the general aspect of the Victorian Age as an era of religious debauchery and of an unprecedented dissemination of sects. Religious sectarianism came to replicate steadily the actual class stratification because it is by way of religious alliance that both non-conformity and class solidarity are revealed. In extremis, agnosticism proposed other means of compensation and helped nonconformist individuals deal with the chaos of experience. In an age in which Catholicism was viewed as a form of “intellectual suicide”, in which science proved incapable to alter or at least explain human destiny, agnosticism offered the decency of a realistic trust in man’s own powers. The overall perception of the religious topic in the Victorian era is of a nature similar to our own postmodernist age, as *belief versus unbelief* still represents a torrid debate of the day. The Victorians are however the first to experience doubt and to question institutional Christianity on such a large a scale.

The *Industrial Revolution* (1760 to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) - the domination of technology - was as important as the *colonial expansion* for Great Britain. During Queen Victoria’s reign the British Empire added a territory 40 times as large as the British Isles, with a population of at least 90,000,000. Scientific advances stirred up disputes pertaining to long-held assumptions of man’s pre-eminence in God’s plan. It is necessary to point out here that much of the “modern technology” we employ today had already become commonplace by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: automobiles, trains, telephone, telegraph, etc. Imperial trade augmented the prosperity of England and made it the foremost world power. Yet, at home machines are

replacing manual workers and the capitalist economy on the rise leads to considerable job loss. The gap between the poor and the affluent grows in an alarming way. In **The Idea of Poverty** (1984), Gertrude Himmelfarb argues convincingly that the old and relaxed economy was replaced by a sterner, scientific one, its emblem being the Poor Law of 1834. At its promulgation, Disraeli sarcastically announces to the world that “poverty is a crime” in England since the poor are nothing more than the products of their own wickedness, ignorance and indolence. It is clear that there existed a racial frame of mind in the evaluation of the pauper class as an inferior and separate race. However, such a view was not dominant as many believed optimistically in the “levelling-up theory” and many more had confidence in the persuasive power of education.

The upshot of the Industrial Revolution, of technological improvement and of advanced medical knowledge, was a surprising growth in population. This phenomenon was so impressive that the Victorians came to fear worldwide famine. Malthus, in his **Essay on the Principle of Population** (1798) argued that populace has a tendency to increase by geometrical progression while food supplies only by arithmetical progression. From such angle warfare and pestilences were for that reason depicted as a kind of providential handling the exaggerated growth in population. Individuals themselves could contribute to the survival of the species, he assessed, through chastity or through what we call nowadays “family planning” since there is no other way by which “men can escape from the weight of this law which pervades all animated nature”. This does not appear as a glorious sacrifice because Malthus views human condition as “a mighty process of God, not for the trial, but for the creation and formation of the mind: a process necessary to awaken inert chaotic matter into spirit” (q. in FORD, Ibid.). Malthus’s nightmare was to haunt the radical and liberal imagination for the next decades after he published his work.

To follow a line of investigation in regard to the social-cultural environment is perhaps more important in the case of an approach of Victorian literature than of any other literary period. Up to this epoch, readers had been concerned with broad-spectrum matters such as love, faith, death, courage, jealousy, whereas the Victorians had to face an entirely new and restricted set of problems: fright associated with technology, social upheaval attached to political reforms, corruption, colonial expansion and disintegration. It was a paradoxical age that, in spite of its multiple tensions, offered multiple compensations (for instance the many opportunities open to various types of talents) as the island was peacefully reigned by Queen Victoria; it was also an age of restrictions, prejudices and taboos, religious, moral, social. To be

certain, the Victorian Age was anything but an age of mediocrity. Scientific discoveries represented a challenge for writers and readers alike, as the Victorians are reputed to have invented the modern idea of invention, i.e. the idea that one can devise solutions to whatever problems. Lyall's **Principles of Geology** and Charles Darwin's **Origin of Species** (1859) maintained that both the earth and humankind have had an evolution that contradicts the **Book of the Genesis**. To many, these scientific advances seemed to drastically lessen the human import in the holy design and this was painfully confirmed in such works as Darwin's **The Descent of Man** (1871) where sexual selection is discussed in the context of man's evolution from the higher primates:

"The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely that man is descended from some lowly-organized form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many persons. But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descending from barbarians. (...) He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper; or from that old baboon, who, descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs – as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.

Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hopes for a still greater destiny in the distant future. But we are not here concerned with hopes and fears, only with the truth as far as our reason allows us to discover it" (in GOWER, op. Cit.: 205 -6).

The congruence between Victorianism and our own postmodernity also resides in the critical *power struggle*, both economic and political, better known until recently as *capitalistic* versus *socialist* agendas. Adam Smith in **An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations** (1776) provided the classic statement of pure *laissez-faire* capitalism. Karl Marx writes his **Das Kapital** (1876) in England and puts forward a political and economic opposite pattern – the communist system. While Smith talks about the two fundamental laws of the market – self-centeredness and competition – as guaranteeing the survival of a vigorous

nation state, Marx and Engels argue that the evolution of humanity is ruled by an uncompromising class conflict between the proletariat and bourgeois classes. But J. S. Mill, in his inspired **Principles of Political Economy** (1848) verified that these laws apply only to production and not to distribution.

The first two authors to be mentioned in any brief survey of the intellectual climate of the age are Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881) and John Ruskin (1819 - 1900). Carlyle was mainly concerned with German philosophy, especially with Kant's transcendentalism. His most cherished work is **Sartor Resartus**, instigated by Swift's **Tale of a Tub** and presenting experience as a set of clothes that conceals the nakedness of actuality. As a historian, he is best known for **The French Revolution**, while as a philosopher he anticipated Nietzsche and, if unwillingly, the Fascist doctrine in **Heroes and Hero-Worship** (where history is described as a sequence of spectacular deeds of majestic heroes; ordinary people having no merit in the advancement of the human race). In **Past and Present** the vigour of medieval culture is set in contrast to contemporary values, which undoubtedly call for a leadership of a heroic type. His anti-scientific emotional voice deplores the mediocrity and materialism of his age:

“But it is my firm conviction that the ‘Hell of England’ will cease to be that of ‘not making money’; that we shall get a nobler Heaven! I anticipate light in the Human Chaos, glimmering, shining more and more; under manifold true signals from without. That light shall shine. Our deity no longer being Mammon<sup>1</sup>, - O Heavens, each man will then say to himself: ‘Why such deadly haste to make money?’” (in GOWER, 1990: 184)

Ruskin was perhaps less concerned with history and much interested in arts and aesthetic values instead. **The Seven Lamps of Architecture** and **The Stones of Venice** describe Gothic art as a form of expressing faith and equate beauty with religious conviction, considering it a moral duty. His essays on modern painting turn into a fierce attack on Utilitarianism: profit pays no attention to beauty, the industrial environment imprinting the ugly and the grotesque as stable marks of Victorianism.

As an alternative, Matthew Arnold (1822- 1888) found relief in the Greek and Roman classicism, praising “the old harmony” and deploring the “insularity”, thus the provincialism, of the English culture. In his **Essays in Criticism** he also discovers a moral purpose in poetry, which is defined as a “criticism of life”. In the domain of philosophy we should at least refer to Herbert Spencer, the founder of a specific branch of philosophy that is largely based on the principles of evolution and utilitarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> Mammon: the god of greed.

Such an age that was gradually demolishing any certainty as regards faith and morals demanded preachers to provide reassurance in traditional values. Writers had to enter now the strident social scene they could no longer contemplate from the outside. The almost desperate resistance to the attacks of science and agnosticism created what we ironically name the “Puritanism” of the Victorians. Yet, if one fails to detect the agony beyond the conventionally moralizing tone of the writers of the age, then one fails to understand the literature they produced. Literature had the prophetic role of recuperating norms for a world that seems to have lost touch with facts and with itself.

## **I.2. The Victorian Novel**

The Victorian novel had to serve a “popular need”; it could no longer speak about great heroes and their fabulous deeds. George Eliot’s testimony is illustrative of this:

“My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgement, pity, and sympathy” (q. in FORD, Op. Cit.: 68).

The Victorian novel has been categorized in various (sub)divisions, such as *sensation novels* (later developed into *detective novels*), *historical novels*, *domestic novels*, *novels of mystery and suspense*, etc., but quite an impressive number do not fit any such a category. What is generally agreed on is the fact that all these types of novels met a rather homogeneous taste of the contemporary reading public, as they borrowed “characters, dramatic idioms, even stories from the melodrama, and the popular theatre” (VLOCK, 1998: 3). This means that the Victorian novel as we know it today – a unified distinct text – was then a more or less loose and fluid textual entity, particularly when published serially. Secondly, the novel was a popular genre for the reason that the stratification of the reading public was not so extraordinary as it is nowadays. The novels addressed an increasing number of readers, most of them part of the middle-class – a class that was gaining power and self-esteem and needed to be “educated”.

Of major importance in this respect was the growth of lending libraries as well as the development of publishing, which became an industrial branch. D. A. Miller remarks in **The Novel and the Police** (1988), “since the novel counts among the conditions for its consumption the consumer’s leisured withdrawal to the private, domestic sphere, then every novel-reading subject is constituted within the categories of the individual, the inward, the domestic” (q. in Vlock, Op. Cit.: 2), thus suggesting that the historic shift from drama to novel was due primarily to the latter’s efficacy in constituting the private self. Some other literary

historians consider that, on the contrary, the Victorian reading subject was not exactly the solitary type suggested by Miller as reading of novels was performed in public, in family or friendly gathering. Reading is founded thus on a series of cultural stereotypes and the pleasure of it lies now in the reader's affinity with character's strong emotional response, and with a misleading fantasy of emancipation and power – both oriented to the marketplace.

THE PLOT of the Victorian novel is a romance one that moves forward if only the young protagonist ventures outside parental home and native surroundings. This escape also sets free various solutions for the narrative proper in the same way in which new social opportunities open in front of the Victorians. The most favoured romantic plot is still Austen's *marriage plot*, what Schor describes as the way in which “a daughter enters culture, how she conveys property and value through the closural rituals of the marriage plot” (1999: 5). The plot of property is therefore of utmost importance, too, following the protagonist from the stage of the contractual individualism of a free agent to the marriage stage when properties are united hopefully for the benefit of both husbands. Both these plots are culturally defined and yet there is a serious instability in the representation of women, and other facets of oppressed femininity (spinsters, orphans – male or female -, governesses, etc) as well as a certain degree of anxiety concerning women's propriety that automatically triggers (or dissimulates) anxieties concerning their property, too. It is in this anxiety that the source of the Victorian “madwoman” must be searched for. As Vlock sensibly underlines, “the madness and spectacle dormant in bourgeois industrial culture had its corollary in bourgeois women, from whom the carnivalesque sometimes issued in the form of verbal display, the mad, redundant pattern of widows and spinsters. According to a dominant strain of Victorian thought, lunacy or other forms of mental deficiency were shared by all women, married or single” (1998: 171).

The essential feature that defines narrative from Aristotle on is plot, that is, the skeletal mimetic ground for a proper narrative. In an equally famous dictum, Northrop Frye defined the novel as “a low mimetic literary form”. Victorian fiction, contrasting with that produced by the previous century, was not characterized by the escapist impulse of the novel-reader who no longer felt the need to read about “great figures acting out their destiny on the grand scale” (Daiches, Op. Cit.: 149). As already underlined, for such a reader, literature had to be quite alike journalism and history as she/he was eager to accept a minimal set of literary conventions. That is why Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) was widely read as he fitted journalism and melodrama together, paying considerably less attention to structure, plot or the “roundness” of characters. Regardless of all these, he is still placed in the honourable proximity

of Chaucer and Shakespeare mainly because his “great sense of life” is able to counterbalance his “little sense of form” (Ibid.)

Although usually grouped with Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) is entirely different in his anti-romantic, sardonic and humorous stance, “capable of tenderness, but never of sentimentality” (BURGESS, 1974: 185). It seems that Thackeray concerted all his resourcefulness in *Vanity Fair* – a huge social panorama, every so often saturated with mockingly moralizing attitudes.

**Women writers** released a fresh and perceptive lookout upon social life, as they proved more competent to minutely analyse moral and emotional nuances. When properly put into operation, this capacity led to the edification of a poetic style doubled by a sagacious scrutiny of societal practices that is identifiable with ease in the works of the Brontës or of George Eliot. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810 – 1865) was constantly underrated until recent feminist criticism and new historicism have revaluated her major writings. She is most read now for *Cranford* – a perceptive analysis of provincial town-life, also a piece of keen social estimation poured in novelistic form. Contemporary criticism tends to value *Wives and Daughters* more, as it indeed appears to be completely liberated from the stylistic pretentiousness typical of minor Victorian novelists.

The Brontë sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne – put pen to paper in the seclusion of a Yorkshire vicarage and their stories were evenly realistic, clever and bursting with romantic spirit. *Wuthering Heights* is still judged as one of the subtlest poetic analysis of the human inner life as it “involves the reader in a total response like that of poetic drama” (Ford, Op. Cit.: 103). George Eliot comes close to *Wuthering Heights* especially with *The Mill on the Floss*, which displays a robust control over language and structure, a singular delicacy of description and undeniable intellectual vigour. She is undoubtedly the most representative Victorian figure as she was both well informed about the intellectual milieu of her time and well-equipped to render philosophical ideas into unadorned language. Her notable legatees were Thomas Hardy and Henry James, but they can hardly be grouped together in spite of the fact that they both proclaimed the advent of the modern age.

Anthony Trollope, though portrayed by Henry James as a great artist that never took himself seriously, gained some fame for himself by means of the so-called “Barchester series”, comprising the best-known *Barchester Towers*. Unfortunately, writing became soon a routine for Trollope and his later novels (*The Warden*, *Dr. Thorne*, *The Last*

*Chronicle of Barset*, *The Way We Live Now*, etc.) built up at a fast pace a world of his own imagination, a fictional universe that is still able to find devotees.

George Meredith never had the popularity of Trollope as he professedly avoided submitting to that “democratic old monster that waits to pull us down” (q. in Ford, Op. Cit.: 105). He enjoyed lengthy poetic descriptions, over-romanticizing and verbal effervescence. He is best known for *Diana of the Crossways* though his *Egoist* appears to have more chances of survival. Meredith’s novels are even less substantial when compared to Samuel’s Butler’s writings. The latter’s *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited* (an anagram of “nowhere” and a hint at More’s *Utopia*) are highly satirical representations of England. His masterpiece, *The Way of all Flesh*, is a unwavering condemnation of Victorian taboos – parental tyranny, racism, anti-Irish and anti-immigrants prejudice, disparagement of sexuality, class chauvinism, bigotry a. s. o. Prose-writing of a more general interest includes George Gissing’s *New Grub Street*, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, Charles Reade’s *Water Babies*, John Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Saga* and many others that are still read at least for the undeniable merit of having offered new boundaries to literature. Last but not least, Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear – both undisguised explorers of the world of pure fantasy, both unable to feel at home in the Utilitarian world of Victorian England. They explored not only fantasy but also the rich possibilities of English in their nonsensical stories and rhymes. As Anthony Burgess emphasizes, they “may well be read when Carlyle and Ruskin are forgotten”, thus verifying the meandering manner in which literary inheritance is cherished by each generation.

### III. Charles Dickens

(1812 - 1870)

*Great Expectations*

#### III. 1. Dickens's Life and Literary Activity

The most widely read of the Victorian writers, Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, the second of eight children, to John Dickens, a clerk in the naval pay office, himself famed for his storytelling ability. After moving to London, Dickens's parents, who were part of the middle class, decided that the mother should tutor the sickly boy at home. As Charles's father had drifted into money owing, the mother embarked on opening a school in their home, but nobody came. When he was twelve, his father got imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea, where the family lodged with him. It was in this period that Charles was required to get a job in a blacking warehouse. His social humiliation, his sense that he had turned into "a little labouring hand" with no hope of further instruction or change for the better, was enhanced when he was set to label bottles in a window, where meddlesome watchers were able to keep him under surveillance while working. A year later, a legacy allowed John Dickens to get out of prison and he also received a pension from the navy. Such an improved family situation permitted Dickens to attend Wellington House Academy and to later work as a law clerk and as a reporter to the parliamentary debates for *The True Sun* and for other journals.

"We can, of course, assign a certain static identity to Dickens, the mid-Victorian novelist and journalist, the young man half-turned dreamily from his desk in Maclise's portrait, the object of boundless scholarly attention. But to most Victorian consumers his identity, even at his professional apex, was something less fixed; he was the product of an expanding and diversifying entertainment industry, a writer whose voice reverberated among the genres, slipping fluidly in and out of journalism, fiction, ballad opera, even poetry, projecting its peculiar rhythms and tones among entire field of current popular entertainment" (VLOCK, 1998: 58).

In 1836 he launches one of the most famous literary careers with the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, also begins his connubial life as he weds Catherine Hogarth, even though he is just as captivated by her younger sister, Mary. This first book has at least the merit of disclosing his

great flair at capturing oddity and extravagance. *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* becomes his next unanticipated success that simply skyrockets Dickens from murky paucity to reputation and affluence. The *Papers* are issued between 1836 and 1837 and are projected to be a chain of sketches complementary to sporting prints. They soon turn from parody to picaresque comedy. Characters, too, grow more substantial, with Sam Weller presiding over them all. Sam Weller is not only a counterpart of the compassionate impractical Pickwick but also a means of restructuring the archetypal duo of Sancho Panza and Don Quixote.



Given the unexpected popular success of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* Dickens could enlarge Sam's part of the story with zest, a position which insisted that there is always another version to be told. So he overlaps some of them in *Oliver Twist*, with its nightmarish vision of London unlawful world and its implicit plea for the reorganization of workhouses. *Nicholas Nickleby* also slips back to the fluid, more fragmented form of *The Pickwick Papers*. The title-hero, always prepared to act in response to a shame-provoking situation, like Dickens himself, is not only narcissistic, but also aberrantly immature. Dickens's distinctive amalgamation of comic vision and righteous anger at social maltreatment is by now well established; so is the publication of his novels in monthly fraction, although his next two novels will come out as part of a weekly serial.

*Barnaby Rudge* – Dickens's first historical novel - and *The Old Curiosity Shop* appear as fragments of a serial – *Master Humphrey's Clock* – a frame story enclosing the first two. Although the flight of Little Nell and her grandfather from city to country provides a panorama of 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, the character of Little Nell herself produces over-romantic uproar, her death being responsible for much of the novel's instant widespread success. *Martin Chuzzlewit*

is the first of his novels for which he writes a detailed plan because he sees thematic unison as a proof of artistic progress. Yet, the public acts unworriedly in response to its satirical tone, which is considered to be less gracious than that of his previous novels. The hero's excursion across the Atlantic to America has generally been interpreted as an attempt to boost sales, while *Dombey and Son* demonstrates a revived artistic assurance. *Dombey and Son*, the first novel for which the writer conceived a number of plans in advance, traces the rise, failure and death of the "son and heir" of the title to finally "celebrate the rise of the forgotten and over-loving daughter of the house, Florence, who proves that '*Dombey and Son* is a daughter after all'" (Schor, 1999: 49). There follows *David Copperfield* – an autobiographical narrative dealing with the artist's development and what it meant to be a novelist at mid-century, but first of all with the melodramatic fate of the lost best boy, with no father figure to materialize when most needed. The novel "takes as its point of origin not a story so much as an image, which stands as both the central visual icon for the novel and a repeated point of narrative coherence. We see David making his way along a hot, dusty road toward Dover, orphaned, set upon, robbed, struggling to reach the aunt he hopes will love him" (Schor, 1999: 7). The conclusion of this complicated story of identity, authority and authorship, gender and success, is conventionally happy in spite of the spectres of solitude and poverty that are still potent:

"We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own" (937).

*Bleak House* is the novel of the orphan girl who reclaims her property also her right to find out the truth about her parents. *Bleak House* speaks not only about the fate of the bastard daughter, Esther Summerson, and the fall of the Dedlocks, it speaks of an entire world in which the abuses in Chancery are thus described to develop into a metaphor for the wide-ranging inequities of Victorian society. Like his other later novels, its power and coherence depend less on a narrative line than on a progressively more flowing and symbolic vision. Whilst *Hard Times* assails capitalist industrial organization and the dissipation of the family myth, which are seen as the outcome of a dehumanised system of education, in *Little Dorrit* the Marshalsea prison, the Circumlocution Office and the already defunct system of debtors' prison become symbols of the more appalling social and psychological imprisonment of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century England. *A Christmas Carol* is unquestionably not realistic, "though it borrows what it wants

from realism”, a sort of a “holiday from Realism” (Doody, Op. Cit.: 296), which is not so surprising after all, as Dickens’s attachment to Realism is notoriously loose.

Among Dickens’s last novels, ***A Tale of Two Cities*** is a historical romance and a semi-autobiographical novel that actually deals with self-sacrifice and self-accomplishment. The protagonist, Sydney Carton, appears as the double of the author because, as Fred Kaplan has it, “while creating Carton, Dickens imagined himself as himself and as playing Carton’s role” (1988: 417). The novel domesticates the French Revolution and also employs the Dickensian key motifs of the uncanny return home, the maternal voice from beyond the grave, etc.

In the last decade of his career, Dickens composed virtually a murder per plot and Glavin is right to ask: “Does Dickens now write *roman policier* for the sake of the police or for the sake of the crime? His wrath may be palliated, sometimes, yes, but it is too fundamental, too constitutive, ever to be slackened” (Op. Cit.: 151). ***Great Expectations***, ***Our Mutual Friend*** together with ***Little Dorrit*** are accurately considered the genuine revelation of Dickens’s creative ripeness, not unlike that of Shakespeare’s in his last plays. The influence of his friend Wilkie Collins caused the finely built plot of his last and unfinished novel, ***The Mystery of Edwin Drood***. This was conceived as a thriller and the idea itself is so unexpected with Dickens that literary criticism has scarcely ventured in approaching it.

### III. 2. ***Great Expectations*** – An Autobiographical Novel

A novel of **psychological realism**, ***Great Expectations*** explores with much more subtlety than any other of Dickens’s novels the correlation between integrity and social rank. First serialized in the journal *All the Year Round* in 1861, ***Great Expectations*** is still regarded as one of the most excellent achievements of the Victorian Age and one of Dickens’s heartfelt writings. The opening chapter, describing the forsaken marshes and Pip’s confrontation with the escaped convict, is one of the best openings in world fiction:

©“My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.”

The reader enters abruptly the world of Dickens’s fiction, also his autobiography. ***David Copperfield*** is often referred to as the most explicitly autobiographical novel but it seems that ***Great Expectations*** also revisits many of the psychological pressures and traumas the writer

experienced as a boy. Dickens's fiction has this hallucinatory effect, as it never completely buried autobiographical details, and as the writer himself never got completely rid of the anxieties of the defenceless child he had been. Autobiography seems to provide one chief clue in any analysis of *Great Expectations*. Dickens's life story is that of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century individual but also the story of the modern human subject, as it renders "Dickens's own disenfranchisement as a labouring boy at Warren's Blacking Factory, and the way he reassembled his identity through authorship; the way he wrote himself into the heart of his culture" (Schorr, 1999: 7).

The subject matter of the novel appears to be the projection of individual aspirations, dissatisfactions and ambitions in a world that sardonically draws a line between ethics and wealth. Pip fanatically desires to become a gentleman and to leave behind his humble origin and background, particularly his nightmarish encounter with the weird revenant, Magwitch, the convict. He outwardly seems to manage to pursue his aspiration, but this happens, ironically and dramatically, by means of this very detestable spectre of marginality and degradation, and not by a noble, disinterested and mysterious patron.

As a whole, the novel is an act of exorcism, a painful exercise in recollection, with Magwitch standing for the image of the dead Father, equally abhorred and adored. On setting Magwitch free with the stolen file, Pip symbolically unfetters the ghost of his past and binds it thoroughly up to him. The recurrent image of the handcuffs occurs as a memento in the most intense moments in the narrative, pointing at the outcast convict as at the archetypal figure of the scapegoat. The name of Pip's benefactor – a horrid embodiment of a goblin – is also suggestive: the Latin *magus* and the English *witch* suggest the admixture of the mythical benevolence of gods with of the Victorian mistrust of any sudden favourable turn of fortune. The prisoner turns into an icon of the irrepressible fate that requires that any raise in the world is a fall from grace, from innocence and harmony. It appears that Dickens's father is in the shadow of Magwitch, with his sinful past coiling and crushing his life and the lives of his children, like Laocoön's serpents.

Miss Havisham, too, on which Pip concentrates his expectations of gentility, is described as a "witch" in the novel and if one overlaps the opening picture of the tombstones of Pip's parents, where Magwitch leaps from, on that of the clock and of arrested time in Satis House then the writer's revisiting his long lost childhood appears more poignant. Miss Havisham wears "grave clothes" and is solidly built around the idea of male ill treatment of innocuous and inexperienced femininity. The reader experiences the entering the tomb and the labyrinth

when Pip revisits again and again Satis House and thus is encouraged to resurrect his long-lost mother, too:

© “I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and it seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But...I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth”.

The spinster inspired an openly misogynistic rhetoric, which offers a disquieting view of mid-Victorian patriarchal intolerance. This prototype “also expresses the widely held belief that female celibacy constituted a disgusting form of abnormalcy. One is tempted to read this cultural bias through the lens of capitalism, with the single woman a slab in the otherwise silky fabric of bourgeois economic discourse, an irregularity that displays itself with a kind of quiet insistence” (Vlock, Op. Cit.: 170).

Yet, even though Miss Havisham and her house are mysterious enough, the “poor labyrinth” of the hero, that is the source of his torments and anguish lies elsewhere. Magwitch involves Pip in guilt and shame and these are the next major themes of *Great Expectations*. Guilt expands so as to comprise concealment and duplicity because, on entering Satis House, Pip enters both Dante’s *Inferno* and the naively accepted misapprehension of a romance. As Glavin remarks, Dickens never speaks “from the hearth”, if hearth stands for the ordinary bourgeois domestic realm. Indeed, most of the houses in *Great Expectations* are either labyrinths or grottos. These caricatured hearths are just playhouses for the “deeply damaged characters whose core sense of self is devastated or almost non-existent” (Kohut, in Glavin, Op. Cit.: 23).

Estella is part of this cunning game of seduction (not essentially erotic, but mainly social) as she is the one who symbolically leads the way to the low-ceilinged deathly room of Miss Havisham. The ultimate realization that she is also connected with Magwitch is an extra ironical acknowledgement of the hallucinating demands social status exerts on immoderate minds. This labyrinthine experience of the protagonist may also be equated with the reading experience, as Margaret A. Doody concludes:

© “Pip in his poor labyrinth...you in your labyrinth, and I in mine. In novel reading we are rescued from the solitude of our own poor labyrinth – by means of entering

another's and making it our own. When we read a novel, we know that the labyrinth is neither merely a labyrinth of adventure, or of thought (considered abstractly), nor just the entrapments of culture and choices, but the labyrinth of individual life, in all its constraints, excitements, terrors and hopes." (Doody, 1998, 358)

John Glavin examines Dickens's masterpiece in ***After Dickens: Reading, Adaptation and Performance*** (1999) from the point of view of its performative potential, thus offering a radically new reading that may be placed between literary criticism and theatrical performance. He thus underlines the fact that, in delineating such borderline creatures like Magwitch, Orlick, Miss Havisham, Mrs Joe, etc., the writer appears to be attracted to Nature's "sports", that is "the bizarre, unexpected, dazzling adaptations, the eccentric individuals marked off from the mass" (1999: 14). He seems to have been deeply influenced by Darwin's works in this fascination with human oddities, but also in planning of his plot around an orphan's ability to adapt to rapid change as a response to the viciousness of an animated environment based on competition. Yet, "where Darwin prizes adaptation to circumstances, Dickens insists on adapting *against* them. Generalised Darwinian adaptation is driven by the need to save a species" (Ibid.), whereas Dickens pleads for the survival of the child of this species only.

### III. 3. *Great Expectations* – A Bildungsroman

Pip introduces himself to the reader as a very young child, wandering in the graveyard where his family is buried and believing that he inhabits a world where language's basic function is the divination of what is absconded or simply absent. In the opening section of the novel, Pip is for the most part a agreeable figure: an orphan brought up "by hand" by an fiendish sadistic sister, he is primarily a victim who must struggle relentlessly to stay alive in the spiteful incomprehensible world that resembles more a grave than a stage. The shifts in perspective associated with Pip's first dramatic encounter with Magwitch, when the convict literally *turns him upside down*, suggest the distorted child's eye-view of the universe Pip is doomed to carry with him into maturity. Magwitch not only steals from him and makes Pip steal in his turn, but he symbolically castrates the boy, emptying his pockets. The child, unable to stand firm, becomes son to a greater fully developed authority, which is equated with parental authority, but which for Dickens always meant disgrace.

In fact, the whole unhappy course of Pip's later life is determined by adult caprice and flight of imagination, which cause him to lose his moral balance. The chief emblems of this syndrome are Miss Havisham's manipulation of him as Estella's plaything and Magwitch's transformation of him into a "gentleman". The exposure to Satis House and to Estella's cynical whimsicality and, later, the legacy of "great expectations" encourage Pip to breathe in the fresh air of illusions. From her early valuation of Pip ("What coarse hands!"), Estella puts him off balance and triggers his desire to become a refined gentleman. However, Pip is more than a pathetic victim of external forces and stratagems even though he is encouraged to think so by Estella who solemnly declares:

© "We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I." (285)

Her point is, Pip recounts, that their "association [was] forced upon us and we were mere puppets" (288). However, Dickens makes it clear from the beginning that there is some weak spot in his character, a narcissism that makes him quick to forget the homely virtues and truths represented by Joe Gargery and Biddy.

In the second stage of his development, Pip's obsession with Estella and with his improbable role as her intended Joe and Biddy are expelled from his life. Simultaneously, the protagonist annuls any chance of an affirmative life for himself, indulging in a waiting game and given over to daydream and never-ending anticipation. Narcissism is from the start Dickens's essential subject: Pip yearns in fact not for another of either gender but for the self, for its idealised image. This ego ideal urges the hero to enter the rituals of love, edification, and other societal scenarios so as to become fit for reproduction (i.e., the reproduction of his own self). His narcissism often verges on masochism, as in the passage when he contemplates a would-be terrible fate for himself:

© "It was a dry cold night, and the wind blew keenly, and the frost was white and hard. A man would die tonight of lying out on the marshes, I thought. And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude." (80)

As Schor comments, it is as if "he is choosing his future by choosing his perspective, choosing to live out the role of solitary victim, defined by those things more distant, contemplating his own contemplation of them and his inability to reach them or even to read them. At this time he is a boy looking for a glittering star; he is looking to freeze to death" (Op. Cit.: 158).

Still, Pip's rejection of Joe as a social embarrassment in Part II is compensated for by his kind sponsorship of Herbert Pocket's own expectations. This benevolent relationship anticipates the moral regeneration of Part III, when, with his self-esteem devastated, Pip begins to grope toward true emotional maturity. Despite his repugnance of Magwitch, he stands by him, defending the life of the man who provided him with his own life of a gentleman. Despite the exposure of Miss Havisham's masquerade, he is gentle to her in her lunacy and declines to take the conscience money she presents to him. Despite his sour frustration, he is devoted to Estella, advising her against her marriage to Bentley Drummle. Finally, he recognizes the true worth of Joe's friendship, exchanging "portable property" for authentic fullness of sentiments. Dickens manages to conserve the reader's sympathy for Pip, even at Pip's worst moments, through a narrative device, which may be called moral retrospective.

Thus, the Pip who speaks to the reader is, from the outset, a full-grown person who has already passed through excruciating experiences and he is now able to evaluate and construe his own actions from the perspective of a wiser person who may be more tolerant, though painfully so. Pip's expectations are not only of "calling himself Pip", of winning a girl, and economic security, but also to complete his education. The reader is always aware of the existence of two Pips, one who performs what is being narrated, the other who examines and appraises while narrating. Pip – the narrator morally judges the other Pip, one good example of this method occurs when Pip goes to Miss Havisham's, and sees Estella for the first time as an adult. Caught up in his infatuation, he forgets all about his promise to visit Joe. The chapter concludes in unaffected repentance of the mature teller:

© "Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions. But I never thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God forgive me!, soon dried".

The protagonist's estrangement from Joe begins in fact when the boy learns to read and Joe is incapable to do the same. He struggles "through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter" (75). Joe's inability to get educated is clearly associated with emasculation and sexual passivity, as he confesses to Pip that Mrs. Joe "would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear I might rise" (80), because, he goes on, reading is to be "like a sort of a rebel". Such details make the reader preserve his sympathy towards the protagonist who is no longer viewed as cruel but as impatient with a comrade who tags along.

Thus the first-person narration draws the reader into unobstructed empathy with the central character, flawed though he is. The book has the value of a confession, talking about past sins and present remorse, yet, like any other confession, this one is also primarily an attempt to control the story, i.e. destiny.

Yet a classical Bildungsroman requires a serial, linear space of growth and development. It is in this novel that Dickens's detestation of the traditional marriage plot is manifest and this intense dislike of linearity clearly affects the significance of *Great Expectations* as a Bildungsroman, too. Happy families are rare in Dickens's fiction and it is usually through solitude and solitary evaluation that one is confirmed one's worth and self-esteem.

### III. 4. Dickens's Technique of Characterization

Dickens's is not a coherent and unified fictional universe, but a baffling one in which particular and disconnected trends, characters or circumstances are rendered extremely vivid – a collection of moments, grimaces and situations rather than a train of events or a gallery of portraits. The whole narrative depends, in fact, on episodes and on the very gaps between “acts”, which are but flashbacks of the older Pip – the narrator. As Nina Auerbach has it in *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians* (1990) Dickens's heroes, great or small, are displaying “the histrionic artifice of ordinary life” (q. in Glavin, 1999: 100). It may be that many of his minor characters are perceived as artificial or mere sketches of personalities, yet Dickens knew very well that “real theatres are not about having truth, but about having fun” (Ibid.). There are many unforgettable characters in *Great Expectations*, including minor ones, such as Wemmick, Mr. Pumblechook, the Pockets, Bentley Drummle, etc. Harriet Martineau writes in her *Autobiography* of 1877 that these characters are hardly credible because “while Dickens tells us a world of things that are natural and even true, his personages are generally, as I suppose is undeniable, profoundly unreal” (q. in Vlock, Op. Cit.: 31). Yet not all of Dickens's characters are exaggerations and even the most sceptical reader must accept the fact that what is actually suspected of being inflated is the cast of characters. To bring his profuse canvas to life, Dickens brings into play the portrayal through caricature, roughly drafting the outlines of insignificant characters by means of an assortment of evocative techniques, which may remind one of that type of painting prior to written language, to history and culture.

Definitely, the primary *modus operandi* is **naming**, to this being added, though to a lesser extent, **epithet**.

**Naming** is often a weapon against the world of adults. Pip, whose “infant tongue” refuses the patronymic and therefore “called [himself] Pip, and came to be called Pip”, is able to find appropriate names for his *dramatis personae*. By means of persons’ names that are peculiar and suggestive from an acoustic point of view, Dickens indicates in a single stroke both the prevalent emotional traits and the bodily form of characters. For example, the name of Pumblechook brings to mind, through its very sonority, the likeness of a bulky, arrogant man who grumbles and chokes and quivers, his name being in itself an eruption of suppressed emotion, an illustration of the language of extremes. The haughtiness of this fake sponsor of Pip is camouflaged in his polysyllabic, highly consonantal family name. Similarly, the idea of unpredictability is suggested in the name “Wemmick”, whereas the Pockets constitute a whole family of distracted, nearly inadequate accessories, much like the ornamental pockets on a piece of clothing. As for the names of the major characters, they too point out both physical aspect and psychological predilection. Miss Havisham’s name symbolically enfolds the word “sham”, Estella’s name hints at an arctic inaccessible light, Jaggers symbolizes the cruel sword of blind justice, which dominates the individual through legally recognized misuse, and “Pip” intimates infant talk and “pipsqueak” (small or insignificant person, but nevertheless often annoying or troublesome), but also the slang “pip” meaning “a fit of depression”.

Conversely, **epithets** are of assistance to the reader who desires to go beyond the facade designated by proper names. Epithets make a distinction between different facets of individuals, for instance the two Wemmicks: the “Walworth Wemmick” – a man of plain family contentment, and “the Little Britain Wemmick” – a man of quick proficiency that helps him survive in the competitive atmosphere of the City. Bentley Drummle is also distinguished by such evocative descriptions as that provided by Jaggers who keeps on attaching the label of “spider” to him. Voice, dialogue, gestural peculiarities, melodramatic idioms become sequences of indicators for one’s personality as in the case of Mr. Pocket’s habit of lifting himself up by the hair or Mr. Pumblechook’s automatic handshakes and noisy greetings.

Characters are also involuntarily describing themselves through **recurring choice of words** (tag lines): Mr. Wemmick’s fixation with “portable property” and Joe’s preliminary “What I meanersay” underscore the clerk’s obsessive desire to possess and control, which is specific to the urban civilization, and the carefulness and honesty of the latter, both qualities being associated in Dickens’s view with traditional civilization of country-life. Some critics

have addressed the employ of the eccentric verbal communication, like dialect and idiodialect<sup>2</sup> in Dickens, but little has been printed on this more interesting aspect of verbal stereotyping.

Peter Ackroyd, in his *Biography of Dickens*, remarks that the writer could, as it were, “jump on the stage and do all the voices” (q. in Vlock, Op. Cit.: 135) while another famous Dickensian biographer, John Forster, attributes the same role of the ventriloquist to Dickens and explains it through his fascination with a contemporary comic actor, Matthews, who captured public attention with his one-man shows (1928: 59).

**Personal belongings**, too, serve to characterize owners, as characters depend on the objects of their fixation, starting with Miss Havisham’s ghastly nuptial dress to Mr. Jaggers’s death masks, which are perceived as grotesque accessories to the identity of characters. Mr. Wemmick’s diminutive Gothic fortress suggests the character’s failure to attain material and social capital that would enable him to lead a less exotic middle-class domestic life.

### III. 5. The Melodramatic Plot of *Great Expectations*

Almost all of Dickens’s novels rely more or less on melodramatic codes. His stories feature such elements as unclear origins, long-lost relatives, unexpected stroke of luck, despondent orphan-heroes and endangered orphan-heroines – all standard melodrama devices. The plot of *Great Expectations* has also been described as highly melodramatic. It is indeed littered with buried secrets and interwoven pasts and interspersed by means of twists of fate and climactic disclosures. Characters are interconnected in more or less mysterious ways: Miss Havisham and Magwitch both share Jaggers as their legal representative, a state of affairs that encourages Pip to suppose that it is the influential lady of Satis House that has become the backer of his “great expectations”. Moreover, Compeyson is both Miss Havisham’s long-lost lover and Magwitch’s associate in felony while Magwitch is not only Pip’s sponsor but also Estella’s father. Similarly, Molly is not only Jaggers’s helping woman, but also Estella’s mother. The inventory could go on, extending to comprise many other characters, such as Orlick or the Pockets.

The improbable fusing of fates creates an impression of some incomprehensible orderliness or a given blueprint in human existence. Bringing into play coincidence, Dickens

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<sup>2</sup> Idiodialect, language spoken by fictionalised characters that embody historical people (see Vlock, Op. Cit.: 135-6).

elucidates fate's value of a decisive agent in human affairs that imbues even the most ostensibly arbitrary occurrence with meaning. The implication seems to be that life itself has a definite meaning, that even chance happenings are part of the process of self-edification. What's more, Dickens's notion of fate incorporates a factor of psychological determinism, with the individual bound to build up his own destiny in accordance with his interior world. Pip's self-absorption and aspirations, Estella's trained mercilessness, Miss Havisham's bitter detestation of men, and Magwitch's gratitude that seems entirely altruistic mixed up with his obsessive desire to "own" a gentleman, which is entirely egoistic – all contribute to the complex unfolding of Pip's narrative. The idea that one's chance to be happy is preordained and modelled by means of occurrences that might look like accidental, appears in Pip's rumination early in the novel, succeeding the visit to Satis House:

©“That was a memorable day for me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you, who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron and gold, of thorns and flowers, that would have never bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.”

The interaction between outer action and inner reaction calls attention to fateful episodes and spectacular elucidations. The melodramatic plot as a whole intimates the prospect of inner development, as the hero grows deeply aware of his drawbacks in a series of epiphanies that are triggered by exterior incidents and voices. What Dickens seems to suggest is that happiness, that is order and meaning, depends solely on one's capacity to infer and value of the pattern their life has been built on.

### III. 6. The Two Endings of *Great Expectations*

It is commonplace data that *Great Expectations* has two endings, one initial form, the other printed on the advice of his friend writer, Bulwer-Lytton, who proposed a more gratifying conclusion for the constant readers of Dickens. The two different endings reflect the generic and structural ambiguity of the novel as “the fairy princess and now successfully embourgeoised pauper still seem to be in different books” (Schor, Op. Cit.: 176).

The original ending seems more appropriate to the tone that pervades *Great Expectations*. Like many of his novels, *Great Expectations* renders a dismal view on life as a series of fateful stages, which cannot be explained logically and cannot be retraced in all their

complexity. The youthful adulation that Pip feels for Estella grows out of his self-absorbed passion rather than out of indisputable spiritual union and sexual magnetism. Given his inability to grasp the young woman's nature as it has been twisted by Miss Havisham, he is condemned to run into disillusionment and affliction. His unsubstantiated obsession quite early indicates that he will never have her, as he will never try to get near her, that she is to remain an unapproachable vision. Thus, the original conclusion of the novel is in keeping with the unembellished message Pip transmits via his chronicle: if one feeds on "expectations", one postpones knowingly and perpetually to live one's life as it is. Pip appears incapable to escape "the deep-seated patterns of grief", in John Glavin's opinion, because "to achieve such a release, Dickens's oh-so-promising male protagonists would have to learn to manage, rather than defend themselves from, the harrowing demands of shame and of rage" (1999: 150). Commonplace happiness is for Dickens simply inconceivable and such a story with Pip and Estella brought together has never had a chance. "Instead, narcissism spurs aggression; the frivolous becomes undistinguishable from the ferocious" (Ibid.).

The topic of prospects is central to the first part of the novel in which Pip's entanglement in his own illusions is described as deliberately self-damaging. Yet, we see Pip's time-consuming illusion doubled by a pervasive sense of reformation in the conclusion of the story and this explains the reader's acceptance of the equally improbable moral rectification of Estella. One cannot assume that they now are meant to live "happily ever after", as this would be a violation of the major justification of the narrative, namely that some missteps are irreversible. The first ending suitably places emphasis on the wisdom that both Pip and Estella have attained through affliction:

"I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be" (59)

One can however argue that the subsequent ending is finer than the first in providing an appropriate solution to the idealistic strain in the novel. From the opening chapters, Pip is absorbed by his dream that places Estella amidst his aspiration and longing despite the early acknowledgement of the fact that both of them are bound by the distorted code of Satis House. However, both Pip and Estella free themselves from conceited misapprehension through their hurtful experiences and the second closing message convinces the reader that they are at length rehabilitated so that they utterly match up in the end.

Besides, there is enough evidence in the text to suggest that Dickens may have always planned a blissful ending for the twosome because, in several moments, the sequence of events indicates Estella's admiration of Pip as poles apart from her habitual "victims". One such a conspicuous recognition occurs at the Richmond ball, when Pip interviews her in relation to her enticing Bentley Drummle:

" 'Do you deceive and entrap him, Estella?'

'Yes, and many others – all of them but you.' " (38)

It might be argued that the second ending is over-elaborate, impractical and unworkable. Indeed, the fact that both Pip and Estella happen by the ruins of Satis House on the same day after more than a decade of absence and silence is at least inflated. However, all through the story, Dickens has been engaged in coincidental turning of events, those fortuitous events that demarcate a life's route. This last, outwardly casual reunion carries out a veiled plan that has administered Pip's existence. The protagonists' coming together is no longer a sequence of Miss Havisham's plan of scheming retribution but a realistic junction of two beings that are naturally united by a shared personal history and mutual comprehension.

Both endings are to be taken into account because in both Pip appears as a grown person whose tolerance addresses both his own past mistakes and Estella's. This compassionate quality suffuses both versions, but, despite a certain resemblance in the cadence of the discourse of self-scrutiny, the two final scenes remain dissimilar on the whole. The expressive representation of the heart-to-heart conversation in the garden washed by moonlight suggests a more hopeful vision on their future than the abrupt addendum that recounts a chance encounter on a crowded city street. This first ending is gloomily implying that such providential happenings are hardly possible. The writing of a second ending was based on the Victorian public request for happy endings, yet it would mean to oversimplify the discussion by stating that Dickens merely yielded to profit-making demands but if this is what actually happened, we must remark the genius with which Dickens revised the ending so as to make it appear as an integral component within the structure of the novel. In describing the ruined house with the new ivy rising out of the vestiges, Dickens brings to the reader's mind an awareness of the relaxed relationship between past and present, which pays no attention to human suffering and hopes. In contrast, the original ending is far more colourless and insipid, as Dickens is forced to compress the major proceedings in Estella's life and quickly convey to the reader the moral that what has gone apart can not be put back together. Estella has been early and in honest

described as incompatible with regularised intercourse, standing for the untouchable happiness, safely placed “in the glory of *noli me tangere*, of egos who don’t need solitude to feel supreme” (Glavin, Op. Cit.: 99). There is the same sense of closure and however of adjustment, but the narrative voice is employed with moderation so as to suggest the acceptance of irretrievable failure. It must be conceded that this is a rare instance in which almost divergent endings of a book have equal artistic worth.

### III. 7. Undermining the Realist Agenda: Pip’s Crisis of Identity

Toward the end of the novel, Pip is in a state of disorientation, as a nauseating blurring of identity besieges him, and as spatial and temporal sequences tend to grow too much flexible and overlapped and it is the mission of his feverish mind to set them in proper order.

The consternation produced by the liquefied borders that separate past from present, inside and outside, self and other, etc. The apex of this agitation resides in the sense of a vertiginous process of losing a distinct identity, as well as in the inability to tell oneself from another, or to tell one’s own multiple identities from the one built by others or built for others. Pip summons up the feelings of dread and fatigue he experienced during those moments:

© “I confounded impossible identities with my own identity; I was a brick in the house wall and yet entreated to be released from the giddy place where the builders set me; I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off”.

Identity is clearly at stake for the duration of such fits of delirium and the dilemma of identity is fashioned either as an incessant commotion or a paralysing state of panic, either as a series of mental associations, or efforts of disassociations that are able to underscore the double danger of self-effacing and self-assurance. The alarm of various identities converging to harass Pip’s frantic mind, his confusion concerning the identity of his benefactor are presented in such a manner so as to suggest the dissolution of the entire world, of entire humanity. This synergetic narrative ability of Dickens, as illustrated in his much-blamed use of coincidences, has become the nightmare of modern criticism but must be still praised as one of the most innovative means of dragging the unconnected narrative threads together.

In his *Life of Dickens* (1871 - 2), John Forster remarks that not many things “moved Dickens’s fancy so pleasantly as the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life” and that he would often state that people “supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each

other; and tomorrow bore so close a resemblance to nothing half so much yesterday” (1928: 76). Most of Dickens’s readers regarded such patterns of analogy as the confirmation of a fated order, an unseen but cohesive order, which proves to be favourable at long last. On the other hand, coincidences and abrupt changes of situation may prove equally perplexing and dangerous for the individual’s integrity, which may feel urged to abandon his destiny with this benevolent providence.

Coincidence is also a subterranean assertion of the necessity to connect the increasingly atomised human existences in the Victorian Age. Social life is characterised by multiple forms of segregation and categorization, many of them being illustrated in *Great Expectations*: between labour time and leisure time (see the two Wemmicks), between children and adults, men and women, between different social classes a. s. o. This preoccupation to arrange taxonomically aspects of human existence was however futile as this is the age of tremendous social and individual change: whole social categories lose position and privilege in favour of other groups, the individual himself/herself is haunted by losing the laboriously-gained status, and the same sequences of time may bring good fortune to someone and failure to somebody else.

Richard Sennett writes “Respectability founded on chance: that was the economic fact of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (q. in Walder, Op. Cit.: 162). The individual’s struggle is absolutely impressive in his neurotic desire to make the past distinct from the present so as to allow the existence of a future. This restlessness is explained by Alexander Welsh in *From Copyright to Copperfield* (1987) through the blacking warehouse incident that is re-enact in many of Dickens’s novels, as the author’s own desire “to justify a rise in the world, so desired by the sons of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Restlessness, as Dickens told Forster, characterised his entire life: “It is better to go on and fret than to stop and fret” (in Walder, Op. Cit.: 639).

Pip’s delirium raises some other disturbing questions regarding this time the reliability of the narrator. Pip says of his convalescence from fever under the care of Joe:

“I would half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of mental troubles of the fever that was gone.”

In a disturbing manner, the reader is compelled to value the so-called “fever” as a means of quarantine during which the protagonist is allotted the necessary time in which to recapitulate past errors and suffering, but also to recover the peace of childhood with Joe beside him. One cannot ignore the sense of violence that accompanies Pip’s illness in spite of his physical stagnation. It is now that Pip attempts at severing himself from all those

“impossible existences”, which have accrued around his actual existence, suffocating his identity. He wrestles with the shadows of murderers/ benefactors, failing to decide among those who “meant to do him good” and those who wished him ill. The numerous substitute parental figures affect Pip’s chance to build up a stable identity and his delirium affords both a revaluation of all his encounters with ogres as fathers and ogresses as mothers and the serene conclusion that the sole and genuine father he has ever had is Joe:

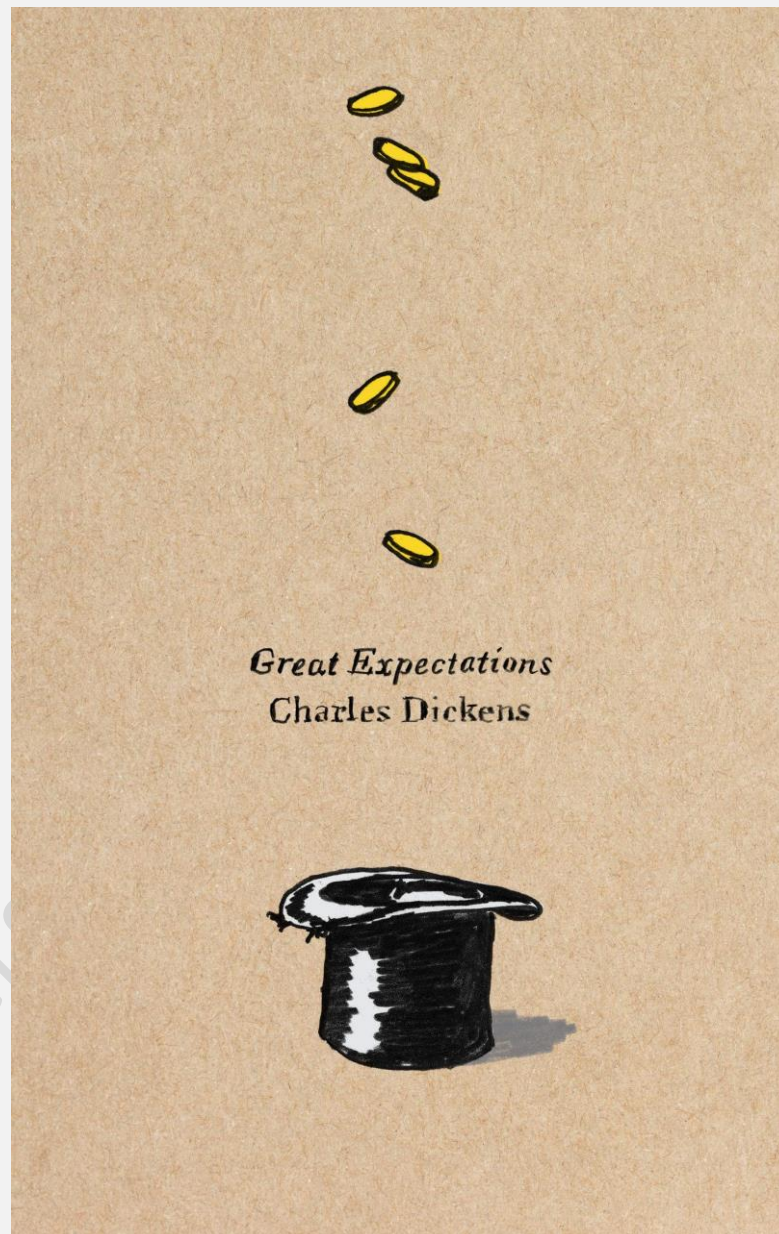
© “I knew that there was an extraordinary tendency in all these people, sooner or later to settle into the likeness of Joe”.

Thus, the aggressive dealings that characterise the economic background are substituted by means of the unadulterated tenderness and friendship of Joe – the only one who has struggled to maintain a relationship in which Pip has always played the part of the injured victim and Joe the part of the helpful fairy, even when injured and victimized himself. Illness paradoxically cures Pip’s immoderate expectations and helps him understand that Joe permanently “did everything for me”. That is why he feels to be “little Pip again” and this sense of a spiritual rebirth is even more underscored by the second Pip, who is fathered by Joe, as it should have been from the very beginning. On the other hand, “little Pip” may be read as the “Dickensian miracle of *in verbo* fertilization” (Glavin, Op. Cit.: 93), since the actual begetters of any child (here Joe and Biddy) are to bring only shame on their offspring and they are or should be forced to surrender their children to parents who are more appropriate mainly because they have preserved their chastity. Abstaining for sex, Pip is the best father as he has abstained not only for sex, but also for any type of affinity and has now managed to suspend both memory and past.

Dickens’s hesitation in regard to the ending of *Great Expectations* suggests that he could not shape an appropriate end of the line for his hero once Pip had given up his “great expectations”. The brutality of the disease that forces self-scrutiny upon the hero needs to be finally counterbalanced by the temperance of the Realist mode of representation. If we view the delirium as a corresponding item for the narrative as a whole, so Pip might be seen as a probable alter ego of Dickens, therefore a traditional narrator suffering from the constraints imposed on him by the obstructive Realist postulates. Pip’s failure may therefore be read as the general failing of the Realist writer to preserve the illusion of verisimilitude and detachment.

Among many of the sources of imaginative force in Dickens’s novels was for sure the fear, the uncertainty concerning these postulates of the Realist agenda within which he unreservedly located his literary performance. This apprehension and this doubt are expressed

more clearly during the moments of crisis the protagonist experiences when his mind feverishly searches for a frail equilibrium between the apparently plain, yet unalterable values and principles according to which humanity has always traced the border between past and present, victim and oppressor, failure and success, and which are so precariously endorsed and mirrored by the Realist mode of representation.



## IV. Charlotte Brontë

(1816- 1855)

*Jane Eyre*

### IV. 1. The Brontë Sisters

The Brontë sisters were the daughters of an Irish cleric with whom they shared an undefined social situation and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Haworth rectory, Yorkshire. The mother, Maria, died of cancer in 1820 and her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, moved in with the family. In 1824, Patrick Brontë sent his oldest daughters, Elizabeth and Maria, to school at Wakefield, then transferred them to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, Lancashire. Charlotte and Emily soon joined them at this ill-famed boarding school, which was later portrayed in *Jane Eyre*. There, Elizabeth and Maria fell ill and had to go home where they died of consumption. The next year, Charlotte and Emily came back home, too.



Charlotte, Emily and Anne, together with their brother, Branwell, grew up in a secretive world of daydreaming, romanticizing life to such an extent that they later became incapable of crossing the gap between the parsonage and the rest of the world. To keep themselves amused, they invented the make-believe kingdom of *Angria*, to which they all dedicated thousands of pages scribbled on some miniature books in minuscule handwriting. The creation of these idealistic sagas occupied the children until well into their twenties and served as a serious

writing apprenticeship as it is here that many of the characters, dramatic outlines and topics were conceived and put to work before appearing in their works of maturity.

After a short-term job as a teacher, Charlotte went with Emily to Brussels to study French and German at the Pensionnat Heger. They returned for the funeral of their aunt, who left each child a small sum of money. Charlotte returned to Brussels unaccompanied and began to feel a special affection to Constantin Heger, the head of the school, whose thought-provoking and refined wits charmed the ingenuous young woman. It appears that he mistook her attachment for love and thus hurt her feelings. This emotional confusion and Madame Heger's suspicion eventually obliged her to run away and in 1844 she endeavoured to start a school at the Haworth parsonage, but no pupils came.

The next year, because of an illicit love affair, Branwell was fired as a tutor and, grief-stricken, spent the following three years at home drinking a lot and taking drugs until he died of his excesses. His three surviving sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, – impoverished, yet highly cultivated women – were positioned at great disadvantage in the early Victorian Age, facing a sole alternative: either to get suitably married, or to become tutors or governesses. If the former possibility implied a deficit of self-rule, the latter positions were chastening for their unambiguous semblance with a servant's condition. As Terry Eagleton argues, the Brontë sisters experimented on themselves the general fate of Romanticism, which proved unable to face Victorian industrialism. Indeed, the clash between their Romantic view on life and the abrasive reality was straightened out in overindulging in fantasy, also in the conversion of repulsive actuality into curative illusion.

In 1846 the Brontë sisters published at their own expense a joint volume of *Poems* allegedly authored by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell – in actual fact, their male pseudonyms designed to screen their identity and keep them away from the wide-ranging chauvinist attitude towards women writers. When they decided to become professional writers they were cynically aware of this discrimination as Charlotte afterwards confessed in her autobiography:

© “We had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their reward a flattery, which is not true praise.”

As John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill remarked in their *Essays on Sex Equality* published around time of the Brontës' novels:

© “A single woman is felt both by herself and others as a kind of excrescence on the surface of society having no use or function or office there. She is not indeed precluded

from useful and honourable exertion of various kinds: but a married woman is presented to be a useful member of society (...). A single woman must establish what very few either women or men do establish, an individual claim” (1970: 73).

Despite their subterfuge the Brontë sisters sold only two copies of their volume of poetry and the publisher turned down Charlotte’s first novel, *The Professor*. She however began *Jane Eyre*, while taking care of their sick father, and it was available a year later. This was an instantaneous, if unanticipated, success. Emily soon published *Wuthering Heights* (1847) together with Anne’s *Agnes Grey*. The reviews, in both cases, represented a complete disaster.

Branwell also had literary aspirations, but his entire existence was but a series of embarrassing failures. “He degenerated into a dipsomaniac and drug-addict, making life for all at Haworth parsonage a dangerous and harrowing agony until his death in 1848” (Craik in Pollard, Op. Cit.: 149). His sole literary contribution was to provide material, as “all three sisters unhesitatingly depicted drunkenness and degradation, but much more to confirm them in what their private imaginings had begun, in treating the material of melodrama and of baroque and Gothic horror as inevitable and essential elements of real life” (Ibid.). Charlotte Brontë wrote at his death, envisaging divine absolution for the man who brought so much unhappiness on his family:

© “When the struggle was over – and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony – I felt as I had never felt before that there was peace and forgiveness for him in Heaven. All his errors – to speak plainly – all his vices seemed nothing to me in that moment; every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to the natural affections only was felt. If Man can thus experience total oblivion of this fellow’s imperfections – how much more can the Eternal Being who made man, forgive his creature” (q. in Thormählen, 1999: 119).

The year 1848 marks a twofold calamity as it was the time of both Branwell’s and Emily’s passing away. After her loving nursing of the sick brother, then after his death, Emily went on diligently with her household tasks but, before long, she fell in a state of lethargy, paying no attention to her own health. She died at the end of the year 1848 and Charlotte wrote at her death:

© “Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone (...); on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh.”

Anne also fell ill, catching consumption from Emily, and Charlotte interrupted her work on her new book, **Shirley**, to look after her sister, who however died in 1849. Anne owed a lot to the fame of her two sisters as her novels are far from being masterpieces, but she was also overshadowed by their more spectacular successes. Both **Agnes Grey** – a moderate study of a governess' life – and **The Tenant of Wildfell Hall** – a portrayal of mental disintegration induced by alcoholism – lack the passion that readers would expect from one of the Brontës. She was intelligent and gifted, but her temper was of a quieter cast. However, one critic, commenting on **The Tennant** and on the novel's daring delineation of an unhappy marriage followed by the departure of the wife, Helen Huntington, wrote: "the slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England" (in Carter & McRae, 1998: 290). Her poetry contains accounts of critical sadness "accompanied by a spiritual lethargy that struck at the root of thought and feeling, blocking every effort to rally and leaving no alternative to pleading for faith and hope" (Thormählen, 1999: 71).



Charlotte's **Shirley** was almost certainly conceived as a parallel to Mrs. Gaskell's novels. It is an ambitious attempt of rendering a vast social setting and a conflict between employers and workers. Shirley Keelder is a but reiteration of Jane Eyre, only that she is financially and socially sheltered, an incarnation of Jane's declared longing to be "an equal to any man". When the novel is completed, Charlotte travels to London where she meets Thackeray, then to Scotland and to Manchester, where she visits Elizabeth Gaskell, her future biographer.

In 1853 she publishes **Villette**, a novel set in Brussels that also exposes the author's standpoint on the excruciating treatment of women in the age. She marries Arthur Bell Nichols,

her father's curate. In 1855 Charlotte dies in pregnancy and is buried next to her family at the Haworth parsonage, which has become a place of cultural pilgrimage and a Brontë museum.

As Marianne Thormählen sums up, "for a century and a half, people have wondered what factors – genetic and environmental – were especially significant in the evolution of the Brontë genius. Part of the answer lies in the physical, emotional, intellectual and religious freedom accorded to the exceptional talents that developed in Haworth Parsonage. It was a freedom allied to an ethos of labour and effort, informed by affection for fellow humans and by personal commitment to a religion, which not only allowed for, but also demanded, the engagement of passions. It would be hard to think of a more favourable climate for creative imagination and intelligence to mature in at the time, and it was very much a product of that time" (1999: 23).

#### IV. 2. Charlotte Brontë's Literary Activity

As the elder sister, Charlotte wilfully and quite early in her life assumed the role of a surrogate mother in her family, being the only "social being" at Haworth. Her fiction is however illustrative of her own plea for emotional reimbursement. As Walter Allen points out, her writings are fundamentally centred on the affiliation *master - pupil*, or *master - slave*, disclosing "one of the commonest sexual dreams of women: the desire to be mastered, but to be mastered by a man so lofty in his scorn for women as to make the very fact of being mastered a powerful adjunct to the woman's self-esteem. It is a fantasy with obvious affinities with the Cinderella story" (Op. Cit.: 188). This view on Charlotte Brontë's fiction seems plausible, yet one should also take into account the huge responsibility the writer assumed quite early in her life and the subsequently natural desire to have her own share of security and affection. Most of her stories obviously fit this escapist tendency.

As Terry Eagleton writes in *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, the sisters were genteel, educated, but without social or geographical access to the world that might gratify their tastes and interests and, above all, they were female, "trapped between imaginative aspirations and a society which could use them merely as 'higher' servants" (1975: 9). "A private governess has no existence," wrote Charlotte in a letter to Emily. Even after the success of *Jane Eyre* brought fame to Charlotte, her extreme shyness, 'her deep and exaggerated consciousness of her personal defects' (Gaskell in Pollard, 1987: 267) made her shrink from the wider world she longed for.

**Jane Eyre** – the most well-liked of her novels – is “an impossible love story” (Allen, Op. Cit.: 189) between a poor governess – an orphan girl who was brought up in the house of her aunt and later sent to a charitable school – and Mr. Rochester, her master, whose illegitimate daughter she has to educate. Rochester’s illegitimate “brat”, Adèle, is a little Cupid; she is “the lighthearted strawberry-gatherer, who offers searching criticism of Rochester’s possessive vision of his life alone with Jane” and also reminds Jane of “the erotic necessity of self-love for self-preservation” (Doody, Op. Cit.: 368). Mr. Rochester keeps a lunatic wife in a locked room without the knowledge of anyone in the house, except for a drinking woman-servant. This mad woman is perfidious enough to try to set her husband’s bed on fire and to haunt the lodgers’ nights with horrendous laughter and petrifying screams. When Jane finds out that the man she longs for and has now accepted as a husband is already married, she runs away from the socially stigmatising position of a mistress.

The sign of the “lightning-struck tree” is borrowed from Gothic fiction, namely from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, where it also anticipates disaster and failure. In the Eden-like orchard of Thornfield and under the chestnut tree, Jane and Rochester sit together alone for the first time and this is also the setting for Rochester’s proposal of marriage to Jane. The same night of the proposal, the chestnut tree is struck and this emblem will haunt the narrative as an omen of the instability of any fantasy when brought to the malicious light of day:

© “But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master’s face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? It writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us...a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal; and I thought only of hiding my dazzled eyes against Mr. Rochester’s shoulders”.

In *Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Brontë’s War of Earthly Elements*, David Lodge argues that Brontë’s use of “visionary language” is contingent on “the value of individual self-fulfilment won from a conflict between passion and reason conducted at an extraordinary pitch of imagination” (q. in ARDHOLM, Op. Cit.: 88). After she flees from disgrace and while in the companionship of her miraculously discovered cousins, Jane finds out that she is the title-holder of a providential fortune, too. Though tempted by Reverend St. John Rivers, her cousin, to go to India as a missionary’s spouse, Jane is prevented from becoming “a

perfect victim” by a voice calling out her name in the night. This voice startles Jane as she prays for guidance:

© “I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry –

‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’ – nothing more.

‘O God! What is it?’ I gasped.

I might have said, ‘Where is it?’ for it did not seem in the room, nor in the house, nor in the garden; it didn’t come out of the air, nor from under the earth, nor from overhead. I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being – a known loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently.” (445)

Hastening back to Thornfield, Rochester’s estate, Jane finds her master and lover mutilated in his wife’s ultimate and incredibly vindictive act of violence. As the wife is now deceased, Jane is free to wed Rochester and, of course, he is to later recover his sight, at least partially.

Summarized in this rather insipid manner, the story is an “impossible” one, as Walter Allen remarks (Ibid.), yet, what gives credit to this unbelievable action is a harmony of ambience and tonality and an inimitable amalgamation of private experience and passionate idealistic projections. Besides, the substantial portrait of Jane makes any incredibility of the narrative appear as inconsequential because, as Walter Allen again underlines, *Jane Eyre* represents “the triumph of dream over reality” (Op. Cit.: 190) in which the reader is also invited to join because all Brontë’s novels are supposed to make the reader collaborate in producing the significance of their units of discourse. This invitation would often call into play the reader’s social, literary and religious knowledge so as to put the finishing touches to complicity with the narrator, which is clearly congenial to didactic interest. Yet, Charlotte Brontë makes it clear in many of her works, as she does in this excerpt from *Shirley*, that she is not tempting the reader with a traditional romance:

© “If you think (...) that anything like romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus and melodrama? Something real, cool and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning” (1).

The intent reader indeed discovers that plurality is, in the case of *Jane Eyre*, as Frank Kermode said of *Wuthering Heights*, “not a prescription, but a fact” (q. in Williams, 1998: 142).

#### IV. 3. *Jane Eyre* – a Bildungsroman

The novel is a Bildungsroman, keeping the record of a young woman's progression towards maturity. A significant component of Jane's schooling is the development of the awareness of each person's, therefore of her own, spiritual purpose. "The fact that *Jane Eyre* demonstrates the providential destiny of its narrator aligns the novel with the English tradition of fictional devotional and didactic narratives such as the *Pilgrim's Progress*" (Ardholm, 1999: 72). In every chapter of the novel Jane comes across persons who officially advocate religious dogma. Such characters clearly assist in the shaping of Jane's system of convictions and in better clarifying her position against the divergent viewpoint of unforgiving and impulsive zealots. Charlotte Brontë re-enacts the growth and formation of the heroine's consciousness from the wilful individuality of the orphan child to the sophisticated and affable wife of Edward Rochester. In this process of maturation, the fictitious chronicler presents a succession of events whose spiritual nature she attempts to deduce. "At the end she created a pattern that depicts, and builds up to her, her providential destiny of marrying Rochester" (Ibid.).

Mr. Brocklehurst represents the most unpleasant incarnation of a religious fake, his indoctrination in hypocrisy turning into a grotesque and sadistic clowning. In their first discussion at Gateshead Hall, he terrorizes the little girl with the menace of the fate of naughty girls being thrown into "a pitiful of fire" where the wicked are condemned burning forever. Later on, at Lowood, his angry mysticism highlights the institutionalised vicious and ruthless discipline practised in the so-called "charity schools" of the age. The brutality of Brocklehurst's religious vision is made apparent in the memorable scene when Jane's is being exposed as "a liar". Reluctant to listen to the girl's account of events and relying on Mrs. Reed's story alone, Brocklehurst denigrates Jane in public at Lowood, then delivers a lecture on the sin of dishonesty in the same fanatic vein as that in which he condemns the refusal of the schoolgirls to eat the burnt porridge. His impassioned sermon on the divine remuneration of self-abnegation is set in contrast to the portrait of his light-hearted, vain and beautifully dressed daughters that mimic a pious attitude while standing by their father, thus mutely bearing witness to their family's double standards.

Yet, it is at Lowood that Jane first encounters authentic devoutness and integrity in the person of her schoolmate Helen Burns. Alike a sacrificial victim of ancient times, Helen uncomplainingly endures undeserved correction and derision, thus alleviating Jane's

particularly emotional temperament and training her in the acceptance of such values as forgiveness, tolerance and temperance. The example of passivity she offers is not detrimental to Jane's evolution, on the contrary it stands for the type of restraint and submissiveness that helps one continue to exist under destructive pressure. That is why later in the narrative and at climactic moments, Jane conducts herself in accord with Helen's genuinely Christian wisdom. When most compelled to give way to rage or adoration, she finds enough power to resist the temptation of paying back or of disclosing her formidable sentiments. For instance, in Chapter VI, when aunt Reed acknowledges on her deathbed the fact that she has denied Jane her rightful legacy, the heroine charitably demonstrates her Christian clemency, saying:

© "You have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's and be at peace".

Yet Jane's faith is not to be equated with bigotry because she is not entirely convinced that Helen's quiet renouncing of earthly existence is an active state of bliss, especially if she looks around her and sees the splendid rebirth of nature, which symmetrically announces the inscription on Helen's tombstone, "*Resurgam*":

© "And then my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell: and for the first time it recoiled, baffled; and for the first time, glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood – the present; and all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth; and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos" (80).

This idea that earthly life is tragically limited and that it must be lived to the full is made clear once more when she meets St. John Rivers, and when she is able to refuse to go along with his missionary fanaticism. Although he is characterized by the same qualities of selflessness and austere mysticism that Jane also possesses he is less meek, less open-minded and affectionate than she is. He is determined to defy the demands of his heart and body and, because of a rigid adherence to what he perceives as his Christian vocation, he discards Rosamund Oliver's love in spite of his own affection for her. His proposal to Jane is thus prompted not by love, but by a sense of her suitability as his co-worker in pious service away from home. If it may be viewed as a means of taming his sexual urges, the strange proposal to Jane also represents an attempt to force her spirit to bend under his command.

If the story gives the impression that its utmost aim is to trace the evolution of the independent female protagonist daringly making her way in the world, the idea is in opposition to the unkind, even brutal power of destiny, to the heroine's ultimate compliance with exterior

circumstances, and to her suspect confidence of the so-called “kindness of strangers”. It is quite difficult to comprehend what made the writer conceive the heroine’s fate as dependant on startling, incomprehensible gestures of a benevolent providence or on often bewildering plunge into suffering and privation, as in the implausible episodes of the impecunious and famished Jane wandering on the moors, then being swept up from the threshold of bereavement into the kindness and care of the Rivers’ household.

Jane’s dual positioning as either a willing victim of circumstances or an autonomous individuality extends to her inner life as well. Her noticeable imperfections, her social irrelevance, and her defensive camouflage of inconspicuousness (her being “plain”) render her personality *readable*, as everybody attaches meanings to her individuality. Deprived of the usual avenues of advancement and recognition – beauty, rank, status and wealth – her *joie de vivre*, mental power and imagination remain veiled, or, to use Brontë’s familiar term, “buried”. Unlike many of Dickens’s or George Eliot’s protagonists, who eventually admit the multiplicity of foci of the self, Charlotte Brontë’s heroine needs to be acknowledged by others, to come into sight from a position of inactivity and near invisibility through the negotiation with others’ wishes and claims.

In a typically defeatist manner, the divination of Jane’s inner worth takes place not from slow but sure disclosure of her moral fibre, like in the case of Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet, but rather from miraculous happenings, from sudden and revealing shifts of others’ discernment and perception. Rochester tells Jane on the first night of their acquaintance:

© “I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but set free, it would soar cloud-high.”

This capacity to “read” somebody’s countenance alludes to the Victorian theory of physiognomy, which maintained that one’s appearance might provide a kind of insight upon the mind’s inner workings. To appeal to such “readings” often proved an optimal solution to the narrative vicious circle of the first-person narrator’s access to the characters’ minds and the Realist assumptions of veracity.



#### IV. 4. The Symbolic Dichotomy of the Oppressed - Oppressor

Permeated by elements derived from both myth and romance, which bring close to the surface unfathomable psychological issues, on one level *Jane Eyre* reads like a fairy tale, on another it reads like a nightmare. Hence, the central character can be perceived as a romantic ingénue whose inarticulate desires are placed in between those of a masochist and those of a martyr, as the utmost pleasure of Jane's appears to be that of wilful enslavement. Similarly, Rochester is not only the condescending Byronic hero but also the emblematically emasculated victim of Jane's involuntary sexual harassment.

Jane is deliberately cast in the role of the injured party since infancy, when her prime tormentors comprise John Reed, Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst. Despite the fact that she incessantly endeavours to fight for her rights, the untimely disgrace she experiences nails down in her mind the conviction of her own vulnerability, as suggested by the incident of the Red Room, into which, despite her terror, she is thrust back by Mrs. Reed. It is suggestive to discover that the initial reason for her punishment is the fact that she has attempted to escape hostility and loneliness in the company of books. John Reed, her first male oppressor is also

the first to delineate her eccentricity and to warn her against the danger of being perceived as a non-standard expression of femininity that is customarily disciplined violently:

© “You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense. Now I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves; for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years” (44).

On this, John Reed throws a book at Jane, hitting her so she loses balance and falls against the door cutting her head. The scene is illustrative of the way in which any patriarchal culture defines itself through the ideological suppression of female distinctiveness. Such degrading occurrences during which she conceives of herself as a sufferer for an obscure cause will affect the perception of all subsequent events of her life. Conversely, these incidents, though damaging for her emotional integrity, are by far extremely important in Jane Eyre’s self-preservation. It is the lesson of the Red Room that prevents Jane from later being locked up for good, as Bertha Mason is, in more terrifying disciplinary spaces. In constructing the breathless and confused “speech” of Bertha Mason, later in the novel, Charlotte Brontë wanted to disclose the way in which social eccentricity and difference is always disciplined and regulated.

The to-and-fro movement between the status of victim and that of a tyrant is at least puzzling. For instance, Jane’s commitment to a life of “plainness” is rendered manifest in her choice to break out of the constraints of Lowood for an exploration of the outer world. Yet, as a substitute for the gratification of her own pleasure and freedom, Jane intends only to dedicate her life and her talents to others. Anything else is considered to be a self-pitying vision:

© “But servitude! That must be a matter of fact. Any one may serve: I have served here eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere.”

The liaison with Rochester, which is exceptionally generous in regard to romantic principles, is likewise altered so as to become another variety of containment and another source of affliction. Rochester contributes to Jane’s natural proclivity for self-flagellation by stirring her jealousy of Blanche Ingram. With the purpose to school herself in humbleness, Jane sketches two portraits, one entitled “Blanche, an accomplished Lady of rank”, and the other, which is her own self-portrait, “A Governess, disconnected, poor and plain”, which turns into a masochistic game in which Jane appears to take pleasure in her own distress, to turn all these negative epithets into sheer marks of her exceptionality. Even when Rochester proposes her,

the event is transformed into a malicious game as he continues to fuel her jealousy of Blanche so as to cause her to speak out her feelings for him. Female desire takes in such instances the paradoxical form of “masochistic representation of ‘sensibility’ in the experience of suffering and self-abasement” (Burgess, 2000: 239). The creative process involved in the painting of the two portraits initiates a meditative one, too, that urges Jane to evaluate the consequences of her jealousy and secret desire of Rochester:

© “Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way, a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real, and rapidly devoured the ideal.” (190)

It is by means of this creative process that Jane becomes able to distinguish between her social status and that of Blanche Ingram and Rochester, whose compatibility is incontestable at least in that respect:

© “Whenever in the future you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them; say ‘Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady’s love, if he chooses to strive for it; it is likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?’ ” (191)

In like manner, during her visit at St. John Rivers’ after she has witnessed the smashing up of her expectation at Thornfield, Jane agrees to become the disciple of her cousin and thus cure her obsessive craving she still retains for Rochester. She even accepts to embark together with St. John on his missionary assignment in India, although she partly shrinks back from such a complete form of servitude that, to her mind, has nothing of the idealistic aura she has so hard contrived for herself:

© “By straining to satisfy St. John till my sinews ache, I shall satisfy him to the finest central point and farthest outward circle of his expectations. If I do go with him – if I do make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar – heart, vitals, the entire victim.” (Chap. 34)

Of course, after such a commute between the polar (op)positions of *oppressed* - *oppressor* it is not at all surprising to find out that in the end it is not Jane to be immolated on a sacrificial altar, but Rochester, terribly maimed in the burning of Thornfield. The positions of master and victim are thus reversed, with the woman becoming the guide and guardian of her blind –i.e. sexually passive – husband. In the denouement, Jane is able to combine the servitude that she has always assumed with the devious pleasure of supremacy and self-rule, the desire for which she has constantly repressed.

Noticeably, *Jane Eyre* is neither a psychiatric case record, nor a transcript of Charlotte Brontë's wishful thinking; first and foremost it is the dazzling result of a singular artistic expertness, and its command as a work of art is neither augmented nor diminished by the incidence of a decipherable psychological code or of particular patterns of behaviour. Quite conversely, in recognizing their presence one can better understand some of the novel's subliminal main beliefs and desires.

#### IV. 5. The Topic of the "Independent Woman"

All the way through the story, Jane is distinguished as a rebellious young woman opposing social strictures to define herself in her own terms. The romantic myth of the ingenuous immature woman who satisfies her sexual appetite in the arms of a mysterious, saturnine man makes use of stock ingredients derived from classical Gothic fiction, which is reactionary to all intents and purposes regarding women issues. Any sexual relationship presupposes a struggle for power and the predictable happy ending of such narratives usually consists in woman's stifled capitulation in front of forceful, supercilious manliness.

Some of these elements may be straightforwardly acknowledged in *Jane Eyre*, too. For instance, one may easily detect the standard gloomy, ominous male protagonist and the defenceless heroine whose infatuation with each other must prevail over several testing impediments before it can be consummated. The sexual strain, which imbues most Gothic tales, lies in the cat-and-mouse discussions between the star-crossed lovers and is further consolidated through the various hostile circumstances that take them apart. However, Jane Eyre differs from the regular heroine of Gothic novels in many respects: even though often motivated by a masochistic desire, Jane's lack of experience is never equated with either ignorance or lack of individuality. Her strong individuality is paradoxically emphasized through her often-mentioned "plainness", which becomes a mark of her special nature when compared to all the other women characters in the novel. It is this refusal of the stereotypical bifurcation of female characters who are in Gothic fiction either pathetic ingénues or corrupted *fammes fatales*. Contrariwise, Jane displays common sense, self-control, and autonomy, but also an impatient determination to change the environment she cannot adapt to, which is a trait habitually associated with masculinity. In an often-quoted passage, which reads almost as a feminist manifesto, Jane asserts her strong individuality:

© “Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.”

This demand for an elementary empathy with men is ratified by her relationship with Rochester, as the overtly sexual attraction that unites the two is gradually turned into a harmonious convergence of their bodies and their spirits. When Rochester lets her consider that he is going to get married to Blanche Ingram, Jane is unconventional and brave enough to make her own claim on him by underscoring the similarity of their frame of mind:

© “I am not talking to you now through the medium of customs, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh –it is my spirit addressing your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal –as we are!”

Rochester also accepts the accuracy of her statement, endorsing it once more:

© “My bride is here (...) because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?”

When at the end of the novel Jane returns to him, she has money of her own and is no longer indebted to Rochester for employment. As for Rochester, he himself has been refined through the pure flame of suffering, both physical and spiritual, and has turned from the haughty master of the house into a mutilated wiser man longing for the woman he loves. Marriage too has turned from another version of enslavement into a liberated union in which husbands are spiritual companions and kind friends. In her treatment of the “woman’s theme”, Brontë is not anti-romantic but anti-conventional as she protects the customary ideology concerning love and marriage but allows them a new-fangled resonance as she portrays a wholly independent woman character who is still able to tone with predetermined social norms.

#### **IV. 6. The Interchange of Gender Roles in**

##### ***Jane Eyre***

Given the lack of alternative in Brontë’s fictional world, the experience of being a public nobody and the cruel suppression of desire, Jane Eyre’s development is completed through the

turnaround of the conventional order, and not by way of an essential modification of it. As a result, dispossession is represented in the novel as accomplishment, powerlessness as supremacy, periphery as centre, incarceration as liberation, the concealed as the noticeable, etc. In addition, the discordant facets of male – female relationships, which actually bespeak wider social discordances, are at least temporarily converted into an androgynous unification within which such tensions are calmed down or repressed for good.

Rochester's "unmanning" guarantees future domestic felicity especially because of his permanent incapacity and of his sequestration with Jane at Ferndean, which is a womanly setting: "deep buried in the woods". Most critics have viewed Rochester's debility as a literalization of his domestication, a demonstration of the taming of his authority – mythical, social and sexual. However, it seems that his unmanning is in fact a sort of exorcism of all potential sources of discord in the couple, because, as Jane says:

© "To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company (...), perfect concord is the result."

Their "wondrous union" seems to necessitate the assimilation of one member of the couple by the other and not exactly the harmonious identification with the other. Rochester in effect is Jane, but Jane never confesses that she is, too, Rochester in the way in which Catherine Earnshaw confesses to be Heathcliff in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. It would be to oversimplify if one viewed his emasculation as a feminisation; it is more than this, as Jane victoriously announces in the conclusion of the story:

© "He saw nature –he saw books through me (...) and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam..."

The disabled husband under the care of a loving woman can still be associated with masculinity, but it seems that the reconfiguration of the initial couple, with the domineering man and the submissive woman, in this less antagonistic pair is but an expression of the desire to assign less rigid gender attributes to fictitious characters. The result is therefore not liberation of woman at the expense of man's suffering; conceivably, it was never Charlotte Brontë's intention to rewrite the script of an Elizabethan revenge drama. On the contrary, both man and woman emerge as partners in liberation from restrictions that result precisely from their "crippled" condition, physical or spiritual. In Charlotte Brontë's view, there seems to be no other option to relations based on the rigid opposition between power and obedience.

To a certain extent, all of Charlotte Brontë's imaginary pairs honour that "perfect concord" that existed in the Brontë family before the mother's death, the sisters', before financial troubles, before sickness, bereavement and sorrow. The inability of all the Brontës' characters – as well as of all the Brontës – to acclimatize into a world wider than the family circle, than the Haworth Parsonage, appointed them to a fictional world where they all stayed like in a place of untimely burial. Whereas Jane is permitted to secure her incapacitated lover under her supremacy, the other heroines of Charlotte Brontë's novels have got to go again to "the shores of Reality" (*Shirley*). As Margaret Anne Doody remarks, in *Shirley* such a happy-ending story is reverted to tales told by women to other women: "that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this country side...A lone spot it was...full of oak trees. It is altered now." Securing her lover in her private dominion cannot be equated with independence in Jane's case. Imprisonment and deprivation are shown to be the lot of all women characters in *Jane Eyre* (Cf. Doody, 1998: 368–9).

While Bertha Mason is cut off from the world and placed under the vigilant course of therapy, the obedient and isolated victim of any disciplinary system, Jane herself becomes, however willingly, a perpetual nurse to an ageing, half-blind spouse. Likewise, if her custody of Rochester suggests domination, it is also a form of subjection (another variety of "servitude").

It is not so hard to make out of the ending of *Jane Eyre*, transmuted into "a happy succeeding life", the outline of Charlotte's own life at Haworth – itself an insalubrious and isolated setting – caring for her half-blind father, who succeeded in surviving to all his other children, and recreating the world in her own words. The famous adage addressed to the reader at the end of *Villette* alludes obliquely to this artistic process, yet also to the malfunctioning of the Realist discourse when set to contain desire: "Leave sunny imaginations hope".



## **V. Emily Brontë**

(1818- 1848)

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### ***Wuthering Heights***

#### **V. 1. The Magnum Opus of Victorian Fiction**

The most intriguing of the Brontë sisters, also the most introverted, Emily would spend most of her time in lonely wanderings on the moor land, also writing, playing the piano and drawing. In regard to practical knowledge she was so ineffectual as only great artists are, but, if unaware, it was Emily that initiated the sisters into publishing their writings. Charlotte writes about this decisive moment of their lives:

© “One day, in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a Ms. Volume of verse in my sister Emily’s handwriting (...). I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear, they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy and elevating”.

Despite the fact that she considered her poems highly personal, Emily accepted to have them in print in the end. The same sisterly devotion determined her to publish her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which she wrote between 1845 and 1846. It was only after Charlotte revealed the identity of the Brontës that Emily, extremely hurt, came to the decision of abandoning the whole business of writing and publishing.

***Wuthering Heights*** is more than a novel; it has been described as an astounding elegy, a dramatic poem, but also a mystery story, a Romantic hymn to love – perplexing in contents and impeccable in execution. As a certain literary form cannot contain it, the most widespread critical attitude towards it is one of bemused veneration such as Walter Allen’s who considers *Wuthering Heights* nothing more than “the most remarkable novel in English” (Op. Cit., 1978: 195).

A straightforward reproduction of the yarn dealing with the orphan Heathcliff, his adoration of Catherine Earnshaw, his vindictive marriage to Isabella Linton, Catherine’s passing away and his unnatural longing for her, is not sufficient to divulge the incredible vigour of this piece of fiction. There are many readings of the novel, which describe it in turn or all at once as a novel of riotous atmosphere, a mystical tale, a Gothic novel - in which to

*adore* is a synonym for *to devour* -, a novel of revenge – in the company of Heathcliff paying off his early anguish and disgrace – etc. Catherine is first introduced to the reader as a phantom and, indeed, the whole storyline is centred on mystical occurrence as no border is being drawn between nature and super nature. They seem to coexist and communicate in the most credible way.

Yet, many critics consider that there is nothing of the Gothic atmosphere here as everything in the novel works for a general sense of totality and completeness – a logic that is but unfamiliar to Gothic fiction. However, E. M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* identifies the basic ingredients of the Gothic in ***Wuthering Heights***, i.e. the *unspeakable*, the *incomprehensible* and the *universal sense of terror*, as he sees it “filled with sound-storm and rushing wind” (1962: 154).

Heathcliff is first seen through the eyes of Mr. Lockwood, the narrator – the outsider – that finds out the story from Nelly Dean – the insider and the housekeeper at Thrushcross Park. She is a gifted teller and able to speak about past actions since Lockwood is in actual fact the witness of the climactic conclusion of the story only. Nelly is the epitome of the classic smart servant (though one can hardly speak of prototypes in the case of ***Wuthering Heights***): she knows about Heathcliff’s arrival in the household of the Earnshaws, about his humiliation by Hindley Earnshaw, about Heathcliff’s revenge on him and on Edgar Linton, who married Catherine, and also about his devilish plan to eradicate both families’ hopes for the future. The plot thus unwraps graciously and solemnly before the reader under the framing of two narrators and this narrative technique is but an extra reason for considering *Wuthering Heights* a matchless aesthetic triumph of the Victorian Age.

The twofold narrative viewpoint is so excellently designed to envelop the whole plane of the passionate relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff. Passion in this novel disregards common sense; it is a death-defying force and an awful psychological burden. Catherine senses it as however indispensable and irrepressible:

© “My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he’s always, always in my mind, not as a pleasure (...), but as my own being.”

However, such ardent avowals tend to obscure a deeper moral inconsistency and that is why she eventually chooses Edgar Linton for a husband and not Heathcliff. Edgar represents not only the suitable match in a traditional social context, but also the quintessence of *normality* and *respectability*, being poles apart from the two lovers, as Catherine observes

without a shadow of a doubt, “as the moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire”. Even the estates of the two men are entirely different, standing for antagonistic values: *Wuthering Heights* is gloomy and brutal in ambience, evoking some heroic ages of tribal and aggressive masculinity, while *Thrushcross Grange* is the symbol of decadent landed gentry.

Heathcliff, the most extraordinary male character in English fiction is a Victorian Caliban, indicative of “half-civilised ferocity” and being further likened to a natural force than with a human being. He cannot be domesticated; neither can he be held responsible for the might of his loathing or of his love for the reason that nature’s spectacles are neither logical, nor moral. Frank Kermode describes Heathcliff as “domestic, yet savage – like the dogs, bleak, yet full of fire, he bestrides the great opposites: love and death, culture and nature, in a posture that certainly cannot be explained by any generic formula” (1967: 111).

The latter part of the novel, dealing with the second generation (Catherine, Hareton, Linton) is an rewritten edition of a previous story.

Frank Kermode draws attention upon the scribbled names discovered by Lockwood at the beginning of the story: “Catherine Earnshaw –Catherine Heathcliff –Catherine Linton”. These words that reveal for a split second Catherine’s fortune, when read from right to left, prophesy her daughter’s destiny, too. The novel is concluded in a deceptively serene disposition, with Catherine and Hareton demonstrating how disparity can be solved. Certainly, they seem to have discarded the wild experiences of the preceding generation, but the general sense is one of irremediable loss and failure, not one of contentment.

## V. 2. Peripheral Characters as Narrators

Mark Schorer, in *The Metaphors of Wuthering Heights*, considers that Emily Brontë’s novel “means to be a work of edification: Emily Brontë begins by wishing to instruct her narrator, the dandy, Lockwood, in the nature of grand passion; she ends by instructing herself in the vanity of human wishes”, which instead signifies “the impermanence of self and permanence of something larger” (q. in Ardholm, Op. Cit.: 111). Other critical voices consider *Wuthering Heights* primarily a ghost story, indeed “overcharged with somewhat soap-operatic topoi of repressed sex and passion, looming violence, the privileges and abuses of wealth, and transgressive social interaction” (Williams, 1998: 139), or a quasireligious text on the separateness of man, etc. J. Hillis Miller considers it an uncanny text and therefore an

exemplary deconstructive text as it promises but does not deliver interpretation “thus signalling its status as an allegory of interpretation or more exactly of unreadability, underscoring the non-adequation of competing readings” (Ibid.).

A dynamics of the interaction between the two storytellers is made evident by the to-and-fro movement between the self-absorbed and overconfident Lockwood and the systematic and intrusive Nelly Dean.

The selection of marginal character-narrators generates a perspective-frame around the touching melodrama played out by the central characters of the novel. Both Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood serve the function of mediators between the reader and the book’s main characters and their doings. Thus, they supply a comprehensive way into the novel’s more or less mythical tale of incest and retribution, responding themselves to the curios, sometimes horrific incidents that occur inside or in between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. Nelly Dean’s wisdom and her rather rigid moral code suggest the uselessness of any effort of a village chatterer or gossip to arbitrate the ill-fated course of events. Correspondingly, Mr. Lockwood’s stiffness and respectability, his stereotypical mind-set and idealistic premises, are perhaps nothing more than what a visitor’s reactions are expected to be once in a completely unfamiliar a world of weird and wonderful emotions.

In cooperation, these two characters provide the reliability of the commonplace to proceedings that are hard to believe and out of the ordinary. Both Nelly and Lockwood trespass the boundary of detached examination and impartiality, since “they are implicated and invested in the events of the Heights, Lockwood in his various visits to the Heights and interchange with Heathcliff, young Earnshaw, Catherine (in particular, prompting his erotic fantasy), and Joseph (...); Nelly in her undeclared role in Heathcliff’s rise and fall, as well as her various relations with Edgar, Cathy, Isabella, and the other servants, and also in her ushering the narrative to Lockwood” (Williams, 1998: 140). Critical estimations that centre on Lockwood consider him in turn an impartial observer (therefore a reliable narrator), an interpretive guide, an obtuse if not a harmful witness who consents to the gendered violence at the Heights.

Elizabeth Napier in *Boundaries in Wuthering Heights* observes that Lockwood’s problems at Wuthering Heights are “insisted upon with more than usual explicitness” (1984: 97) because he is logically unaware of his own incapacity to understand what is happening there and of his prejudices that he brought with him from his urban environment. His

bafflement results in a series of blunders, taking one character for another and thus underlining his status as an outsider.

As for his status as a “reader”, Lockwood is clearly an uncritical one, accepting everything that Nelly delivers to him. As J. Hillis Miller, in *Wuthering Heights: Repetition and the Uncanny*, notices: “If Lockwood were a ‘real life’ reader/ critic, he will attempt to piece together what he sees and hears into a coherent pattern (in Peterson, 1992: 121). Yet, Lockwood is not such a focused reader of passion; in a sense, his arrival on the scene of the Heights is a reiteration of the Proppian motif of *the entrance of a stranger* who troubles the social field while he tries to restore order to chaotic experience. He fatally remains ignorant of the significance of events and any doubt concerning his short-sightedness is eliminated in the conclusion of the story when, in spite of his lyricism, he proves unable to imagine peace for the protagonists of the story, especially after having heard from Nelly Dean that locals have seen Heathcliff and Catherine walking the moors at night:

© “I lingered round [the graves], under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (279).

For Lockwood, the significance of the story he himself has contributed to shape remains deep buried alike its heroes. On the other hand, Nelly Dean, who is quite often described as the authoritative voice of the novel, considers herself entitled to own that hidden significance, as she makes it clear to Lockwood:

© “‘He must have had some ups and downs in life to make him such a churl. Do you know anything of his history?’

‘It’s a cuckoo’s, sir. I know all about it; except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money, at first.’

Such instances as the above-mentioned situation in which she pretends to know “all about it, except” seriously undermine Nelly’s reliability and present her rather as a manipulator of both plot and audience, as a “phallic mother who exerts control over characters” (Williams, 1998: 135).

The opinion of the reader does not remain alike that of Nelly Dean or of Mr. Lockwood as one instantly senses that their angles are limited by their partial roles, and that neither of these narrators proves to be capable of any sincere compassion towards the romantic couple. Their reading of events is therefore considered at least dubious. For instance, when Nelly

views Heathcliff as a devil or confuses Catherine's poor health with utter hysterics or, symmetrically, when Lockwood worries that younger Cathy is contaminated by the cunning of the first Catherine, their verdicts are ironically pointing at the narrators' obtuseness and prejudice than at the tragic lovers' qualities or defects. It appears that Emily Brontë decided upon psychologically and emotionally inadequate storytellers in order to endow Heathcliff and Catherine with enhanced stature, to render their love grandiose since impossible to grasp by a so-called "normal" audience. Lockwood is depicted as a man of the city, ignorant of the ways of the country people:

© "People in these regions acquire over people in towns the value that the spider in a dungeon does over a spider in a cottage to their various occupants: and yet the deepened attraction is not entirely owing to the situation of the looker-on. They *do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface change, and frivolous external things" (64-5).

In a comeback to Lockwood's simile of urban and rural spiders, Nelly Dean laughs at him, saying:

© "I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body (...); not exactly from living among the hills and seeing one set of faces, and one series of actions, from year's end to year's end; but I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out also; it is as much as you can expect from a poor man's daughter" (65).

While invalidating Lockwood's prejudiced view on local people as illiterate and on the threshold of savagery, Nelly disturbs the reader's own preconceived ideas concerning tellers who are well read, that is well trained in manipulating truth and adjusting the narrative material so as to fit the *telos*. In both stances, as perceptive or insensitive, both narrators are incorrigibly fallacious.

An additional technical concern in Brontë's preference for rather unimaginative narrators is the temporal design of the book, in which two successive generations are presented with their tangled fates, their adoration or abhorrence of the dead, their repeated sins and virtues, with the actual heroine disappearing halfway through the story and the disconsolate Heathcliff torturing himself and others because of grief and loneliness, etc. it is only Nelly Dean who is present from the start of the story to its end, and thus she affords the position of the so-called *natural inheritor* of the tale, being the survivor who has witnessed it all and who considers

herself entitled to interpret and offer solutions to past mysteries. Nelly Dean offers the story a touch of mysticism and one of folklore: she appears to be the archetypal teller of tales, the ancient *scop* who unravels the sagas of the old times.

M. A. Doody in *The True Story of the Novel* (1996) considers that a novel may be described as “a sort of convalescence from the threat and pain of its beginning” (316) and she talks about the necessary presence of “Enosis”, or of the *mending trope*. Such novels, beginning abruptly and generating shock, disgust, and painful confusion from the very first pages even contain ostensive references to *repairing*, *mending* and *healing*. Each narrative rupture of the type of Lockwood’s violent and traumatic interaction with Catherine’s ghost in the beginning of the story must find its complement in the forward movement of the narrative. Thus, the making of fiction is often, in Doody’s opinion, “figured in the references to mending, repair, and humble improvisatory making that accompany beginnings” (Ibid.). These references are usually images of threads and sewing, for instance, in *Alice’s Adventures Through the Looking-Glass* when the protagonist and the black kitten are engaged in a symbolic game of *unmaking-making* while they roll up and down a ball of worsted until it becomes “all knots and tangles” – that is, a story.

Certainly, it is women who are customarily associated with this trope of *putting-together*, of reconstructing a story out of odds and ends, because their domestic activities allow the employment of this figure in the most homely manifestations. In the fourth chapter of *Wuthering Heights* Nelly Dean says to Lockwood:

© “I’ll just fetch a little sewing and then I’ll sit as long as you please”.

She sews as she embarks on her story telling, thus creating a cosy atmosphere for Lockwood, i.e. restoring him to calm after he disturbingly made contact with the weirdness of *Wuthering Heights*. Stitching and healing represent here the promise that the outsider has not been irreversibly traumatised, but also that the story can be recovered by means of suture and bricolage, perhaps even domesticated and presented in a more comprehensible manner.

In the employment of such traditional tropes there is always a sense of *unfinishedness* and always a certain amount of unevenness of the resulting artefact, reminding the reader of the incompleteness of any text, of the fallibility of any effort to represent reality. That is why Nelly is given mythological features: we should not imagine Nelly as the archetypal wet nurse like the similar character in *Romeo and Juliet* as she was young enough when the first love story took place. On the contrary, the dying Catherine sees young Nelly as a witch, presumably her

haggish qualities being exploited from a narrative point of view primarily because they bespeak her nearly magical command as a narrator, as well as her abusive intervention in others' lives. She seems to preside over the whole lot, over everything that is *tellable/narratable*. Her attentions to detail, as well as her frequent vacillation indicate a narrative profusion that will always refuse a definite closure. Nelly Dean's incapability or unwillingness to propose conceivable elucidations that gives *Wuthering Heights* that quality that Roland Barthes in *S/Z* calls "pensiveness". "The classic text," he says, "seems always to hold in reserve a last sense which it does not express but whose place it keeps free and signifying: this degree zero of meaning, this supplementary meaning is pensiveness (*le pensivité*): pensiveness is the signifying of the inexpressible, not of the unexpressed" (q. in Doody, Op. Cit.: 439).

### V. 3. The Two Generations in the Novel

The majority of critical evaluations centre on the embedded story that deals with the obsessive and fierce love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw and they habitually deal with issues of feminism (abuse of women), of mystical knowledge (the male hero as a demonical lover, Catherine as either vampire or ghost), social issues (the two locations standing for different clashing ideologies and classes), psychology (identity, madness, sexuality, incest, sadism, necrophilia, etc), deconstruction (contradictions, paradoxes that might involve that what is professed is something else than what is expressed, linguistic "quirks" undermining secure meanings, etc.).

For instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the novel as a feminist revision of Milton's epic and understand Cathy's death as her willing immolation on the patriarchal altar; Terry Eagleton views *Wuthering Heights* as illustrative of the clash between the emerging capitalistic bourgeoisie and the traditional land gentry; Helena M. Ardhholm surveys it as dealing with conventional Methodism in locating spiritual experience within the individual feeling. Other critics, such as Beth Newman, draw on film theory and consider Emily Brontë's novel as fundamentally built around *gaze* and on Lockwood's "scopic drive" to link the frames to the narrative (1990: 1033).

The fact that Catherine Earnshaw dies at the midpoint of the novel may put forward the opinion that everything else that follows is at least anticlimactic. For most critics, the second saga is only a faint version of that of the first and, indeed, Cathy Linton and Hareton Earnshaw make poor surrogates for the first Catherine and the fierce Heathcliff, while Linton Heathcliff

is a caricature of Edgar Linton. Even though the major events of the second half are quite spectacular, such as the secret courtship of Cathy and Linton, Cathy's imprisonment, Edgar's death, and the beginning of Hareton and Cathy's romance, they lack the extraordinary energy of the love story between the gypsy foundling and his stepsister. Thus, the second generation's saga seems futile even though it is the first story that is embedded in it and not the other way round. Even so, this second tale appears as a tedious spinning out of episodes simply meant to fill the time until Heathcliff joins in death his love. This sense of futility also derives to a certain extent from the relative absence of Heathcliff in this sequel to the major story. He actually enters this 2<sup>nd</sup> narrative on three instances: first, when he has no choice and converses with his tenant, Lockwood; secondly, when he speaks frankly to Nelly of his secret and terrible agony caused by Catherine's death; thirdly, after Edgar's death, just prior to his own. Heathcliff's secret worship of a ghost represents the actual narrative core of this second section of the novel, but it is excluded from the main narrative and replaced with the doings of the younger couple.

On the other hand, the second half of *Wuthering Heights* may be seen as an organic addition to the first, extending naturally the configuration and significance of the book. The reappearance of proper names has never been viewed as a lack of imagination but as a means of underscoring the natural and frequent interconnection of human fates. The idea of incest is annihilated in this second part because we are given the same story and this time, with Hareton and young Cathy, we simply understand that fate moves in a rather unimaginative manner. Indeed, in this family romance, a stepsister and a stepbrother marry a brother and a sister, and two series of first cousins get married, too, and that is why, after all, such names as Catherine, Linton, Earnshaw, Heathcliff and Hareton run through the book like a melodic theme. Not only do such names outlive their initial owners, but also personalities that re-emerge, and events that are repetitive, etc. For example, Hareton is the inheritor of the viciousness of Heathcliff and of his archetypal role of the outcast and of the prodigal. The whole second movement of the novel may also be seen as indicative of Heathcliff's effort to be in charge of everybody's future by taking revenge on the Lintons on account of their intervention between himself and his beloved Catherine. In this version of the story, Heathcliff remains the protagonist, equally active as in the first story. He turns into the merciless instrument of revenge against Catherine's daughter who, in his mind, "killed" the original Catherine and tries to mock Hindley's ghost by turning Hareton into a brutish slave.

Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1972) links *Wuthering Heights* to a genre she names “**Female Gothic**”. This genre, in her opinion, is able to represent realities of family life from a woman’s point of view, particularly those relationships, which are in general rejected by conventional ideologies of the family. Most of this 2<sup>nd</sup> tale takes place in the kitchen of the Heights, the place where many ideologically constructed principles are deconstructed. The second generation’s tale is often regarded as a “civilised” version of the original story of passion, guilt and revenge. However, there are signals in this sequel that things are not so clearly cut after all. After Catherine’s death, Heathcliff lives in a residence that no longer looks like a house, but rather like a lair or a cave, the meaning of which lead to the animal aspect.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the kitchen may be read more as Heathcliff’s den than as Nelly’s or young Cathy’s domestic realm. Moreover, the kitchen is both a means of confinement for young Cathy, but she somehow manages to become the mistress of the animals, which scare Mr. Lockwood on his first entrance at Wuthering Heights, and which further underline the mythical aspect of the story:

© “Half-a-dozen four-footed fiends, of various sizes and ages, issued from hidden dens to the common centre”.

M. A. Doody considers that this “common centre”, the centre of the kitchen, is but “a central den” and that the humans forced to live in dens, as young Catherine is, are pushed towards the animal side of their identity (Ibid.). Young Catherine is not able to turn the fierce dogs into social companions even though they appear to be under her command because she is not able to rationally deal with Heathcliff – the epitome of the undomesticated in the novel; therefore she seems powerless when faced with the necessity to turn the den into a cheerful social grotto. Thrown into the pit, locked up with the beast, Catherine allows the reader to view her experience as a means of being herself animalised. The only optimistic detail is her taming of Hareton, but is he really worth the effort? If young Catherine is a version of her mother, is Hareton indeed a version of Heathcliff whose civilisation allows a sense of triumphant progress in the end?

Such questions that inevitably arise confirm Doody’s supposition that the kitchen at the Heights is not only a reiteration of the mythical den, but an *ambiguous den*, as it is at once a sanctuary for the bewildered urban Lockwood, an ideal place for storytelling and the place where the purposeful rewriting of the first generation’s tale is performed.

#### V. 4. Traces of Various Literary Genres in *Wuthering Heights*

The plot of *Wuthering Heights* depends in some measure on the practice of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic novel writing, as first developed by Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Anne Radcliffe. The characteristic conventions of this genre include an eerie atmosphere, a haunted dwelling, a family curse, odd characters and episodes, incidents involving mental illness, incest and violent behaviour. The title of Emily Brontë's novel instantly links it with this genre, with the word "wuthering" referring to the turbulent and wild emotional atmosphere of the story. The plot of the novel also suggests the working out of an ancestral curse or stigma because it is clear that Heathcliff's bizarre fits of fury, Hindley's alcoholic wastefulness, and Catherine's hysterics all represent the sinister consequences of their troubled childhood.

The implication of a cursed past associates Emily Brontë's work to the outline of the traditional family romance as well. This literary tradition derives from the Greek mythology, particularly from the Oedipus myth, which entails the sin of incest and the punishment by gods. Even if no actual incest happens in the story, the fanatical passion between Catherine and Heathcliff and Hindley's role as an unforgiving father-figure link *Wuthering Heights* to the primordial, oedipal legend.

Myth leaks into *fairy tale* in *Wuthering Heights* through the stock figures of the cruel lord of the house, the gypsy foundling, the wilful princess and meddlesome servant. In addition, the metaphoric significance of the location of Wuthering Heights as a castle or a fortress in which "princess" Catherine is imprisoned by weird unfriendly forces draw from folklore and legend. In the second generation's tale, the novel grows saturated with motifs taken from *revenge drama*, resembling the *Elizabethan or Jacobean plays* by John Webster or Shakespeare (*Hamlet*). Heathcliff, the retaliator simulating insanity in order to further his violent ends, is in a sense the chief driving force of evil. *Wuthering Heights* as an avenger's tragedy comprises both the reasons for the avenger's project, "its successive implementation and its deeply tragic features, the aftermath of revenge with its absence of lasting triumph and even permanent satisfaction. Stripped to the barest of bones, Heathcliff's tale is that of a boy adopted into a household which, whatever its deficiencies, is certainly a marked improvement on his origins, whatever they were. Persecuted by his benefactor's son, he stays because of his emotional ties to his oppressor's sister but makes no determined or sustained attempt to withstand the bully's design for his degradation. Consequently, that design succeeds well enough to persuade the boy's beloved childhood companion to marry a rich

and civilised young man instead of him. Having overheard her say that marriage to him would degrade her, he runs away. This is the basis for Heathcliff's revenge, and compared to the crimes and sufferings that prompted his Elizabethan and Jacobean predecessors to take up arms against an assortment of evildoers, it is not an impressive one" (Thormählen, 1999: 134). Indeed, in the beginning, Heathcliff's idea is to outclass Edgar Linton, his rival, but after Catherine's death revenge turns into his only *raison d'être*:

© "I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do!"

The hero's stratagems secure Edgar's property for him and also Hindley's, but he is unable to entirely ruin Edgar's life. As for Hindley, it is likely that he might have ruined himself in the end without Heathcliff's assistance. It is young Cathy to best describe the avenger's situation of having destroyed his life only:

© "I know [Linton] has a bad nature (...) he's your son. But I'm glad I've a better, to forgive it; and I know he loves me and for that reason I love him. Mr. Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery! You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you – nobody will cry for you, when you die! I wouldn't be you!" (288).

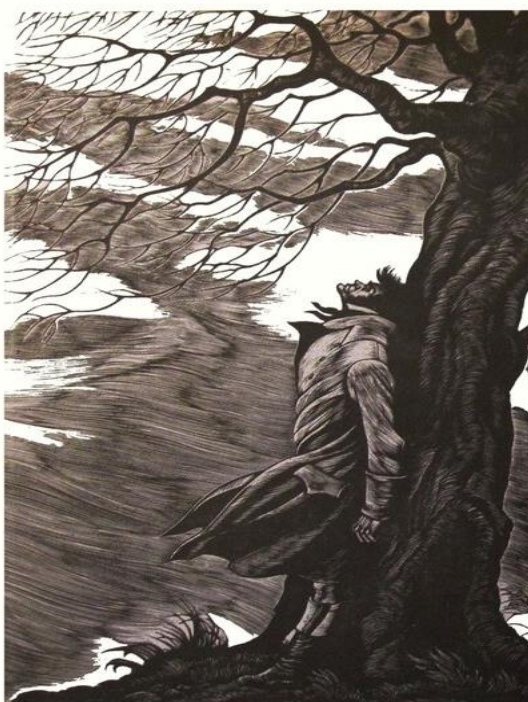
If, on the contrary, *Wuthering Heights* is simply a love story that "testifies to the supreme power of love, it is difficult to imagine a less sentimental way of acknowledging its triumph" (Thormählen, 1999: 141).

The male protagonist also fuels the uncanny undercurrent of the plot, *Wuthering Heights* having very much the aspect of *a ghost story*. The first event of the novel is Lockwood's creepy report on the first night that he spent at Wuthering Heights, with the childlike ghost of Catherine scratching at the casement to be let in. Symmetrically, among the last incidents of the novel is the village boy's report of having seen two mystifying figures wandering on the moors. This episode, together with Heathcliff's obsessive craving to join his soul mate and his literal plunge into Catherine's grave hint at tales of terror and the supernatural.

All these literary forms have left unambiguous marks on *Wuthering Heights* in terms of structure, narrative technique and human typology, and their combination is one of the many causes that led to the composition of a highly unconventional novel.

## V. 5. The Structural Ambiguity of Heathcliff

Innumerable critical reactions to Heathcliff underline his moral ambiguity, as well as the combination of violence and an undeniable and inexplicable personal magnetism. Charlotte Brontë was the first to demonstrate that he is the embodiment of a satanic tempter of innocence through the examination of the language in the novel that permanently associates Heathcliff with the devil and temptation. Her apologetic reading is but a proof of sisterly support, yet also a proof of Charlotte's affiliation with Nelly Dean's prejudiced interpretation. That reading presumably fitted that of the Victorian reader, who was accustomed to novels where etiquette and moral principles were held responsible for the well being of any community.



*Wuthering Heights* actually appears to have no moral stable focus, “which might have imparted authority to any ethical standpoint associated with the *dramatis personae* themselves. As generations of readers have observed with various degrees of irritation or fascination, none of the persons in the novel is entirely likeable: the natural drive to identify and sympathise with a leading character is frustrated at every turn. Attempts to make Nelly Dean the villain of the piece may seem fanciful; but her loyalties are inconstant and her complacency unjustified (...). She shows no sign of ethical development involving

recognition of her faults. Nor does anybody else in the book, with the probable exception of young Cathy. Hareton is guided towards his happy ending by nature (decent genes in combination with love), not by principle; and Edgar Linton is a gentleman and a devoted husband and father, but he does not possess enough force of character to provide a moral centre of gravity in a tale which contains such varied and vehement passions” (Thormählen, 1999: 81). Nonetheless, the reader may identify in the shadow of major characters a person who mumbles words from the **Scripture** at any point in the story, the whole action being pierced now and then by his affected exclamations, prayers and reprimands. “Joseph – like Heathcliff, he has only one name – is, as has often been pointed out, a caricature of a Calvinist with his exaggerated notions of Sunday observance, his interminable prayers and his conviction of his own assured salvation” (Thormählen, 1999: 82). Though his discourse is overcharged with biblical quotes or references, Joseph is in no sense a moral yardstick in the universe of the Heights.

Clearly placed outside such a conservative morality, Heathcliff is nothing else but a version of evil to Nelly Dean, to Mr. Lockwood, and also to Charlotte Brontë. His extreme violence, verbal or physical, his lack of politeness towards strangers, his life spent in solitude or in the company of animals rather than of human beings have tremendous effects on the timid Lockwood, who is nothing else but the epitome of the average Victorian reader. A reader who, by the way, should have been familiar with Emily’s own readings of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic fiction, of James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs & Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, or even of books on sorcery and black magic, so productively exploited in the *belles lettres* of the time. Heathcliff’s discourse is impregnated by hellish vocabulary and imagery, and he is himself referred to as a devil, goblin, imp, fiend, Satan, etc. He constantly describes his life without his beloved as a hellish torment and is scornful towards “duty, humanity, charity and pity” that he considers the characteristics of the people at Grange. As for himself, he spits out his moral “teething”/ teaching fiercely at Catherine’s death:

© “I have no pity! I have no pity! The worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain” (152).

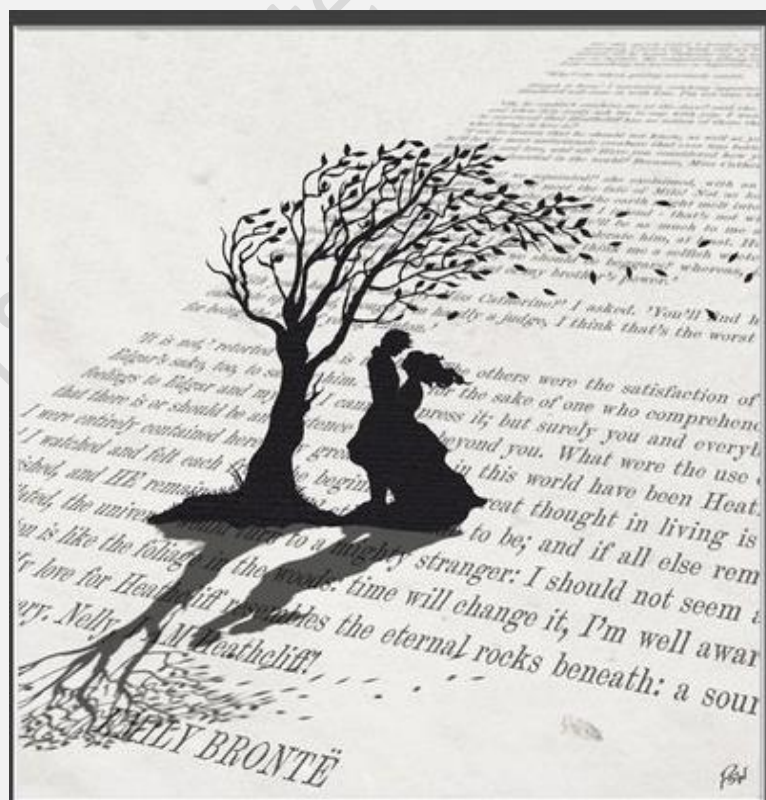
Still, the narrative that depicts him as a “free spirit” whose special code of values transcends the trivial rules and conventions of “normal”, that is, commonplace people, continually reinforces the reader’s sympathy for this character. Such notions as propriety as reflected in the contract of marriage, or in well-mannered conduct are worthless to Heathcliff,

whose utmost reason for living and dying is dictated by the imperative reunion with Catherine. This explains his being constantly perceived as looming over the petty preoccupations of the Edgar, the talkative Isabella, and the biased Nelly Dean. Furthermore, at key-moments in the narrative – notably after Catherine’s death –Heathcliff confesses his inmost despair to Nelly, thus obliquely invoking the reader’s compassion even though the severe judgements on his behaviour are filtered through Nelly’s narrow-minded and intolerant perspective.

Perhaps a more accurate view on Heathcliff is the already classical one made by Dorothy Van Ghent in *The English Novel: Form and Function* in which the protagonist is depicted as an elemental spirit, like the wind or the flood, and for that as amoral rather than immoral.

© “Heathcliff is no more ethically relevant than is flood or earthquake or whirlwind. It is as impossible to speak of him in terms of ‘sin’ and ‘guilt’ as it is to speak in this way of the natural elements or the creatures of the animal world.”

Like the moorland itself or the changeable weather on the heights, Heathcliff is a vibrant natural presence, an event and less a being, charging the universe of the novel with mixed connotations.



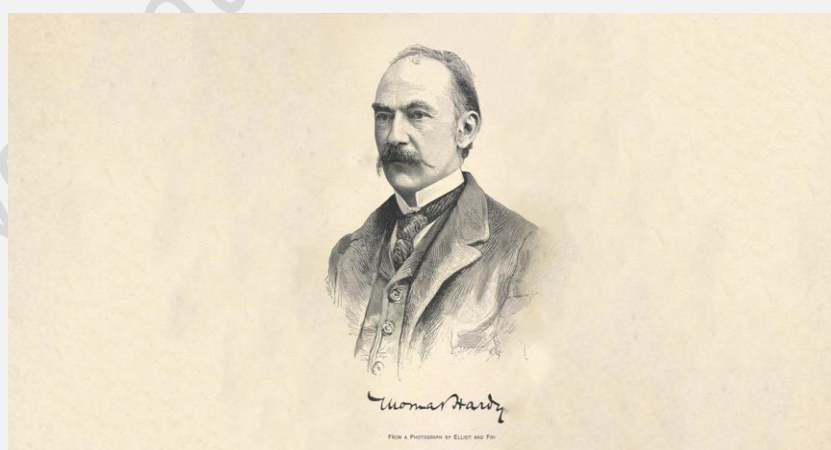
## VI. Thomas Hardy

(1840 - 1928)

### Jude the Obscure

#### VI.1. Life and Literary Activity

Born at Upper Brockhampton, Dorset, which he immortalizes in his novels, Thomas Hardy was the oldest child of a prosperous stonemason and a bookish mother descended from a long line of farmers. Because of his delicate health, Thomas Hardy was tutored at first at home by the mother and later attended the elementary school where he learned the fundamental subjects and Greek. When he was sixteen he began working as an apprentice of an ecclesiastical architect in Dorchester and was allowed to study more Greek and to write verse and essays. He decided to pursue architecture and became the assistant of an eminent architect in London. In 1863 he won the gold medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects in a national competition for his essay "The Application of Coloured Bricks and Terra Cotta in Modern Architecture". A year later, he published anonymously his first book, in effect, a humorous sketch, in *Chamber's Journal*. It was only in 1868 that he decided to write a novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which was rejected by the publisher. In 1871- 2 he published anonymously the novels *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which hardly attracted any review or financial success.



*A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) marked the doubtless beginning of a successful career. This financial achievement encouraged him to marry Emma Lavinia Gifford and to launch into an unceasing creation of masterpieces. This first stage of Hardy's writing career, placed between 1874 and 1896, was responsible for the writing of the novels for which he is best remembered:

***The Hand of Ethelberta*** (1876); ***The Return of the Native*** (1878); ***A Laodicean*** (1881); ***Two on a Tower*** (1882); ***The Mayor of Casterbridge*** (1886); ***The Woodlanders*** (1887); ***Tess of the d'Urbervilles*** (1891), his best-known novel but one which brought down a storm of abuse for its “obscenity” and had to be bowdlerized for magazine publication; and ***Jude the Obscure*** (1896), his most controversial novel, roundly denounced as pornography. Disgusted with this reception, Hardy announced he would never write fiction again.

The second stage of Hardy's writing career, lasting from 1897 until 1908, was marked by his poetic drama masterpiece, ***The Dynasts*** (1904 –8). It begins as a celebration of England's part in the Napoleonic wars but depends into a summation of Hardy's mature vision of life. He also published lyric poems in ***Wessex Poems*** (1898) and ***Poems of the Past and Present*** (1901).

In the third stage of his writing career, Hardy devoted himself exclusively to lyric poetry. His most important contributions are ***Time's Laughing Stocks*** (1909), ***Satires of Circumstances*** (1914), ***Moments of Vision*** (1917), ***Late Lyrics and Earlier*** (1922), ***Human Shows, Far Phantasies*** (1925), and ***Winter Words*** (1928), published posthumously. Towards the end of his life, Thomas Hardy received the Order of Merit and honours from Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Aberdeen, the Royal Society of Literature, and many others.

## VII.2. Hardy's Major Works

Like many great writers, Thomas Hardy is an elusive, almost protean figure. The more one reflects upon his work, the more it seems to grow into multiplicity. We can read him as a philosopher spinning fables of determinism, an elegist of rural simplicities, a warm poet, a Christian whose faith has been followed by scepticism, an imaginative historian of the revolutionary changes at the turn of the century, a modernist trying to come to terms with the malaise of our life. Each of these figures corresponds to a facet of Hardy's work, which are, as expected in the case of prolific creators, aesthetically uneven.

Neither as a modernist alone nor as a traditionalist alone is Hardy at his best. In the first role he is somehow too self-conscious, and in the second too uncritical. His writings display a unique convergence of traditional and modern, both impulses neither in harmony nor struggle but in a kind of sustaining fiction one with another. One visible consequence is that in his best works – five novels and a few collections of poems – Hardy achieves a rare sense of inclusiveness: the natural together with the historical, the inescapable limitations of all

existence with the particular troubles of the moment. There are recurrent moments in all his Wessex novels when he achieves something far more valuable than any philosophy, his own deeply contemplative wisdom. In the imaginary world of Wessex there survives the memory of a life in which nature and society are at peace. A sense of the past, like a heavy aroma, lingers over this land. Perceptions of time and space are both radically divergent and closely linked. Time stretches out as a vast gray corridor into and beyond the historical past. Space is cramped and worn, but in the perceptions of Wessex, the two come together through the apprehension of local particulars.

### VI. 2.1. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

As a writer of novels, Thomas Hardy was endowed with a precious gift: he could not imagine a universe without an active, even intruding feminine principle. He was clearly fond of the changefulness, sometimes the caprice of feminine personality. And at the deepest level of his imagination, Hardy held to a vision of the feminine that was thoroughly traditional in celebrating the maternal, the protective, the fecund, the tender, the life-giving. The feminine admixture is very strong in his work, a source both of sly humour and profound sympathy.



It is in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that this side of Hardy comes through with the most striking vitality. For in *Tess* he stakes everything on his sensuous apprehension of a young woman's life, a girl who is at once a simple milkmaid and an archetype of feminine strength. Nothing finally matters in the novel as much as Tess herself: not the other characters, not the philosophical underlay, not the social setting. In her violation, neglect and endurance Tess comes to sum Hardy's most radical claim for the power of suffering. Tess derives from Hardy's involvement with and reaction against the Victorian cult of chastity. She falls and

violates the standards and conventions of her day. And yet, in her incomparable vibrancy and lovingness, she comes to represent a spiritualized transcendence of chastity. Through a dialectic of negation, Tess reaches purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world she lives in. What we have here is not the spiritual sensationalism of Dostoevsky as Hardy's view is a more innocent one. He is not a phenomenologist of the perverse. But as a man deeply schooled in the sheer difficulty of life, he does recognize that there is a morality of being as well as of doing. Once educated to humility, we do not care to judge Tess at all: we no longer feel ourselves qualified. And that is a triumph of imagination. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the romantic element appears more valuably as an insistence upon the right of the individual to create the terms of his/her being, despite the pressures of the external world. In Tess, Hardy's stress is upon the rights of the person and not, as it will be in *Jude the Obscure*, upon the subjective demands of any personality.

Simply as a work of fiction, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is itself singularly direct in its demands. None of the secondary characters has much interest in his/her own right, apart from their capacity to illuminate the experiences of the protagonist. The plot flows in a linear, almost fatalistic manner: the poor girl sent away from home to her wealthy relatives is, in the vein of traditional fairy tales, tempted and abused by malevolent forces, to be lastly revealed as an exceptional human being, worthy of social (or, at least of the reader's) appreciation.

Out of *remorse* and *guilt*, Tess agrees to her mother's scheme that she visit the rich d'Urbervilles who will purportedly make her a fortune. The trap has been sprung for Tess, be it trap of fatality, social pressure, family idleness or all at once. Throughout the remainder of the book, Hardy will employ a pattern of hunting images while Tess will be harried from place to place at what seems like gradually increasing speed. Finally, when the hunt is over, Tess is captured on the sacrificial altar at Stonehenge. In the first few chapters she is shown in the ease of her natural surroundings, a long-cultivated and soft-featured rural landscape, but also in the discomfort of her social place, a growing poverty that forces to surrender her independence and appeal to her rich "cousins". As it happens, the rich cousin is Alec D'Urberville shown at the outset as a stagy villain who greets Tess with the standard melodramatic gambit:

© "Well, my beauty, what can I do for you?"

The theatricality is deliberate as Hardy desired to achieve something that is rare in fiction: a fusion of theatre and truth. Hardy manages the seduction scene with a tact not always characteristic of his novels. The concluding passage of mournful reflection –

© “But some might say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith?” –

serves in this novel an overall purpose. The Tess we next meet is a transformed young woman. There has been a fall from innocence, and in some ways – Hardy is by no means the first to notice this irony – it has been a fortunate fall. Tess’s eye is now keener, her tongue sharper, her mind quicker. Innocence lost, she takes upon herself the weight of awareness. Her freedom will be steadily diminished, as she steps along the markings of fate; yet it is only now that she gains another type of freedom, since only now can she grasp the significance of choice. Tess will find no help at home, as she will find little anywhere. To renew herself through work, Tess goes to the Talbothays dairy, where both the natural world and the heroine come into ripe bloom. Unexpended youth brings with it hope and “the invincible instinct toward self-delight”. Tess reaches a radiant fullness while working quietly on the farm, finding comfort in the dairyman’s generosity, enjoying the camaraderie of her fellow-workers, falling in love with Angel Clare. She and the land come together, in a symbolic audacity. All of Tess’s sexuality comes into readiness, but it is sexuality superbly at ease with itself; she is the only one of Hardy’s heroines who does not use it to manipulate or crush men. In this Eden of sensuousness, Tess and Angel enact the rites of courtship. Idyllic as they are, these scenes are never allowed to become mere idylls, for the courtship is being conducted within a community that registers and (dis)approves.

Hardy’s conception of Angel Clare is not to be questioned: a timid converted to modernist attitudes though he possesses neither the firmness of the old nor the boldness of the new. Scene by scene, Angel comes to seem the complement of Alec. Whereas Alec assaults Tess physically, Angel violates her spiritually. Alec is a stage scoundrel, Angel is an intellectual wretch. Alec has a certain charm, despite his slothful way; Angel bears an aura of tensed moralism. What they share in actual fact is an obvious incapacity to value the splendour of feeling that radiates from Tess. Each represents a deformation of masculinity, one high and the other low; they cannot appreciate, they cannot even see the richness of life that Tess embodies.

About the sequence at Flintcomb-Ash there is almost no disagreement among critics. The writing is harsh and compact and nothing in Zola or Dreiser, or in any other Naturalist work of fiction, surpasses these pages dedicated to the portrayal of human degradation. The land is barren –the very opposite of Talbothays. Flintcomb-Ash is like a vision of hell, for Hardy what London was for Dickens. It is Flintcomb-Ash in which Alec D’Urberville, shed of religion and

gone back to his calling of tempter, keeps appearing and reappearing prepared to rescue Tess if only she will forget Angel, her husband, who had left her. At this point Alec appears in a double guise: he is both kinder and crueler to Tess than is anyone else, both more human and sinister. Only he among the figures surrounding her offers Tess any help. Yet it is he who comes to seem a kind of a devil. Tess succumbs to him and, succumbing, hates him; there is a frightful intimacy in their conversation: the intimacy of sinners.

It is quite clear that the two settings in Tess, Talbothays and Flintcomb-Ash, take on thematic or narrative significance, adding to the meaning of the novel. The two landscapes pose a series of contrasts: summer versus winter, a fertile paradise versus a barren wasteland, Angel Clare versus Alec d'Urberville. At Talbothays Dairy, Tess is a milkmaid whose daily routine occurs in an environment of rich natural abundance and warmth. At Flintcomb-Ash, she is a field hand, digging turnips from the frozen, unyielding earth in a setting dominated by the red threshing machine and the bleakness of the sky. In the earlier scene, Tess experiences the awakening of love for Angel Clare; in the later one, she undergoes a renewed threat from her seducer, Alec d'Urberville. In both cases, landscape serves as a projection of Tess's psychological state. The first reflects her feeling of hope and limitless possibility, the second her feeling of despair and deprivation. This neat dichotomy between the two sceneries, however, may obscure the fact that all through the novel, the earth acts as both a friend and a foe to humankind. The vistas that confront Hardy's characters as they stand poised upon a hill surveying the scene below sometimes represent what seems like limitless possibility, sometimes a vastness in nature that dwarfs humanity and reduces its significance. As Tess descends the Egdon slopes to reach the dairy, she is described in the following manner:

“Not quite sure of her direction Tess stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly” (Chap. XVI).

Although Alec's cunning and duplicity are responsible for creating Tess's helpless situation in “The Chase” (“the wood of error” where she finds herself alone with Alec late at night), the strong sense of ironic fate in the world of the novel prepares us to see any individual as an inevitable casualty of indistinct and ubiquitous hostility. The name of the wood is prophetic not only of Tess's condition as the prey of Alec but also the ambiguous situation of Alec himself. That Tess finally murders Alec does not seem so implausible. The murder is an act of desperate assertion and given all that has happened, we accept the killing of Alec with a feeling that approaches relief. There remains the interval in which Tess and Angel briefly come together as

husband and wife, living suspended from time – and then the climax at Stonehenge. Stonehenge is a place emanating inexplicable grandeur and horror. Hardy's writing becomes very quiet as Tess fades from life. At Stonehenge nature seems to live and breathe, it becomes an animated presence; it stirs and brushes against us like a pulsing hand. Like Wordsworth, Hardy instinctively unites nature and man, making the external setting a kind of sharer in human fate.

The secondary figures in the book are little more than accessories. Only one character is almost as important as Tess, and that is Hardy himself. Through the musing narrative voice he employs, he makes his presence felt. He watches over Tess like a grief-stricken father. He is as tender to the heroine as the heroine is to the world. Tender and helpless. It is Hardy ruminating upon the destruction of youth and hopes whose voice we actually listen to, from the first page when we can grasp the overwhelming force of the lines from Shakespeare with which he prefaces the book:

“Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed  
Shall lodge thee.”

Ironically, the final chapter is called “The Fulfillment”, emphasizing the fatalism of the book as a whole. Hardy's pessimistic views of the world are expressed throughout the novel in both the cruel accidents that befell the characters and in the explicit narrative comment. Perhaps the most striking narrative summary of this attitude appears in the final paragraph:

© “‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in an Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.”

## **VI. 2.2. *Jude the Obscure***

### **VI.2.2.1. Rural versus Urban, Ordinary versus Extraordinary**

As Walter Allen points out, “*Jude the Obscure* stands somewhat apart from the rest of Hardy's fiction. It is his one attempt to write a novel strictly of his own time.” (255) We are to understand that Jude is sensualist and a drinker, but it is not here that we should look for the source of his deterioration. His tragedy is not triggered by his flaws; on the contrary, “his tragedy lies in what he is not” (Allen, 255):

© “What brings him down are the intellectual ambitions beyond his station, his dreams of the student's life at Christminster (...). The central tragedy of Jude is one of unfulfilled

aims, aims, moreover, almost impossible of fulfilment at the time in which he lived, even though he had had the purity and self-control of a saint.”

The simple story of a poor village boy, who dreams of a life of academic or artistic glory, but who never manages to escape the entrapment between carnal and intellectual delectation is, as David Daiches underlines, full of plot monstrosities. Before he leaves his native background, the title hero marries “a grossly sensual girl, who had appealed to his own very real sensuality, and the account of the dreaming idealist caught fast in the snare of his own physical nature is one of the most powerful things in Hardy. Arabella, the girl he marries, goes off to Australia, but reappears later to reclaim her husband. Meanwhile, Jude meets in Oxford his emancipated intellectual cousin Sue Bridehead, and in developing their relationship Hardy probes some of the most puzzling paradoxes of love, sex, and character. Sue herself is a curiously frigid person; she marries a middle-aged schoolmaster, is carried off by Jude with whom she lives for years, takes charge of Arabella’s little boy and produces children of her own. The son of Arabella and Jude, ‘Little Father Time’, old and wrinkled even as a small boy, eventually hangs his stepbrother and stepsister as well as himself, leaving an announcement: ‘Done because we are too menny’. Sue, who had been a secularist, gets religion and rejoins her middle-aged schoolmaster out of a sense of duty, and Jude takes back Arabella and dies of it not very long afterwards.” (1080 –1)

As Hardy announced in his preface to the first edition of *Jude the Obscure*, he intended to write a novel that could reveal honestly both the insipidity and miracle of an ordinary person’s life:

© “For a novel addressed by a man to men and women of full age, which attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken.”

#### VI.2.2.2 The Theme of Marriage

The theme of marriage dominates *Jude the Obscure*: the marriage between Jude and Arabella founded on sexual attraction only; the marriage between Sue and Phillotson, founded on intellectual sympathy; Jude’s parents’ unhappy union, and many other wedded couples that are scattered throughout the novel as ominous references to the instability of this institution. The relationship between Jude and Sue is more complicated, as both characters are conscious of the

destructive nature of marriage and both accept to live outside the bonds of the conventional marriage sacrament. As a consequence of their decision, society hounds them, depriving the pair of work, lodgings, and general acceptance. Furthermore, their “marriage”, like all the others in the novel, is disastrous: Sue is frightened of sex; Jude is frustrated by her coldness and excessive spirituality; their offspring commit suicide, and the last child is born dead. In a drunken stupor, Jude remarries Arabella, living out the short remainder of his life wracked by misery and despair. Sue remarries Phillotson, out of misguided religious belief and condemning herself to a life of unhappy submission. The fatal consequences of these marriages point to some evil beyond the errors involved in these particular relationships.

Unlike some of Hardy’s earlier novels (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, for example), *Jude the Obscure* expresses a fatalistic view of marriage as an institution. It seems that in the world of the novel, affection and sexual matters are irreconcilable, and marriage seems merely to exacerbate the imbalance between the two. Unlike many nineteenth-century novels, which picture marriage as the final fulfilment of the preceding events and the final untangling of the novel’s complications, Hardy’s turn-of-the-century novel expresses deep pessimism about the institution of marriage.

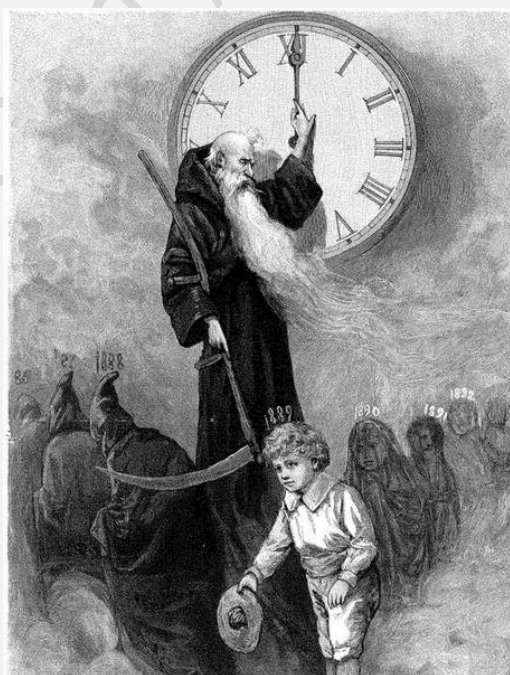


### VI.2.2.3. Grotesque Elements

A series of *grotesque elements* fuse in the novel to create the sense of an apocalyptic demise of the once-sacred institutions of the church, family, education and so on. The figure of Father Time, Jude's eldest child has been attacked on account of its grotesque and melodramatic aspects. Instead of developing him as a real character, Hardy gives him an allegorical name and what seems to be a purely symbolic function: the little old man, prematurely aged, seems to carry the troubles of the world on his shoulders. As a character, Father Time is not one of Hardy's most interesting creations. Yet, the improbabilities of the aged child's character are themselves revealing of what appears to be a lack of faith in the basic conventions of the traditional novel. The ideas of family, inheritance, and the movement of life from one generation to another, so important in the nineteenth-century novel, to a large extent depend on the viability and energy of children. The image of an aged child contradicts all that childhood conventionally means: hope, promise, and continuity. Father Time reinforces a theme established early in the novel in the character of Jude, whose anxiety Hardy describes in the first part of the novel:

© "If only he could prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man!"

Whatever natural instincts Jude has for survival appear to have atrophied in Father Time. His suicide note ("Done because we are too menny") puns on the word 'men', thus echoing his father's wish not to grow to adulthood.



#### VI.2.2.4. Stagnation and Circularity

The horrific image of the four children hanged in the tenement flat emphasizes, in a particularly graphic way, the theme of hopelessness in the novel.

This sense of stagnation and universal adversity is further accentuated by the series of chapter headings that suggest the aimless wanderings of the chief characters. The title of each part of *Jude the Obscure* contains the name of a town or city: “At Marygreen”, “At Christminster”, “At Melchester”, “At Shaston”, “At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere”, “At Christminster Again”. Apart from Marygreen, a point of departure, and Christminster, which for Jude is a goal or a destination, the rest of the towns are arbitrary stopping places. In contrast to the rural folk cultures of Hardy’s earlier Wessex novels, *Jude the Obscure* portrays a modern world where uprooted individuals take temporary lodgings in one town or another. Christminster has a special meaning in the novel as a medieval center of learning, religion, and culture to which both Phillotson and Jude travel in order to fulfil their ambitions. As a child, Jude sees the town as a “mirage”, a “new Jerusalem” hovering on the horizon, a Mecca which means escape from the stagnation of rural Marygreen. When he arrives in Christminster, he mentally converses with the spirits of the famous dead, thrilled by the weight of traditional culture which the very stones convey. Even when his attempts to pursue his theological vocation are thwarted and his infatuation with Sue draws him away to Melchester, the academic town (Hardy’s version of Oxford) remains fixed in Jude’s mind as a symbol of beauty and truth.



At the end of the novel, we see that Christminster, like all the other towns in the novel, is hostile to human aspirations and desires. Jude’s illusions continue to the very end; his decorated Christminster cakes commemorate the gothic beauties of the town, and his bringing his family there on Remembrance Day constitutes a symbolic pilgrimage. But it is in Christminster that Sue is forced out of her lodgings and Father Time engineers the suicide of

the children, and it is on another Remembrance Day in the same city, with the graduates cheering in the streets, that Jude whispers his bitter dying words:

© “Let the day perish wherein I was born...”

The illusory city of beauty and truth has become the graveyard of hope and this is supported by several other sequences of events: Phillotson leaving Marygreen to pursue his intellectual ambitions, comes back here as a schoolmaster at the end of the novel; Jude returns to Arabella Donn, after he has divorced her; Sue re-marries Phillotson herself; and Jude returns to Christminster only to find his tragic end. This narrative strands have an important structural and thematic significance, as they are circular and lend a static quality to the plot of the novel. Although the characters appear to act and struggle, they are trapped in patterns of fruitless repetition. Like people on a treadmill, Sue and Jude are forever running to stay in the same place. Their spatial movement from town to town forms an ironic contrast to the internal deadlock of their relationship. Many other novels by Hardy employ repetition as a structural device, but they differ from the heavily ironic scheme of *Jude the Obscure* by implying the possibility of fruitless repetition. ***Jude the Obscure*** stands alone in its unrelieved pessimism, of which the purposeless repetitions are an emblem.



## **The Victorian Age**

### ***Timeline***

- 1810** George III goes insane; the Regency
- 1811** William Makepeace Thackeray is born in Calcutta, India
- 1812** Charles Dickens is born in Portsmouth
- 1815** Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo
- 1815** Anthony Trollope is born in Bloomsbury, London
- 1816** Charlotte Brontë is born at Thornton, Yorkshire
- 1817** Death of Jane Austen (born 1775); buried at Winchester Cathedral
- 1818** Emily Brontë is born at Thornton, Yorkshire
- 1819** Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) is born at Arbury Farm in Chilvers Coton, Warwickshire
- 1820** Accession of George IV
- 1825** First English railway
- 1830** Death of George IV; accession of William IV
- 1832** Passage of Reform Bill
- 1837** Death of William IV; accession of Queen Victoria
- 1840** Thomas Hardy is born at Upper Brockhampton, Dorset
- 1845** Great famine in Ireland
- 1848** Revolutions in France, Italy, Austria; publication of the *Communist Manifesto*
- 1848** Emily Brontë dies on December 19
- 1854** Outbreak of Crimean War
- 1855** Charlotte Brontë dies in pregnancy; buried beside her mother, brother, and four sisters at the Haworth parsonage
- 1859** Publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*
- 1860** Outbreak of American Civil War
- 1863** Thackeray's death on Christmas Eve at Palace Gardens
- 1865** Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

- 1870** Dickens's death at his home, Gad's Hill. Buried in *Poets' Corner* in Westminster Abbey
- 1876** Invention of the telephone
- 1880** George Eliot dies of pneumonia at the age of 61
- 1882** Trollope's death, after years of seclusion and depression, in London
- 1886** Publication of Marx's *Das Kapital* in English
- 1887** Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria
- 1895** Invention of motion picture camera
- 1900** Publication of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*
- 1901** Death of Victoria; accession of Edward VII
- 1903** Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk
- 1905** Einstein's theory of relativity
- 1910** Death of Edward VII; accession of George V
- 1928** Thomas Hardy dies of a cold at age 87; buried in *Poets' Corner* in Westminster Abbey at an impressive funeral service attended by thousands, including the most eminent people in England.

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