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**The Brontës' writing community:
family, partnership and creative
collaboration**

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Abstract

In 1846 Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë published *Poems* under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. An immediate interest regarding the identity of these mysterious Bells emerged. With the publication of their novels the following year the Brontës established themselves not only as writers, but as a family of writers. The publication of Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* presents three sisters pacing around a table as they share their novels with each other. This scene became firmly embedded in the Brontë mythology. However, from their earliest reviews the interest in the Brontës as a family has threatened to eclipse their work. This thesis argues that by exploring the Brontës' works critically we are better able to understand their collaborative group, and explore how they imaginatively interpreted the issues of family, community, partnership, and isolation. From within their writing community, two sets of partnerships emerge in the collaborative pairing of Charlotte and Branwell, and Emily and Anne. Partnership, rather than family, becomes the Brontës' central focus as they use their work to process the dynamics of their own collaborative relationships. Throughout the thesis, I analyse critically overlooked resources by all four Brontë siblings, including their juvenilia, letters, diaries, devoirs, in addition to their poetry and novels, in order to demonstrate how their community affected every method of writing they adopted. In addition, this thesis applies collaborative structures to the Brontës in order to present and explore the evolution of their group. In this thesis, I present the Brontës' writing community as integral to their development, but from within their community they each step forward as four unique, individual writers.

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List of Abbreviations

AG	<i>Agnes Grey</i>
BE	<i>The Belgian Essays – A Critical Edition</i>
BLL	<i>The Brontës: A Life in Letters</i>
EBCP	<i>Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems</i>
EWCB	<i>An Edition of The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë</i>
JE	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
LCB	<i>The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a selection of letters by family and friends</i>
PAB	<i>The Poems of Anne Brontë – A New Text and Commentary</i>
PCB	<i>The Poems of Charlotte Brontë</i>
SH	<i>Shirley</i>
TA	<i>Tales of Angria</i>
TOWH	<i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i>
TP	<i>The Professor</i>
WH	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>
WPBB	<i>The Works of Patrick Branwell Brontë</i>
VL	<i>Villette</i>

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, Angela Braxton. In 2003 she recorded a show for me about three sisters because she thought I might like it; the show was *In Search of the Brontës*. That's where this journey began.

Introduction

‘The sisters retained the old habit, which was begun in their aunt’s life-time, of putting away their work at nine o’clock, and beginning their study, pacing up and down the sitting-room. At this time, they talked over the stories they were engaged upon, and described their plots. Once or twice a week, each read to the others what she had written, and heard what they had to say about it. Charlotte told me, that the remarks made had seldom any effect in inducing her to alter her work [...]’¹

‘the dining room of the Parsonage had been turned into something like a book factory, as the sisters paced round the table, reading, listening and discussing each other’s work [...]’²

The Brontës’ Writing Community

The iconic image of the three Brontë sisters pacing around their dining room table as they share their work, as seen in biographies ranging from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857/1997) to Claire Harman’s most recent contribution to the biographical legacy – *Charlotte Brontë – A Life* (2016), is one which is firmly placed in the Brontë mythology. This moment establishes the Brontë sisters as a family of writers who wrote their novels through collaboration with each other – despite Charlotte’s declaration that her sisters’ comments had little impact upon her work. These examples testify to the recurrent biographical treatment of the Brontës’ family, and their collaborative writing. The aim of the thesis is not to discredit the importance of such biographical readings; biography is important in varying degrees throughout this study. Even so, this thesis aims

¹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, [1857] (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 234-235.

² Claire Harman, *Charlotte Brontë – A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 217.

to show it is through critical analysis that we are better able to understand the Brontës as a writing community and how, through their work, they imaginatively explore the issues of family, partnership and isolation which stem from their own collaboration. This work argues that these notions of family and community are extensively explored, not only in their novels, but also in their poetry, correspondence, diaries and essays, yet these materials have not been given adequate critical treatment. Despite the work of Heather Glen, Edward Chitham, and Drew Lamonica Arms, it remains the case that when community is the central focus in Brontë studies, there is often a biographical imperative. What this thesis aims to do is prove that it is in the creative expression of their work that we can locate, and better understand, the Brontës' attitudes towards these subjects.

To consider the Brontë family of writers to consist solely of the three sisters working together is a misapprehension. Throughout the course of their time as writers the group splintered into partnerships which proved to be the most creatively productive dynamic. This move away from family, towards partnership and eventually, in the case of Charlotte, to the individual can clearly be seen in the Brontës' creative work. Informed by their own writing community, the Brontës imaginatively explored how communities are constructed and destroyed, how they help and hinder development, and the way they create anxiety and solidarity. The Brontës demonstrate how a community operates through motifs of inclusion and exclusion. It is through the critical analysis of their work that this thesis will access the Brontës' individual interactions with the notions of community and, as a result, we can better understand their own creative group.

This thesis will demonstrate that, rather than the three siblings, it is the pairings of Charlotte and Branwell, and Emily and Anne which were the definitive influence on their writing. The partnership of Emily and Anne far surpasses their siblings' with regard to longevity, and yet it is rarely explored in detail. Partnership, whether that be siblings or

romantic, becomes the defining trope of the Brontës' portrayal of collaboration in each of their works. Amongst these portrayals of partnership there are consistent examples of estrangement and isolation. I will argue that these moments stem from the isolation experienced when the Brontës felt ostracised from their own community. All the siblings explored this theme throughout their writing, particularly Emily and Anne in their early Gondal poetry.

The preoccupation with a family of writers is propagated by critics. Edward Chitham explains that 'The Brontës read their works aloud to each other, not just left them with the other sisters to peruse at leisure. During these late evening sessions, each sister commented on the work of the others, and amendments were made accordingly, though 'Ellis Bell' was not anxious to make them.'³ Chitham supports the representation of the Brontës collaboratively working together which is put forward by the biographers, but he also problematises it. He challenges our acceptance of how much these contributions from the other sisters actually affect the work of each Brontë sister. Similarly to Gaskell's inclusion of Charlotte's comment, the image of communal writing is accepted but the level of influence is questioned.

Certainly the Brontë sisters in their decision, upon adopting pseudonyms, to retain a family name and publish their poems together as a collective instigated this interest with them as a family of writers. Lucasta Miller explains that 'Soon it seemed that the Brontës' decision to use pseudonyms had had almost the opposite effect to that intended: instead of securing an objective hearing for their work, they had unwittingly invited a horde of amateur detectives to speculate on their identities. The authors, not the books, increasingly became the focus of interest.'⁴ From the commencement of their publishing career the

³ Edward Chitham, *The Birth of Wuthering Heights - Emily Brontë at Work* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 58.

⁴ Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p. 15.

identity of the Brontës and their relationship to each other was raised. In Miriam Allott's *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (2010), the four reviews of *Poems* (1846) all query who the Bells are. W. A. Butler in the *Dublin University Magazine* comments:

Of the triad of versemen, who style themselves 'Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell', we know nothing beyond the little volume in which, without preface or comment, they assume the grave simplicity of title, void of *proenomen* or *agnomen*... Whether... there be indeed 'a man behind' each of these representative titles; or whether it be in truth but one master spirit – for the book is, after all, not beyond the utmost powers of a single human intelligence – that has been pleased to project itself into three imaginary poets, – we are wholly unable to conjecture...⁵

The identity of the Bells intrigued reviewers due to the omission of a preface, and the lack of clarity regarding the authorship of each poem. Thus, from the commencement of their publishing careers the identity of this family of writers threatened to eclipse their work.

Miller continues that in 1926, when the Brontë Society obtained the Parsonage, 'Brontëmania had reached a stage where the mania had become as worthy of remark as the Brontës. [...] In the 1990s, one finds a Tourist Board official quoted as comparing 'Brontë' as a brand to 'Coca-Cola'.⁶ The preoccupation with the Brontë name, and the fandom it produced enforces this fascination with the Brontës as a family rather than individuals.⁷ Furthermore, it shows that the fixation with the family results in a negative impact on their individual pieces of work. The themes of family, community and partnership have been blurred, and the relationship between them occluded somewhat by the over insistence on

⁵ W. A. Butler, 'from an unsigned notice' *Dublin University Magazine*, 1846, xxviii, 383-91 in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Miriam Allott (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 63-64, (p. 63).

⁶ Miller, pp. 104-107.

⁷ Recent scholarship regarding Charlotte Brontë's legacy can be found in: *Charlotte Brontë – Legacies and afterlives*, ed. by Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

biographical excavation at the expense of imaginative exploration. It is the Brontës as a family, rather than the Brontës as individual writers, which has come to dominate their legacy. Michel Foucault has theorised the significance of a name. He argues that, 'It is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description.'⁸ Foucault's theory explains why, despite their frequently blatant differences, the Brontës' creative works are considered from within a collective. However, the use of Brontë as a description rather than just as an indicator has been detrimental to all members of the family to varying degrees.

In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës* (2002), Heather Glen argues:

If any literary works might be said to issue from the same context, these are they. Most of the surviving juvenilia, much of the poetry, five of the seven published novels, were written, literally, together: by three women living in close proximity, in the confined space of an early Victorian household and the emotional intimacy of an extraordinarily devoted family, bound together by common interests and experiences, accustomed from earliest childhood to discussing the process of literary composition, even to sharing a fantasy world. Yet the differences between their works are radical, and striking: arguably far more so than the similarities which their closeness might explain. To consider these differences is to gain an unparalleled insight into the complex and creative and unpredictable ways in which a writer may not merely reflect, but imaginatively reflect upon her world.⁹

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice – Selected essays and Interviews*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 121.

⁹ Heather Glen, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. by Heather Glen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-12, (p. 2).

Similarly to Chitham, Glen acknowledges the issue of considering the Brontës as a collective and how this affects our interpretation of their writing. She highlights the ‘radical’ and ‘striking’ differences in the works of the three sisters. Hitherto, these differences have been explored by Glen, Chitham and Lamonica Arms, but there is yet to be a lengthy investigation into how the imaginative results of community can be traced throughout the Brontës’ work from the juvenilia to the novels. The most extensive consideration of how being a family of writers has impacted the Brontës’ work is “*We Are Three Sisters*” – *Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës* (2003) by Drew Lamonica.

¹⁰ Though there are brief explorations of the Brontës’ juvenilia, the majority of the text consists of a detailed consideration of each of the Brontë novels. In my thesis, I will demonstrate how in order to understand the Brontës as a collaborative writing community it is imperative to consider all of their work, and not just their novels. This will enable us to understand from where the notions of community, family and partnership in the novels derive.

Foucault queries, ‘Assuming that we are dealing with an author, is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work?’¹¹ In the case of the Brontës, if we are to further our understanding of the writing community it is essential to consider all the aspects of writing which they can be seen collaborating on and through which they address ideas of collaboration. To only study the novels is to ignore nearly twenty years of collaboration which preceded this. In addition, it excludes an essential member of the community – Patrick Branwell Brontë. By failing to produce a novel Branwell’s contribution to the Brontës’ writing community has been overlooked. Not only

¹⁰ Drew Lamonica, “*We Are Three Sisters*” – *Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

¹¹ Foucault, p. 118.

was Branwell one of the founders of the community, his relationship with Charlotte was the most productive creative collaboration either sibling ever experienced.

In this thesis I shall build upon Chitham, Glen, and Lamonica's challenge to argue that the notion of the Brontës as a collaborative group is far more complex than the three sisters ritualistically sharing their work around the dining room table. Through a thorough exploration of all the Brontës' writing I will show the development of the Brontës as a family of writers, and how they expressed their shifting attitudes towards these subjects of community, family and partnership in their novels. By analysing their juvenilia, life writing, poetry and novels I will explore how their writing community affected all their methods of writing and how they used their creative work to respond to the dynamics of the collaborative group. I shall reveal it is partnership, rather than family, which took precedence within their work. Furthermore, from within their collaborative circle the Brontës emerged as individual writers.

Community and Collaboration

In this thesis, I refer to the Brontës' collaborative group as a community rather than just a family. The reasoning for this is that the Brontës' relationship to each other as writers differed from their relationship as family members. Their role as siblings was permanent whereas their community allowed for evolution. In *Keywords* (1988), Raymond Williams explains that during the nineteenth century, '**community** was felt to be more immediate than SOCIETY'.¹² In his portrayal of community, Williams comments on how it was a persuasive term used to describe an existing or an alternative set of relationships. 'What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society, etc.*) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive

¹² Raymond Williams, *Keywords – A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 75.

opposing or distinguishing term.’¹³ The Brontës emerged from this period preoccupied with community. As rural communities were in a state of decline, due to the shift towards industrialisation, suddenly family took precedence. As such, I take Williams’s notion about wider communities and use it to explore the insular group of the Brontë siblings. I will show how the Brontës’ experience and preoccupation with a series of interpersonal relationships including family, sorority, partnership, and the benefits and tensions that arise from a sense of belonging are reflected in their work.

With regard to the Brontës I discuss two forms of community: textual and writing. The textual community, I put forward, was established by the Brontës’ father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë. In her exploration of the Brontës’ relationship with religion, Marianne Thormählen considers the origin of the Brontë genius:

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, I believe, 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 demanded, the engagement of the 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.¹⁴

I suggest the central source which contributed to this environment of freedom was the Brontës’ father. Patrick stood as an example that a member of their family could be a

¹³ Williams, *Keywords – A vocabulary of culture and society*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 23.

published writer. He claims, ‘Had I been numbered amongst the calm, sedate, concentric men of the world, I should not have been as I now am, and I should, in all probability, never have had such children as mine have been.’¹⁵ Patrick clearly credits some of the literary talent of his children to himself due to his character, and his method of parenting. Through Patrick’s role as a writer, and also as a provider of literature, he created a textual community for his children which had a profound impact on all of them as writers.¹⁶ By drawing on the same sources of influence the family created an intertextual connection which informs their work. The central use of community in the thesis is the writing community of the Brontë family. This emerged out of the textual community established by Patrick. The writing community refers to the four Brontë siblings and their decision to write together collaboratively.

Through my consideration of the role of collaboration in the Brontës’ writing community I shall interact with Michael P. Farrell and his study *Collaborative Circles – Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work* (2001). Farrell defines collaborative circles as:

a set of peers in the same discipline who, through open exchange of support, ideas, and criticism develop into an interdependent group with a common vision that guides their creative work. Like friendships and marriages, circles develop over time. It takes time to develop the trust, commitment, and instrumental intimacy necessary for collaboration. Only at the culmination of a developmental process do we find the kinds of episodes of collaboration that leads to creative work.¹⁷

¹⁵ Reverend Patrick Brontë to Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, ‘30 July 1857’, in *The Letters of the Revered Patrick Brontë*, ed. by Dudley Green (Gloucestershire: Nonsuch Publishing Limited, 2005), pp 258-259. (p. 258).

¹⁶ The limitations of the thesis does not allow for further study into the intertextual relationship between Patrick, the literature he provided, and his children. However, the influence of the literature of their youth upon the work of the Brontës is a topic I intend to explore in future projects.

¹⁷ Michael P. Farrell, *Collaborative Circles - Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 226.

Though Farrell's work explores friendship, rather than family, the structure he applies to collaborative groups is applicable to the Brontës' community. In his attempt to theorise collaboration, Farrell draws on the work of Bruce Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen and their proposed stages of development in collaborative groups: 1) Forming 2) Storming 3) Norming 4) Performing.¹⁸ Farrell builds on this and offers his own stages of development: Stage 1 – Formation; Stage 2 – Rebellion against Authority; Stage 3 – The Quest Stage; Stage 4 – The Creative Work Stage; Stage 5 – Collective Action; Stage 6 – The Separation; Stage 7 – The Nostalgic Reunion.¹⁹ Farrell uses a different collaborative circle to explore each stage of development. However, his study is predominantly biographical and he rarely uses the output of his subjects to analytically consider if the effect of collaboration can be located in their work. Furthermore, when diaries and letters are used they are treated as evidence, rather than as a source of consideration for his exploration of communal influence. As such, my work will use Farrell's framework but also build upon it and take the investigation further in a consideration of how collaboration can be seen through the work of the members of the community.

I will apply Farrell's framework to inform my early chapters where there is more emphasis on the production of the work and the role of group dynamics. However, particularly in the case of Charlotte and Branwell, Farrell's structure becomes limiting as they encompass all but the final stage during the period covered in chapter one. Rather, Tuckman and Jensen's broader notion of 'Performing' is more applicable to the later years of the Brontës' writing careers as they can be seen portraying community through their work. As such, in chapters four and five the focus of the thesis will move beyond the

¹⁸ Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen, 'Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited', *Group & Organization Management*, 2.4 (1977), 419-427.

¹⁹ Farrell, pp. 17-26.

framework of community towards the exploration of thematic connections around the subjects of community, family and partnership in the Brontës' novels.

Studies and theories regarding collaborative work span multiple disciplines from science, sociology and literature. With regard to literary collaboration there are various perspectives which have been considered: collaboration between friends; family; romantic partners; ghostwriting; the collaboration between a writer and their reader; and posthumously constructed literary circles. Lesa Scholl's 2014 paper 'Charlotte Brontë's Polyphonic Voices: Collaboration and Hybrid Authorial Spaces' explores Charlotte's relationship with her male collaborators, or 'masters' as Scholl terms them. In the paper she examines Charlotte's relationship with Branwell, Constantin Heger and her publishers.²⁰ Scholl's work also separates Charlotte, the biographical construction, from Charlotte the writer. In her consideration of the contribution of Charlotte's 'masters' she creates a link between Charlotte's writing practice and a common trope in her work. However, placed alongside Heger and Charlotte's publishers, Branwell is presented as a contributor to Charlotte's work rather than an equal member in their creative dialogue.

Bette London in her work *Writing Double – Women's Literary Partnerships* (1999), considers the role of the Brontës as sisters and how this has proved derogative for our consideration of them as female collaborators. London argues that 'Indeed, if to name the Brontës inevitably invokes images of the remote parsonage where the three sisters penned their novels, that parsonage, in our collective imagination, is inhabited by beings who write *separately* in the common drawing-room, each poring over her own writing desk.'²¹ In her aim to advocate the importance of female collaboration London suggests we are reluctant to consider the Brontë sisters writing together as this would demean them as

²⁰ Lesa Scholl, 'Charlotte Brontë's Polyphonic Voices: Collaboration and Hybrid Authorial Spaces', *Brontë Studies*, 39.4 (2014), 279-291.

²¹ Bette London, *Writing Double – Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 40-41.

individual writers. The repeated biographical motif I have provided appears to disprove London's theory. Even so, I do agree that there is tension between considering the Brontës as collaborators and as individuals.

Ian M. Emberson's 'Three Quartets: the Rossettis, the Mendelssohns and the Brontës' draws a comparison and highlights the similarities between the Brontë siblings and other prolific families.²² Emberson's work is predominantly biographical and as such does not interrogate, through analysis, how being a member of a collaborative family contributes to the creative output of the members. Olivia Malfait and Marysa Demoor in their 2015 'Sibling Collaboration and Literary After-life: The Case of the Brontës' consider the way association can impact the legacy of authors. This is specifically relevant to Charlotte in her role as editor for her siblings. They contemplate the impact collaboration can have on reputation – 'a reputation that has to be protected, reshaped or even cleansed in the eye of the mediator. It is the motivation behind famous cases of posthumous 'editing' by family members or friends'.²³ This case puts forward the notion that Charlotte may have manipulated the representation of her siblings in order to protect her own reputation.

As mentioned previously, Lamonica's work "*We Are Three Sisters*" – *Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës* is currently the most extensive consideration into how the Brontës' relationship as siblings had an influence on their work. She has continued to write about this in her chapter 'The Brontës' sibling bond' in the edited collection *The Brontës in Context* (2014), in which she proclaims:

Writing in collaboration reinforced the Brontës' sense of family solidarity. It was also the means by which they established, asserted and explored individual

²² Ian M. Emberson, 'Three Quartets: the Rossettis, the Mendelssohns and the Brontës', *Brontë Studies*, 34.3 (2009), 247-254.

²³ Olivia Malfait & Marysa Demoor, 'Sibling Collaboration and Literary After-life: The Case of the Brontës', *Brontë Studies*, 40.3 (2015), 187-200, (p. 189).

differences among siblings cast in the same mould, raised in like circumstances and spaces, placed in similar life experiences as daughters, sisters, governesses and authors, whose devotion to one another was both profound and intense. For many readers, balancing the inevitable influences they had on each other's writings with the uncommon distinctiveness of each is the greatest challenge and highest stimulus in studying the lives and works of the Brontës.²⁴

I wholly support Lamonica's claims, and my thesis tackles the challenge she proposes. However, Lamonica's assessment is predominantly focussed on the Brontë novels with some consideration of their other writings. In order to fully understand the sheer affect and implications of the Brontës' community, I propose it is imperative to consider all their work in order to witness the evolution of their group dynamic and how it continued to influence their work. From within this field there has never been an extensive study of the Brontë family as a collaborative group and this is what I intend to address.

The Brontës are certainly not the only literary collaborative family or circle to receive critical attention. There have been various studies into collaborative groups in Romanticism and Modernism due to the Romantic poets and the Bloomsbury group. Julia A. Carlson's work *England's First Family of Writers – Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (2007) asks 'Why is it that the life stories of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family tend to fascinate readers even more than their written works?'²⁵ The same question is frequently asked of the Brontës and thus, as my own work does, Carlson attempts to connect the fascination with the family to their own work, and show how being a family of writers affected their literary outputs. The preoccupation with the

²⁴ Drew Lamonica Arms, 'The Brontës' sibling bonds', in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 91-97, (pp. 96-97).

²⁵ Julia A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers – Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 1.

Wollstonecraft/Shelley family continues in Anne Mercer's book *The Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (2019) in which she considers the impact of the romantic partnership between husband and wife and the effect this had on their literary output.²⁶ Joanna E. Taylor recently completed her doctoral thesis: 'Writing spaces: the Coleridge family's agoraphobic poetics, 1796–1898' (2016), which explores the construction of writing spaces in the work of the children and grandchildren of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.²⁷ The work of both Taylor and Carlson is useful as they take the notion of a collaborative family further in their consideration of how family members can collaborate with the legacy of a relative, rather than directly with the individual. They also demonstrate how our understanding of literary families can be enhanced by analysing their work.

The work on the Bloomsbury group such as in Williams's article, 'The Significance of 'Bloomsbury' as a Social and Cultural Group' (1980); Crauford D. Goodwin's paper 'The Bloomsbury Group as Creative Community' (2011); and Barbara Caine's 'Bloomsbury Friendship and its Victorian Antecedents' (2008), are valuable sources for the consideration of literary communities.²⁸ Goodwin's work raises the point of how investigations into the Bloomsbury group can assist in the understanding of the 'performance of creative communities'.²⁹ In the later chapters of the thesis, I will demonstrate how the Brontës performed their community through the construction of their collection *Poems* and through the presentation of family and partnership in their novels.

²⁶ Anna Mercer, *The Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2019).

²⁷ Joanna E. Taylor, 'Writing spaces: the Coleridge family's agoraphobic poetics, 1796-1898' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Keele University, 2016).

²⁸ Raymond Williams, 'The Significance of Bloomsbury' as a Social and Cultural Group', in *Keynes and the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. by Derek Crabtree and A. P. Thirwell (London: Macmillan, 1980) 40-67. Crauford D. Goodwin, 'The Bloomsbury Group as Creative Community', *History of Political Economy*, 43.1 (2011), 59-82. Barbara Caines, 'Bloomsbury Friendship and its Victorian Antecedents', *Literature & History*, 17.1 (2008), 48-61.

²⁹ Goodwin, p. 59.

The consideration of other literary groups alongside the Brontës raises questions about how communities differ due to the connection of the members. The relationship of parent and child, and grandchild, siblings, and friends all offer differing dynamics which affect collaborative communities. In their edited collection David W. Minar and Scott Greer proclaim the importance of community: ‘Community is indivisible from human actions, purposes, and values. It expresses our vague yearnings for a commonality of desire, a communion with those around us, an extension of the bonds of kin and friend to all those who share a common fate with us.’³⁰ As Minar and Greer propose, communities can form in a variety of relationships. Many studies into collaboration look beyond family into romantic partnerships and friendships. It is from her study of romantic partnerships that Vera John-Steiner states that ‘Generative ideas emerge from joint thinking, from significant conversations, and from sustained, shared struggles to achieve new insights by partners in thought.’³¹ Though not romantic in nature, the partnerships of the Brontë siblings support John-Steiner’s suggestion of the power of partnership in creative relationships. As such, by exploring how the Brontë siblings performed their community through their work I am contributing to this growing dialogue surrounding creative groups.

Furthermore, whilst there is a focus on literary collaboration in Romanticism and Modernism, less critical attention has been paid to the nineteenth century. London argues that this stems from ‘our reluctance to dispense with the idea of the solitary author.’³² Critics such as Jack Stillinger, Jon Mee, and Harold Bloom have all challenged the notion of the individual author and identified the role of collaboration, whether it be direct or

³⁰ David W. Minar & Scott Greer, ‘Introduction’, in *The Concept of Community – Readings with Interpretations*, ed. by David W. Minar & Scott Greer (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), pp. ix-xii, (p. ix).

³¹ Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

³² London, p. 3

through influence, and how this remains a persistent trope in literature.³³ Therefore, alongside the work of London, Lamonica, Taylor and Mercer, my thesis seeks to address this gap.

Outline of Chapters

The structure of this thesis has been dictated by the chronology of the Brontës' work in order to demonstrate how their writing community evolved, and how their attitudes towards community, family and partnership develop through their writing. In chapter one, I examine the juvenilia of the Brontës. What I have categorised as 'juvenilia' is the writing dedicated to the fictional worlds they established in their youth, due to the fact that all the Brontës continued to write their juvenilia when they were in their twenties. Furthermore, due to the lack of prose writing for Gondal the section on Emily and Anne's juvenilia focuses exclusively on poetry, whereas the sections on Branwell and Charlotte's Angrian works concentrate predominantly on their prose writing. In addition, due to the varying periods in which the siblings abandoned their fictional worlds – Emily never did – I have marked the end of their juvenilia period as 1839 when Charlotte wrote 'Farewell to Angria'.³⁴ In this chapter, I show how the Brontës used their fictional work to interrogate and process their own sibling dynamics. Charlotte and Branwell's tempestuous collaborative relationship is shown through the consideration of Arthur and Charles Wellesley and Zamorna and Northangerland. In their decision to form Gondal, Emily and Anne placed emphasis on their partnership, but the isolation from their older siblings and the need to overcome this can be seen in their early Gondal poetry.

³³ See Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds – Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Charlotte Brontë, 'Farewell to Angria', in *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal*, ed. by Christine Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 314.

Emily and Anne's partnership remains a central focus in chapter two, which explores the life writing of the Brontë siblings. The letters, diaries and Belgian essays are a greatly overlooked resource in the critical examination of the Brontës. In this chapter, I demonstrate how their writing community affected all aspects of their writing, including their own correspondence and personal diary papers. It reveals how the Brontës fashioned their image of community through the adoption of creative personae and the blurring between personal reflection and fantasy. It shows them testing styles in their pursuit of independence, whilst continuing to acknowledge the debt to their collaborator. In a consideration of a collection of the Brontë letters, I explore how the sisters persistently presented themselves as a united voice, rather than as individuals. In contrast to this, Branwell was very much an individual in his letters. Yet, he used his creativity to adopt and portray a number of personae within his correspondence. The manipulation and fictionalisation of reality can be seen in the diary papers of the Brontë sisters. In the selection of Belgian essays I have chosen to explore, we are offered the rare opportunity to witness how Emily and Charlotte wrote about the same subject, and how each displays her individuality through the task.

Chapter three considers the Brontës' poetry through an examination of Branwell's published poems and the 1846 collection *Poems* by Charlotte, Emily and Anne. By presenting themselves as the Bell brothers, the Brontë sisters encouraged their initial readers to consider them as a family of writers. Furthermore, their decision to not identify the author of each poem suggests a shared family voice where individual identity was not important. However, this was an editorial construction from the siblings as the poems published in the collection were not written collectively. Through a consideration of shared themes and approaches, I demonstrate how the Brontë sisters make their individuality apparent through a performance of collaborative unity. Ostracised from his writing

community, Branwell's poetry shows his preoccupation with themes shared by his sisters. Through a comparison of Branwell's poetry with his sisters we can see him writing back to the community.

Chapters four and five focus on the novels of the Brontë sisters and the prose piece "and the weary are at rest" from Branwell. After twenty years of collaboration the novels include each member's consideration of family and partnership, and the isolation which accompanied the loss of these. From within this family dynamic emerge critiques of the idealised nineteenth century family. The Brontë novels are populated by orphans and dysfunctional families plagued by death and rivalry. Family is the goal to which many of the Brontës' protagonists aspire but it is rarely the idyll hoped for. It is partnership, rather than family, which emerges as the key relationship within the Brontës' novels. Through depictions of fraternities, sororities, and marriages the Brontës portrayed partnership as the most intense and desired for collaborative relationship. However, even these relationships prove to be problematic, particularly in Charlotte's work. As Charlotte developed as a novelist she moved further and further away from notions of family and partnership leaving us finally with Lucy Snowe, bereft of family or partner, but willing to stand alone as an individual.

It is important for the thesis that all four siblings be considered in every chapter. However, due to the sheer difference in quantity of writing for each sibling this has meant, at times, close attention has been paid to small selections, and large quantities could not be explored, in order to present an equal representation for each sibling. By the final chapter, Branwell's small prose piece pales in comparison to the novels put forward by his sisters. Even so, if the entire life span of the community is to be considered it is important to demonstrate what Branwell contributed in these final years in order to see if his lost community still continued to influence him. Similarly, no diary from Branwell exists, and

neither he nor Anne attended the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. However, far more letters produced by Branwell have been preserved compared to those by his two younger sisters, and Anne's letters and diary papers, though small in quantity, offer immense scope for investigation. Due to the care of her friend Ellen Nussey, a large collection of Charlotte's letters survive. However, I have chosen to limit the letters explored to ones written to the same recipient, and around the same time period as the few surviving letters of Emily and Anne. This is so an accurate analysis can be made of the collaborative voice in the sisters' epistolary writing. Similarly, Charlotte and Branwell's juvenilia far surpass their adult publications with regard to quantity and yet remain largely overlooked critically.³⁵

The scholarly literature about the Brontë family is undeniably vast. However, persistently this scholarship has predominantly focused on Charlotte and Emily, and their novels. The family's oeuvre offers so much that is rarely explored, particularly their life writing. Furthermore, in recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the lesser explored Brontë siblings. Eminent Brontë scholar Thormählen persistently advocates for the study of Anne Brontë.³⁶ The recent republication of Victor A. Neufeldt's collection of Branwell's work suggests new developments of interest within Brontë scholarship. In the examination of the Brontë siblings as a collaborative community of writers this thesis focuses on all four of the Brontë children and how all of their work is affected by their creative relationship with each other. It explores notions of a shared family voice alongside clear moments of individuality. Through the analysis of all the Brontës' methods of

³⁵ Recent scholarship highlights the scope of research which could emerge from a consideration of the Brontë juvenilia. Emma Butcher has published on the Brontë juvenilia in her paper: Emma Butcher, 'War Trauma and Alcoholism in the Early Writings of Charlotte and Branwell Brontë', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22.4 (2017), pp. 465-481. She is also due to publish her monograph *The Brontës and the Military* with Palgrave Macmillan, publication date to be confirmed.

³⁶ See the following: Marianne Thormählen, 'Aspects of Love in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', in *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, ed. by Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 153-171. Marianne Thormählen, 'Anne Brontë and her Bible', *Brontë Studies*, 37.4 (2012), 339-344. Marianne Thormählen, 'Standing Alone: Anne Brontë out of the Shadow', *Brontë Studies*, 39.4 (2014), 330-340.

writing, I interact with critically overlooked sources in order to gain a broader understanding of the Brontës as writers. By analytically considering their writing, I shall explore what their work can tell us about their shifting attitudes towards the issues of community, family and partnership.

Chapter One: ‘We wove a web in childhood’:¹ Sibling collaboration and separation

1.1 Introduction

Biographers ranging from Gaskell to Juliet Barker have mythologised the moment Patrick Brontë presented his son with toy soldiers; an event which seemingly sparked the creative imaginations of the four remaining Brontë siblings. This incident shaped the rest of their lives and launched them on the aspirational road to publication. The Brontës themselves appear to have felt the significance of this moment as both Charlotte and Branwell recount the event in their juvenilia. This moment, which first established the Brontës as creative writers, also positioned them as a family who wrote together. Scholl observes that:

Authorship and literary production were never solo activities for the Brontës. As early as their collaborative juvenilia, they had an awareness of literature as a hybrid, dialogic process, one involving translation, sharing work, rewriting and engaging with a variety of literary influences or ‘voices’ that contribute to the authorial space.²

In addition to responding to the many literary voices their father provided, the Brontës then began to engage with each other. This is where the literary dialogue, which is apparent throughout all their forms of writing, commences. However, this is not a dialogue which is consistent; it evolves and breaks. From the earliest stages of their writing the Brontës fractured off into partnerships and, as I will argue, it is partnerships, rather than family, which defines the writing community of the Brontës.

¹ Charlotte Brontë, ‘We wove a web in childhood’, in *An Edition of The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. by Christine Alexander, 3 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987-1991) II part 1 (1991), pp. 379-385, (p. 379).

² Scholl, p. 280.

London notes that the Brontës were not alone in their practice of collaborative juvenilia:

the production of an extensive juvenilia is not in itself without precedent, as the examples of Hartley Coleridge and John Ruskin might indicate. A shared literary practice, moreover, has its analogues in other “literary” families – most notably, the Rossettis, the Arnolds, the Alcotts, the Kiplings, and the Stephenses (the family of Virginia Woolf and her siblings). Even the miniature size of these works does not make them distinctive.³

Early critics of the juvenilia, such as Gaskell and Winifred Gérin, were dismissive.

However, London, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster protest that such writing deserves consideration in its own right particularly as so many prominent writers partook in the practice. Alexander states that:

It is popularly believed that the Regency and Victorian child was to be seen and not heard. Yet the era is particularly rich in the juvenile writings of children who mock, cavil, exaggerate, and explore the adult attitudes that surround them and that they encounter in their reading.⁴

As such, the Brontë juvenilia enables us to see how they interacted with the literature they encountered, the society they inhabited, and the community they formed. The quality of writing, particularly the earlier works, are structurally and grammatically juvenile, however this chapter does not aim to make a comment on quality. Rather, I intend to show

³ London, p. 38.

⁴ Christine Alexander, ‘Nineteenth-century juvenilia: a survey’, in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. by Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 11-30, (p. 11).

how the juvenilia enabled the Brontës to use their imagination to consider, develop and express their opinions regarding their collaboration as siblings.

In order to understand the writing community of the Brontë family it is imperative to explore their juvenilia. Not only did it serve as their writing apprenticeship, but it was also the sole time the four siblings extensively wrote together in their chosen partnerships. The juvenilia marks the beginning of the community, and the pairings established at this early stage proved difficult to outgrow. However, looking back at the juvenilia from the perspective of the Brontës as novelists, critics have frequently favoured Charlotte much to the detriment of her partner Branwell. Commenting on Carol Bock's work *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience* (1992), London argues that 'Bock subordinates the sibling coauthors to Charlotte's "readers," a kind of participatory audience. And like other readers of the later juvenilia, she pathologizes Branwell to establish Charlotte's superior authorial credentials.'⁵ London goes on to critique juvenilia editors such as Alexander and Robert G. Collins for separating the work of the two siblings, thus implying that their work can stand alone without the other.⁶ In addition, the difficulty of accessing Gondal, due to the absence of Emily and Anne's prose manuscripts, and the difference in quantity mean the sisters' contributions are often overlooked. The apparent need to advocate one sibling results in an uneven understanding of the juvenilia, and the writing community, as a whole. In this chapter, I will give the full scope of the collaboration in a consideration of all four siblings, rather than the categorisations imparted by earlier critics, in order to demonstrate how their work reflects their community.

For the first three chapters of this thesis Farrell's model for 'The Stages of Development of Collaborative Friendship Circles'⁷ is unusually pertinent to the Brontës.

⁵ London, p. 41. Referring to Carol Bock, *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992).

⁶ London, p. 57.

⁷ Farrell, p. 17.

The period covered by the Brontës' juvenilia alone encompasses nearly all of the stages proposed by Farrell. By taking into account Farrell's suggested stages of development it becomes clear that Charlotte and Branwell's partnership differs considerably from Emily and Anne's. At the Formation stage the community encompasses all four Brontës in the early days of their juvenilia. However, once they reach Stage 2 – Rebellion against Authority the community splinters as the authority which is rebelled against by Emily and Anne are the two oldest Brontë siblings. At this stage Emily and Anne's partnership takes precedence. In the period covered in this chapter Emily and Anne reach Stage 4 – The Creative Work Stage, which is where they stay until Charlotte joins their community and encourages them on to Stage 5 – Collective Action with the publication of their poems. Charlotte and Branwell's collaborative partnership developed at a much more rapid rate, and by 1839 they had reached Stage 6 – The Separation but they would never progress to the final stage – The Nostalgic Reunion.

The difference in progression in the two partnerships highlights how important it is to consider all four of the Brontës, rather than just the three sisters. In addition, it also shows the importance of the juvenilia to our understanding of the Brontës as a writing community. Farrell explains that, 'A circle usually lasts for approximately a decade, but rarely longer than fifteen years.'⁸ As such, the period Charlotte and Branwell worked together on their juvenilia is typical of the natural lifespan of a collaborative group. Therefore, the tensions portrayed in their later work is a response to the inevitable expiration of their partnership. Emily and Anne's collaboration is believed to have commenced in 1831 when Charlotte left for school which shows that their collaborative relationship exceeded the fifteen year maximum proposed by Farrell.⁹ This establishes a

⁸ Farrell, p. 2.

⁹ Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 217.

difference in Emily and Anne's collaboration which separates the sisters from the community. As I shall demonstrate in chapter 2, Emily and Anne collaborated in their life writing as well as their creative work. Their partnership was integral to all their writing practices. In regards to Charlotte and Branwell's partnership, a study of their juvenilia enables us to experience the lifespan of a collaborative pairing and witness its demise.

The Brontës' decision to separate into pairs is an action common with collaborative groups once they reach Stage 3 – The Quest Stage. Farrell explains:

Collaborative circles usually consist of three to five members; only rarely do they consist of more than seven or eight. Regardless of group size, as knowledge of one another's values, abilities, and personalities deepens, each member is likely to pair off and work more closely with one other person. [...] Most episodes of creative work occur within these pairs. Although the dynamics leading up to the pairing may include the whole group, it is the paired members who are likely to make the discoveries or to develop the style or the theory that defines the group culture.¹⁰

Farrell establishes a standard of industrious partnerships within collaborative circles. He identifies the significance these pairings have to the productivity and output of the circle. In my study of the Brontës' community it is in their partnerships, rather than as a whole group, that they produce the majority of their work. It is their preoccupation with their pairings, specifically their partnerships as siblings, which I shall focus on within their juvenilia.

I will analyse the collaborative partnerships of Charlotte and Branwell, and Emily and Anne in order to demonstrate how they used their juvenile writing to interrogate the

¹⁰ Farrell, pp. 22-23.

notion of sibling partnerships.¹¹ In this chapter I will perform an exploration of the imaginative reworking of issues of power dynamics which were always part of – or a latent element of – the siblings’ creative relationships. This is a topic which has been explored by critics such as Carol Bock, Lamonica and Robin St John Conover who frequently comment on the apparent rivalry between Charlotte and Branwell.¹² Although rivalry is present, and will be explored in this chapter, it is only one element. I intend to rebalance the focus through the exploration of a much overlooked sibling relationship, but one which, I believe, is the most significant in the juvenilia. Through my consideration of the characters Arthur and Charles Wellesley, I demonstrate how it is the immense love and respect experienced by these characters for each other which makes their rivalry so significant.

Lamonica notes the importance of Charlotte’s novella *Henry Hastings* due to the clear biographical connotations which can be found in the work, as well as the echoes of *Jane Eyre* (1847).¹³ *Henry Hastings* is one of the few juvenilia works in which the sibling relationship portrayed is a brother and sister. The brother is a drunken renegade and the sister is a plain, sensible governess. The links between the novella and Charlotte and Branwell are easily made. Furthermore, Charlotte and Branwell openly critique each other as editors within their creative work when they write scathing reviews. However, I have chosen to avoid this overtly biographical approach for my analysis of the juvenilia. Aside

¹¹ Numerous critics such as Christine Alexander, Heather Glen and Victor A. Neufeldt have discussed the problematic nature of referring to the early writing of the Brontës as ‘juvenilia’ as the siblings continued to write for their fictional worlds when they were in their twenties. It is even argued that one of the final poems Emily wrote, after the publication of *Wuthering Heights*, was a Gondal poem. As such I have chosen to use the year 1839 as the final point for the juvenilia I will explore as this was the year Charlotte composed ‘Farewell to Angria’, and both she and Branwell ceased to write specifically for and about Angria.

¹² See following: Carol Bock, ‘Our plays’: the Brontë juvenilia’, in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. by Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 34-52. Drew Lamonica, ‘*We Are Three Sisters*’ – *Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 2003). Robin St John Conover, ‘Creating Angria: Charlotte and Branwell Brontë’s Collaboration’, *Brontë Society Transactions*, 24.1 (1999), 16-32.

¹³ Lamonica, p. 51-57.

from *Henry Hastings*, the majority of these biographical references occur in the early stages of the juvenilia when the writing is more a product of play. The extensive presentation of the sibling relationship of the Wellesley brothers, and the dynamic partnership between Zamorna and Northangerland, allows for far greater scope in analysing how Charlotte and Branwell explored notions of sibling relationships and competitive partnerships through their work. Through my investigation of these characters, I am able to discuss the themes of jealousy, rivalry, and the battle of power dynamics which dominate the juvenilia of the Brontës.

Arthur and Charles Wellesley are the two sons of Charlotte's original protagonist, the Duke of Wellington, and rapidly became her focal point. Arthur develops into the Duke of Zamorna and King of Angria, Charlotte's central hero. Charles becomes Charles Townsend, one of Charlotte's central narrators in her Angrian work. They may technically be Charlotte's characters, but Branwell also writes for both of them. Theirs is the most extensive portrayal of a sibling relationship in the juvenilia, and it also undergoes considerable evolution. I shall show how, through Arthur and Charles, Charlotte and Branwell were able to show the intense loving bond of young siblings, and how time and maturity result in its gradual demise.

The other central pairing which define the Angrian works of Charlotte and Branwell is Zamorna (Marquis of Douro/Arthur Wellesley) and Northangerland (Lord Ellrington/Alexander Percy). The pair are not siblings, though they do become related through the marriage of Zamorna to Northangerland's daughter, but their partnership and rivalry is the heart of the later juvenilia. Zamorna is Charlotte's hero and Northangerland Branwell's; it is through the characters that the siblings explore collaboration, betrayal, rivalry, reverence and love. I will demonstrate how Charlotte and Branwell used their characters to process their feelings towards each other as creative partners, and how they

arrive at two very different conclusions through an examination of the fluctuating relationship between their figureheads.

Accessing the sibling relationship in Emily and Anne's Gondal work presents more difficulty due to the lack of prose material. No clear narrative is available for Gondal as it is for Angria. Of Emily and Anne's contribution to the early juvenilia, Gérin states that 'They all four contributed to the plots, even if the younger Emily and Anne did not contribute to the written saga, and they all directed the adventures of their titular heroes'.¹⁴ This moment of unity was brief. Alexander believes that the separation into partnerships was inescapable: 'The fracturing of the saga was inevitable: not only were there four players and therefore four competing Chief Genii planning events, but each genius had a favourite character with a following of friends who each told their own stories.'¹⁵ The separation may have been inevitable but the ramifications of it dictate the overarching theme of isolation and loss which I will explore in their early surviving Gondal poetry.

1.2 'O, once this happiness was mine':¹⁶ Arthur and Charles Wellesley

The collaborative relationship between Charlotte and Branwell Brontë is frequently overlooked and undervalued in Brontë scholarship. Branwell's notable absence from the later successful writings of his sisters has resulted in his relegation from the perceived family of writers. However, Conover advocates the importance of the relationship between brother and sister:

For the eleven years it lasted, the literary collaboration shared by Charlotte and Branwell Brontë was, in many respects, an ideal alliance. Brother and sister,

¹⁴ Winifred Gérin, 'General Introduction', in Charlotte Brontë, *Five Novelettes*, ed. by Winifred Gérin (London: The Folio Press, 1971), pp. 7-23, (p. 9).

¹⁵ Christine Alexander, 'Autobiography and juvenilia: the fractured self in Charlotte Brontë's early manuscripts', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, pp. 154-172, (p. 157).

¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë, 'A Fragment, "Overcome with that delightful sensation of lassitude"' in *EWCB*, ed. by Christine Alexander, 3 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987-1991) I (1987), pp. 327-333, (p. 332).

fourteen months apart in age, were united in a joint creative urge and a symbiotic vision, as well as a common attraction to the ambitious Romantic rebel and a shared fascination with the demonic mind. This mutuality cultivated a literary partnership which proved both unique and prolific, and had the effect of fostering an unusual reciprocity of imagination and creativity between the two eldest surviving siblings in this family of authors.¹⁷

The creative partnership of Charlotte and Branwell far outweighed any other collaborative relationship either of them had later in life, and created more output than they ever produced alone. Certainly they shared the creative interests which are raised by Conover, but, I suggest, they also frequently used their differences to the advantage of their juvenilia. The reason Alexander and Neufeldt are able to present the edited collections of Charlotte and Branwell's juvenilia separately is due to the pair's understanding and acceptance of each other's differences. This acceptance was their strength as it allowed each to develop their own focus, independently, whilst ultimately contributing to the whole which was their Angrian saga. It is the sibling relationship portrayed through the Wellesley brothers, and later the partnership of Zamorna and Northangerland, which holds prominence in the juvenilia.

The Brontës were not alone in their preoccupation with siblings. Steven Mintz proposes that 'Few subjects engaged the imagination of the great nineteenth-century novelists more strongly than sibling relations [...] the sibling bond is specifically upheld as the epitome of loyalty and selflessness, continuity and cohesion.'¹⁸ It is this notion of 'loyalty' and 'selflessness' which defines the initial relationship between Arthur and

¹⁷ Conover, p. 16.

¹⁸ Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations – The Family in Victorian Culture* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 147-148.

Charles. As boys the pair are devoted to each other and, as depicted in Branwell's 'Letters Vol VI', willingly risk their lives for each other:

directly after a ball hit Charlie he cried out "Arthur save me" clung to his brother for a moment but was soon knocked of by a dead body falling on him and lay motionless. I shall never forget the expression of Arthures countenance at this moment his eyes strained as if the[y] would burst and blazed with a mainacll lustre. The sweat started to his cold forehead he clenched his teeth & muttered, "Yes I will save you." with one mighty effert he broke his bonds. like packthreads seized the first sword he found with an energy that made the blood spring out at his finger nails and threw himself. on the thickest of Rougues troops he whirled his sword round with force of resistless lightning at every blow some man dropped [.]¹⁹

Arthur, the older brother, is cast in the role of hero and saviour for his younger brother.

Charles's reliance on his brother is made apparent in Branwell's use of 'clung' which shows Charles's desperation and also determination to remain with his brother. It portrays a childlike need; Charles clings to Arthur for safety like an infant.

It is in Arthur's reaction that the intensity of the fraternal bond is made apparent. In a moment of chaos, in the midst of battle, it is the look on Arthur's face at the potential loss of his brother which is the defining moment. Branwell's use of 'strained' and 'burst' depict the shock and also the extreme emotions Arthur experiences. At this moment Charles appears to be dead, and the sight is so incomprehensible to his brother that he strains his eyes in order to alter the image. Frequently in the juvenilia Arthur does not cry, even when faced with intense emotions, and here his inability to express emotion is seen in

¹⁹ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Letters Vol VI', in *WPBB*, ed. by Victor A. Neufeldt, 3 vols, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997-1999; repr. Oxford: Routledge, 2015), I (1997), pp. 230-238, (p. 237). Branwell's spelling, punctuation and capitalisation are erratic. To avoid an excessive use of [sic] please note that all spelling and grammatical errors are intentional and included to retain accuracy.

his eyes which will ‘burst’ as he is overcome with grief. Arthur’s tears are burned away by his rage which ‘blazed’ in his eyes.

Branwell’s use of ‘mainaell’ (meaning maniacal) exhibits a reaction to grief which borders on insanity – a theme explored by all the siblings throughout their writing, particularly by Emily in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). It shows the extremity of Arthur’s violent desire to avenge Charles. In addition, Arthur’s enthusiasm towards these acts of violence reveal a darker aspect of his character which is unleashed without the influence of his brother. This foreshadows the side of Arthur which eventually destroy his relationship with Charles.

The power of fraternal love appears to bestow superhuman strength on Arthur as he is able to break through chains to avenge his brother. Charles’s sacrifice is the decisive act which enables Arthur to conquer the rebellion. It is brotherly love which leads to their victory and restores peace. At this stage of the juvenilia death is rarely permanent; characters and the Genii are able to restore life. This in turn further emphasises the significance of Arthur’s love for Charles, as the risk of threat is enough to inspire unknown power in the elder brother.

Charlotte also uses the drama and peril of battle to demonstrate the love between the two brothers. In ‘Tale of the Islanders, vol. II’ Charles finds Arthur (the Marquis of Douro) grievously wounded:

When we had entered the humble abode, we beheld the Marquis of Douro lying on a bed of leaves. His face was very pale. His fine features seemed as fixed as a marble statue. His eyes were closed and his glossy, curling hair was in some parts stiffened with blood. As soon as we beheld this sight, Charles rushed forward and,

falling on the bed beside his brother, he fainted away [...] Charles seemed like one demented.²⁰

In Charlotte's depiction the roles are reversed, and we see Charles reciprocate the love expressed by his brother in Branwell's work. Both scenes share the theme of grief bordering on insanity. Where Arthur was 'mainaccl', Charles is 'demented'; each is pushed to madness when faced with the prospect of losing his sibling.

The language also indicates the difference between the two; Arthur's reaction is charged with violence, whereas Charles's reaction is filled with emotion. It enforces the roles of the two brothers: Arthur as the protective elder brother, and Charles as the younger brother in need of defending. It also establishes the central power dynamic of their relationship: Arthur's physicality in comparison with Charles's intellect. Therefore, upon discovering Arthur in a life-threatening state Charles does not respond with a desire for retribution and violence, but rather is overcome with emotion. This immense surge of feeling affects his health and leaves him incapacitated alongside his brother. Charles does not aim to avenge his brother, but rather to join him in death so that they can never be parted. Charles's reaction to the potential loss of his brother responds to societal notions of the dependence of younger brothers on their elder siblings. Leonore Davidoff explains, 'Having a brother as model or facilitator could be a decisive element in a young man's life course and give the elder a satisfying sense of responsibility.'²¹ Charles is so dependent on the influence of Arthur in the formation of his identity that without his older brother, he ceases to be.

²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, 'Tale of the Islanders, vol II', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 99-113, (p. 103).

²¹ Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water – Siblings and their Relations 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 151.

The extent of the fraternal bond between the two is reinforced in the early juvenilia by the number of tales Charlotte composes which focus on the two brothers, and which they narrate themselves. Resembling Charlotte and Branwell, both brothers are writers and sign their work 'UT' (Us Two) or 'WT' (We Two)²². Frequently the brothers narrate their tales stating 'We' rather than identifying themselves individually. In Charlotte's 'Characters of the Celebrated Men of the Present Time' the brothers are portrayed together as a pair, rather than individually. However, when it comes to their identity as writers, Charlotte ensures she depicts their differences: 'the Marquis of Douro's strains are like the soft reverberations of an æolian harp [...] the songs of Lord Charles resemble the glad sweet music of the dulcimer [...] So there's the difference.'²³ Arthur's magnificence, compared to his brother, is indicated through the choice of the harp which proposes works that are ethereal, mythical and grandiose. The contrast of the two instruments demonstrates a necessity to state the distinction between the brothers. The intensity of a sibling bond does not prevent or undermine individualism. However, differences can breed discontentment within a partnership.

Charlotte may present the variances of the brothers as important, but as they mature and develop these differences are also what destroys the partnership. Davidoff states that:

Whether explicitly caring for younger siblings or just staking their place in the hierarchy older children had the option to exert power and control over younger.

Elders could be competent, admired, and loved, but also felt to be bossy and taking too much authority upon themselves.²⁴

²² There continues to be debate regarding the identity of 'UT'. In his edited collection of Branwell's work Neufeldt includes the poems stating 'UT' refers to Charlotte and Branwell. However, in her edited collection of Charlotte's works Alexander argues that in fact the 'UT' is referring to Arthur and Charles Wellesley. A conversation between Captain Ramrod and the Duke of Wellington in Charlotte's 'Military Conversations in Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine, October 1829', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 70-78, (p. 74) would appear to confirm Alexander's theory. Either theory still supports the notion of siblings writing collaboratively.

²³ Charlotte Brontë, 'Characters of the Celebrated Men of the Present Time', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 123-130, (p. 126).

²⁴ Davidoff, p. 116.

The dominance of the elder sibling over the younger can be seen in Arthur's treatment of Charles in 'An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men of the Present Time': 'I was going on but Arthur restrained me with, 'Charles, Charles, hush love.' He then took hold of my hand and hurried me away'.²⁵ At this stage Arthur's control of Charles is loving and tender. The use of the affectionate term 'love' is not specific to Charles as Arthur's father also uses it for multiple characters. Nevertheless, it is used by the family to express their endearment. The language is centred on bodily control – 'restrained', 'hurried' – and we see Arthur physically remove his brother from the situation. These actions are not portrayed as violent or unwanted. The holding of hands is caring and gently persuasive rather than forceful. However, when Charles attempts to reverse their roles and cajoles his elder brother his actions are not met with the same level of co-operation.

In the mythologisation of Arthur's courtship of his first wife Marian Hume, Charles composes the tale 'Albion and Marina'²⁶. In it we see the fictional Charles offering his brother advice:

The reader will readily perceive that he had, to use a cant phrase, 'fallen in love'.

Lord Cornelius, his brother, warned him of the folly of doing so, but instead of listening to his sage admonitions, he first strove to laugh and then, frowning at him, commanded silence.²⁷

²⁵ Charlotte Brontë, 'An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men of the Present Time', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 169-177, (p. 176).

²⁶ As their relationship developed Charles's portrayal of Arthur's life angered his brother. As a result of this Charles has subtly altered the names of his brother and his sister-in-law so Arthur becomes Albion and Marian becomes Marina.

²⁷ Charlotte Brontë, 'Albion and Marina', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 285-297, (p. 289).

Faced with a competitor for his affections Charles attempts to intervene but this only leads to further divisions in the fraternal partnership. Charles's use of inverted commas suggests he is not convinced by the romantic liaison. The complimentary language regarding himself, in comparison to the critical language to describe Arthur, is one of the first indications of the tone which Charles later adopts when depicting his brother. The cracks in their relationship have already begun to form, and immediately Charles uses his writing to denigrate his brother by questioning Arthur's love affair in his tale. Arthur's sense of superiority as the elder brother can be seen in his instant dismissal of Charles's opinion. Charles attempts to shift the power in their relationship and Arthur immediately meets it with force when he 'commanded silence'. Rather than the considerate, understanding brother seen in 'An Interesting Passage in the Lives of Some Eminent Men of the Present Time', this Arthur has progressed to the controlling sibling role described by Davidoff.

Charles possesses considerable power in this perceptible shift in the dynamic of the relationship. In taking on the role of narrator, Charles ultimately has control over his brother and how he is portrayed. Arthur may exert his physical dominance over Charles but Charles's intellect allows him to be the master of his brother's legacy. The notion of a sibling holding control over the other through the role of narrator is significant to Charlotte and Branwell's writing partnership. The narrators in Charlotte and Branwell's juvenilia are consistently male. However, it is not clear which sibling initiated this trope. Even so, it clearly establishes that, at this stage in their writing, the dominant narrative voice was classified as male. Charlotte ensures that she shares with, and even supersedes, Branwell as the prevailing voice in their juvenilia through her creation and development of Charles. By adopting a male narrator, Charlotte does not allow Branwell's gender to overpower her voice. At this stage in her writing, Charlotte had not developed the female voice which dominates her novels. This may explain why in *The Professor* (1857), Charlotte adopts a

male narrator rather than the female narrators she came to rely on. In her first attempt at novel writing Charlotte returns to the creative voice which imbues her with power.

It is Arthur's control and aggression as a sibling which foreshadows the corruption of his character. Charlotte and Branwell develop this corruption as he evolves into the Duke of Zamorna. Charles notes the darkness he knows exists within his brother:

I never saw anything to equal his eye! Oh! I could have stood riveted with the chains of admiration, gazing for hours upon it! [...] Such was my hero. The only blot I was ever able to discover in his character is that of a slight fierceness or impetuosity of temper which sometimes carried him beyond bounds, though at the slightest look or word of command from his father he instantly bridled his passion [.]²⁸

Charles's depiction of Arthur is very reminiscent of Milton's Satan: a beautiful, ethereal exterior which hides a corrupt soul. Wellington is able to control Arthur, but without the paternal influence the corruption develops and chaos ensues. Mintz argues that 'Sibling love is emphasized as a purifier of man's carnal nature, as a counterbalance to the everyday preoccupation with worldly ambitions.'²⁹ Echoing Milton, Charlotte uses the love of brothers, and the love of the father, to quell the ferocity and ambition within Arthur.

Charles proposes the dangerous impact of loving and admiring Arthur in his description of 'the chains of admiration'. The appeal of Arthur is so intoxicating that it imprisons and controls the devotees. Charles's veneration here is very reminiscent of the heroines, Marian Hume, Zenobia, Mina Laury, and Mary Percy all of whom sacrifice their happiness, sanity, and their lives due to their devotion to Arthur. Charles is the first great

²⁸ Charlotte Brontë, 'Albion and Marina', in *EWCB*, I, pp. 285-297, (p. 288).

²⁹ Mintz, p. 164.

love for Arthur and his is the first heart broken by his brother's philandering ways. This also highlights an issue in Charlotte's gendering of Charles. Charles's gender is dictated not only by the historical figure he represents, but also as a literary trope for Charlotte to achieve authority in the narrative. Even so, comparisons can be drawn between Charles and the romantic heroines of Angria which indicates Charlotte experimenting with gendered expectations. Charles never embodies the heightened masculinity of Arthur, and subsequently Charlotte feminises him by positioning him in the role of abandoned lover. Nevertheless, Charles is still a character with power due to his role as a narrator. Therefore, the feminisation of Charles, combined with his dominant voice, may indicate the earliest signs of Charlotte positioning a feminised voice as a central voice. Furthermore, the intensity of a sibling relationship, which borders on the romantic, foreshadows the relationships in *Jane Eyre*. When faced with losing Jane after the revelation of his marriage, Rochester suggests they could live as siblings. In addition to this, St John, whom Jane views and treats as a brother, goes on to propose marriage to her. Therefore, in Charles we find the beginning of Jane; a physically weak individual who is devoted to a philandering, physically superior man. Charles and Jane, in their roles as narrator, are able to overcome their physical weakness and become dominant.

No clear answer is offered from either Charlotte or Branwell as to why Arthur and Charles's relationship is undermined. However, Arthur's desertion of his younger brother in his endless pursuit of romantic liaisons is the initial blow which sunders their partnership. As such, Charles's depictions of the early romantic heroines Marian Hume and Zenobia are frequently critical. However, once Charles's hatred of his brother matures, Charles is seen siding with his sister-in-law, Mary Percy, over his once beloved brother. "“Lovely creature,” thought I, “is your doom to be as dark as that of her who went before you? Must that haughty serpent, concealing under his glittering and crested pride a sting of

such deadly venom, number you among his victims?’³⁰ Extending the allusion to Milton’s Satan, Charles, now full of hatred, casts his brother as the serpent corrupting womankind. Charles may be referring to the venom of Arthur, but the venom apparent is that of Charles and the language he uses to represent his once beloved brother. The source of the animosity is shown when Charles refers to Arthur’s ‘victims’ of whom he was the first.

Charles is not the only sibling Arthur shows rivalry towards. In Charlotte’s *The Spell* Charles creates the fictional rival Valdacella, Arthur’s twin, and Branwell explores the rivalry between Arthur and his step-brother Quashia. He describes how Arthur ‘looked with most jealous eyes upon the indulgence of this prince of the blacks they hated one another’.³¹ Alexander states that ‘The story of Cain and Abel was to haunt Charlotte’s writing to the last.’³² Arthur’s inherent hatred of all of his brothers recalls the biblical Cain, the first son, destined to hate and destroy his younger brother. However, Charlotte and Branwell invert the story as Arthur (Cain) becomes King and Charles (Abel) is banished.

Strife and violence within sibling relationships was not uncommon and, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall explain, ‘The longevity and intensity of these relationships could also make conflict explosive when it came.’³³ Therefore the extremity of hate experienced by the brothers is a result of how much they once loved each other. The battle of the power dynamics in their relationship echoes the biblical influence of Cain and Abel whose jealousy and violence undermine their love. In Arthur’s response to Charles’s tale *The Green Dwarf* we see the extent to which their relationship has deteriorated:

³⁰ Charlotte Brontë, ‘High Life in Verdopolis, or The difficulties of annexing a suitable title to a work practically illustrated in Six Chapters. By Lord C A F Wellesley’, in *EWCB*, ed. by Christine Alexander, 3 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987-1991) II part 2 (1991), pp. 3-83, (p. 17).

³¹ Patrick Branwell Brontë, ‘Angria and the Angrians III (e)’, in *WPBB*, ed. by Victor A. Neufeldt, 3 vols, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997-1999; repr. Oxford: Routledge, 2015), II (1999), pp. 652-668, (p. 664).

³² Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1983), p. 219.

³³ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes – Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1997).

“What a little chalky spoon he looks! The whipping I bestowed on him has stuck to his small body right well. Hey, Charley, any soreness yet?”

“Fratricide!” said I. “How dare you speak thus lightly to your half-murdered brother? How dare you demand whether the tortures you have inflicted continue to writhe his agonized frame?” [...] let him offend me again as he has done, and I’ll hardly leave a strip of skin on his carcase.”³⁴

In Branwell’s piece we saw Arthur driven to extreme acts of heroism at the sight of violence committed on his brother. Now it is Arthur inflicting violence upon Charles. The language adopted by Arthur is used to belittle Charles and highlight his inferiorities. Arthur’s attractive physical appearance is a constant trope throughout the juvenilia, and there are numerous extensive descriptions of his beauty. Therefore, Arthur chooses to fixate on physical appearance in order to impose his superiority over his brother. He uses physical force by whipping Charles to cast himself as the Master and Charles as the serf. He describes him as ‘little’, ‘chalky’, ‘small’ to emphasize his physical inferiority. The violent nature of the language when Arthur refers to Charles’s body as a ‘carcase’ demonstrates the temper ‘beyond bounds’ which Charles had observed previously. Arthur not only belittles but also dehumanises Charles, seeing his brother as nothing but flesh for him to torture.

Despite the overwhelming, domineering nature of Arthur, Charles refuses to be belittled and, as he continues to do throughout the juvenilia, forces his brother to face the reality of his own darkness. Charles validates his worth by shouting ‘Fratricide!’ and ‘half-murdered brother’; he reminds Arthur of his rank and right as his brother. Arthur may try

³⁴ Charlotte Brontë, ‘The Green Dwarf – A Tale Of The Perfect Tense By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley’, in *EWCB*, II part 1, pp. 127-131, (p. 130).

to dehumanise him, but Charles continually reminds Arthur of his place as his brother. The repetition of 'How dare you' shows that Charles will not accept his brother's torture, he faces and challenges him. There is also the indication of distress as Charles attempts to protect his body by referring to himself in the third person and thus removing himself from the situation. The use of 'his' rather than 'my' shows Charles creating distance between his mind and the body which Arthur continues to mock and torment, thus enabling Charles to gain power from the situation. Arthur's continued dismissal and punishment of Charles is an attempt to control him. This is countered by Charles using his intelligence and skill as a writer to undermine his brother. This is the power struggle which defines the remainder of the relationship of the two brothers.

For the rest of the juvenilia Arthur and Charles rarely meet. Charles spends the rest of the Angrian saga avenging himself on the brother he once loved. Through his writing he exposes the corruption of Arthur to his people. In *The Spell*, Charles even creates a fictional twin in order to draw attention to Arthur's erratic behaviour: 'The Duke of Zamorna should not have excluded me from Wellesley House [...] Here I fling him my revenge, He will not like the morsel. [...] There are passages of truth here which will make him gnash his teeth with grating agony. [...] I tell you that your tyrant and your idol is mad!'³⁵ In the biblical depiction of Cain and Abel, it is Cain's physical strength which allows him to destroy his brother. However, Charlotte challenges this and portrays the power of the mind over the body. In the previous encounter, Arthur caused Charles physical pain and in revenge Charles aims to cause mental pain to his brother. Arthur may be superior physically, but Charles is superior mentally and it is through his skills as a writer that he can inflict pain on his brother and achieve the vengeance he desires. In his

³⁵ Charlotte Brontë, 'The Spell, An Extravaganza. By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley', in *EWCB*, II part 2, pp. 149-239, (p. 150).

creation of the fictional Valdacella, Charles is able to use the relationship of brothers to undermine Arthur. Charles demonstrates Arthur's inevitable hatred and jealousy towards his brothers through the sibling rivalry between Arthur and Valdacella. This in turn reveals his inherent cruelty and unstable mind.

Charles's exposure of Arthur predominantly features in Charlotte's juvenilia as Charles is Charlotte's central narrator. As Charlotte's narrator, Charles is able to exert power over his brother. This aspect is not explored as extensively in Branwell's work as he had his own narrators. Even so, the hatred and rivalry between the pair is featured in Branwell's piece 'Angria and the Angrians IV (g)':

You'll forgive me if I know them better than you. they are two mighty Humbugs – I could speak if I would but Ardrah says "I wore better not" little minds are always jealous and jealous ones are as often tyrannical. now theres not a more jealous and tyrannical person in Africa that the Duke of Zamorna. His self conceit is known to all and so would be known his want of Judgment only his freinds take care to bolster him up [.]³⁶

Charles immediately addresses his connection with his brother and the superiority of his relationship. Though they have had little to do with each other Charles is still adamant that his understanding of his brother is superior to any other. There is also a tone of resentment against Arthur's friends 'who take care to bolster him up'. There is certainly blame aimed at Arthur's friends who do not understand him, or care for him, as Charles did and thus they exacerbate the corruption in Arthur's soul.

³⁶ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Angria and the Angrians IV (g)', in *WPBB*, ed. by Victor A. Neufeldt, 3 vols, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997-1999; repr. Oxford: Routledge, 2015), III (1999), pp. 132-143, (p. 132).

In Charlotte's piece, Arthur describes Charles as 'little' with a 'small body' and now Branwell responds to this as Charles critiques the 'little minds' of Arthur and his politicians. Both Charlotte and Branwell are preoccupied with depicting sibling rivalry, and the battle between physical strength and mental strength which reveals that they were sympathetic to similar issues at this stage of their collaboration. Charles uses the word 'jealous' three times in rapid succession which brings the theme of sibling rivalry to the forefront. In the juvenilia, Arthur is the most powerful and attractive man in Angria and yet Charles continues to suggest his brother is jealous.

What began as an unbreakable sibling relationship is overcome by rivalry. Through Charles and Arthur, Charlotte and Branwell show the evolution of the sibling relationship as it progresses from the innocence of childhood to the complexity of maturity. The fraternal bond of the Wellesleys is complicated by romantic love and a struggle for power. Each brother uses his domineering characteristic to try to overpower his sibling. However, no matter how much supremacy Arthur gains, and his ever present physical dominance over his younger brother, Charles and his skill as a writer leave him as the one in control. He has the power to create and manipulate the portrayal, and subsequent opinion of the people, towards his brother. Through the depiction of Arthur and Charles, we can extract that Charlotte and Branwell shared similar interests at this stage of their collaboration. Though they explored these themes to different extents they both share an interest in the power of the mind over physical strength. Furthermore, though they both give precedence to the male voice through their narrators, in the character of Charles, Charlotte begins to break away from Branwell and experiment with a dominant feminised voice.

1.3 ‘Northangerland is his master’:³⁷ Zamorna and Northangerland

Rivalry dominates the remainder of Charlotte and Branwell’s juvenilia. Alexander, Lamonica and Gérin all endorse the notion that the central relationship, and rivalry of the juvenilia, is between the characters Zamorna and Northangerland. Alexander notes that in the development of these characters, ‘Brother and sister are now working hand in hand; each is the spokesman for his particular hero.’³⁸ Lamonica argues that it is through the characters of Zamorna and Northangerland that Charlotte and Branwell were able to enact their own internal rivalry with each other:

Writing in collaboration reinforced the Brontës’ sense of family solidarity but also offered a unique framework in which to carry out sibling rivalries. Within families generally, sibling rivalry is a method for establishing difference in the face of natural and nurtured similarities. The natural rivalry among the Brontë children was ultimately productive, resulting in a mass of creative fictions that comprise the most famous juvenilia in the English language.³⁹

The characters of Zamorna and Northangerland demonstrate the significant dynamic of Charlotte and Branwell’s partnership. We do not see one sibling successfully stating their dominance over the other. Certainly, there are disagreements and shifts of power, which I shall explore, but there is also a shared acceptance of the significance of each other and their Angrian hero. In chapter 2, I will explore Charlotte’s Roe Head journals which show how important her partnership with Branwell remained, and how his letters to her about Angria sustained her. The political and emotional partnership of the two characters allowed their creators to challenge each other and explore their own individual

³⁷ Charlotte Brontë, ‘The Scrap Book: Extracted from the last number of the *Northern Review*’, in *EWCB*, II part 2, pp. 312-315, (p. 313).

³⁸ Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 133.

³⁹ Lamonica, p. 39.

interests. Charlotte focuses on her preoccupation with the royal court and the scandals which occur, and Branwell gives his attention to war and politics. This shows an understanding of their partner's strengths. They allow each other to explore their own interests and develop individually whilst still collaborating on the central narrative. Though their characters are not siblings, the tempestuous relationship of their two protagonists allow Charlotte and Branwell to mentally spar with each other, to revel in their shared ideas and enact the gradual decline of their own relationship. Even so, as Lamonica notes, sibling rivalry is natural and assisted in the production of the majority of the juvenilia.

After being enemies for a number of years Zamorna (Douro) and Northangerland (Ellrington) join forces in Branwell's 'Historical Narrative of the War of Encroachment'. The campaign is continued in 'Historical Narrative of the War of Aggression' in which the incomparable dynamic of the partnership is instantly acknowledged: 'we all knew Lord Elrington. and with his. remorseless principals. bitter feelings and unbending energy. aided by the Admired Intellect. great influence. and. eager. spirits of. His freind. the Marquis Douro what might not the Army be capable off.'⁴⁰ Immediately, Branwell establishes the two themes which remain consistent in the portrayal of the partnership: their differences, and their unstoppable force when united. Throughout the evolution of the characters their differences are always highlighted: Northangerland is 'remorseless', 'bitter' and 'unbending', whereas Zamorna has 'Intellect', 'influence' and 'eager spirits'. Mirroring their creators, their differences allow them to compensate for the other's deficiencies and together they become whole.

⁴⁰ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Historical Narrative of the War of Aggression', in *WPBB*, I, pp. 406-446, (p. 422).

Such differences of character result in a tempestuous relationship that continually jumps between love and loathing. Both Charlotte and Branwell compose speeches for their heroes declaring their appreciation for the other. In Charlotte's 'High Life in Verdopolis' Zamorna proclaims:

'Our influence,' said he, 'that is my own and my father-in-law's, is unbounded. It pervades all ranks, circles, grades and degrees of society. We can introduce happiness or misery, peace or dissension alike into a private family or a public council. The power is great, even sublime, and, by heaven, I would share it with none if I could help it; but that great, vile, splendid, hateful, fiendish, angelic, black, bright, abominable, blessed scoundrel, that Northangerland, that illustriously infamous relative of mine, whom I abhor and yet admire, detest and yet love, that bundle of contradictions and yet that horribly consistent whole – he forsooth will share in the power and I cannot hinder him.'⁴¹

The entire speech is littered with contradictions as Zamorna emphasises the contradictory nature of Northangerland's character and their collaboration. The speech initially opens with a tone of unity in the use of 'Our' and 'We'. Zamorna portrays them as a partnership with 'unbounded' influence. Due to the differences in their character the combination enables them to encompass all possibilities. However, there is an indication of dissension on the part of Zamorna as he acknowledges his resentment at having to share control. There is no indication from Zamorna that without Northangerland the authority would be reduced, nor is there a sense of willingness on his part to share the power with his partner. Rather than peaceful unity there is a sense of begrudging acceptance. Zamorna reveals 'I

⁴¹ Charlotte Brontë, 'High Life in Verdopolis, or The difficulties of annexing a suitable title to a work practically illustrated in Six Chapters. By Lord C A F Wellesley', in *EWCB*, II part 2, pp. 3-83, (p. 33).

cannot hinder him', thus signifying the level of Northangerland's influence. With Northangerland, Zamorna becomes all powerful but against him he is weak.

Despite personal reservations, they are aware of the need for the partnership. In the language used to describe Northangerland, Zamorna's conflicted feelings are apparent: 'I abhor and yet admire, detest and yet love'. These contradictory emotions are consistent with Zamorna's feelings towards other partnerships he has experienced, particularly his relationship with Charles. Northangerland becomes Charles's replacement in the narrative, and he too experiences the intense love and hostility Charles is subjected to. In the case of Northangerland, the animosity is more understandable as the two had fought against each other in battle numerous times at this point. Nevertheless, Zamorna's inability to take advice from others results in the demise of his relationship with Northangerland, as it had done previously with his brother.

Branwell composes a similar speech for his hero in 'Angria and the Angrians I (b)' in which Northangerland proclaims the greatness of his partner:

Angrians I know that Arthur Wellesly poss[ess]ed an Intellect far farther above that of ordinary men than any I before had known his eager Alexander like Ambition his noble unveiled. energy and decision of character that youthful generous love of glory and. himself. and so free from cant and weakness that even my recoiled feelings were inspired [...] I felt a new youth when I thought of him and I exerted all my powers to AID him to add new glory to his crown and to stand [at] the right hand of my Noble King I cannot Angrians say God bless the Duke of Zamorna but I can say May all my wishes be crowned in him [.]⁴²

⁴² Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Angria and the Angrians I (b)', in *WPBB*, II, pp. 236-251, (p. 245).

Northangerland's approach is very different to Zamorna's. In the position of Prime Minister to Zamorna's King he is required to show some reverence to his superior partner. There is considerably less criticism; Northangerland's praise is not countered with denigration. Certainly, this is in part due to Northangerland's corrupt life which is very much deserving of denigration. However, it also implies Northangerland is not threatened by his partner in the way Zamorna is.

This reassurance is expressed when Northangerland declares, 'I believe you to be Sire the Greatest human being except myself [...] I know you Zamorna better than you know yourself.'⁴³ Similarly to Charles, Northangerland remains unthreatened by Zamorna despite Zamorna's apparent physical and political dominance in the partnership. The siblings continue to pursue their preoccupation with the power of the mind over physical strength which they explored in their depiction of Arthur and Charles. Northangerland proclaims Zamorna's greatness whilst still unashamedly stating his own perceived advantage. Lamonica states that, 'Northangerland becomes a singular force in shaping the character of Zamorna'.⁴⁴ Like Charles before him, Northangerland understands his partner, even the aspects Zamorna will not acknowledge himself. Therefore, Zamorna may have more political power, but Northangerland has superiority over him due to his understanding of his partner. The power of understanding gives Northangerland the power to control.

There is a less obvious indication of rivalry from Northangerland: Branwell's capitalisation of 'AID' emphasises the apparent aim of his hero. In his role of converted villain there is more need on the part of Northangerland to convince those listening to his speech. Referring to himself as 'the right hand of my Noble King' positions

⁴³ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Angria and the Angrians I (c)', in *WPBB*, II, pp. 252-277, (pp. 269-270).

⁴⁴ Lamonica, p. 47.

Northangerland in league with the King. He is able to state his power whilst simultaneously showing his subservience to Zamorna. Even so, there is an indication of rebellion in his final comment: 'I cannot Angrians say God bless the Duke of Zamorna but I can say May all my wishes be crowned in him'. This is potentially due to Northangerland's own rejection of God but it is still a reservation on his part, a sign that his loyalty to his partner is not unconditional.

In the depiction of their rivalry through the characters of Zamorna and Northangerland Charlotte and Branwell are not limited by gender restrictions. Through the selection of a male character Charlotte is able to stand as an equal to her brother's counterpart. Even so, the pair challenge gender norms further as it is actually Charlotte's character, not Branwell's, who is superior in their Angrian saga. In the collaborative dynamic of their partnership it appears their role as siblings, rather than their gender, may be more significant in determining their position in their community. In the writing community, Charlotte and Branwell were the dominant siblings, resulting in the departure of Emily and Anne. In the portrayal of Zamorna and Northangerland it appears that Charlotte's role as the oldest sibling entitled her to the leading figure in Angria. However, the number of times Northangerland betrays Zamorna suggests this was not always accepted by Branwell.

Replicating the demise of his relationship with his brother Charles, Zamorna once again allows his romantic liaison, and his refusal to accept advice from his partner, to result in the demise of his partnership with Northangerland. In Branwell's 'Angria and the Angrians II (g)' Northangerland is asked to help his estranged partner to which he exclaims:

Helped! and why should I help him? – he called himself my Son in Law – and in a few months as good as divorced my Daughter. he made me his Prime Minister and

then snatched the seals back from me he patronised every man whom I hated and hated every one whom I patronised He detested me and yet was consumed with Jealousy lest I should be inveigled by Ardrah or Quashia He is a D–ned fool a confounded Idiot – I have more occasion to detest him⁴⁵

Northangerland’s speech proclaims Zamorna’s betrayal. In a loveless life the only individuals Northangerland cares for are his daughters and his partner, Zamorna. To avenge Northangerland’s supposed betrayal, Zamorna estranges himself from his wife, who is so consumed with grief it leads to her death – until Charlotte resurrects her. Zamorna is more than aware of the impact the withdrawal of his affection can have as his previous wife, Marian Hume, also died of neglect. He uses this sadistic approach to hit Northangerland in his only source of weakness. By placing the betrayal of his daughter before his political betrayal the extent of Northangerland’s grief at the treatment of his daughter is apparent. Zamorna turns his love against him as the most potent weapon.

The death of Mary Percy is a significant moment in Charlotte and Branwell’s collaborative relationship as we see an event in their narrative affect their partnership. Branwell took it upon himself to kill off Mary whilst Charlotte was away at school and could not be consulted.⁴⁶ Upon her return, Charlotte subsequently overpowered Branwell’s decision and revived her heroine. In this moment we see the battle of power dynamics between the siblings. Charlotte demonstrates her dominance as she does not respond through events in the narrative but goes beyond this and changes them. She disregards her brother’s creative choices and enforces her own. It appears Branwell accepted Charlotte’s

⁴⁵ Patrick Branwell Brontë, ‘Angria and the Angrians II (g)’, in *WPBB*, II, pp. 533-560, (p. 550).

⁴⁶ ‘I wonder if Branwell has really killed the Duchess – Is she dead, is she buried is she alone in the cold earth on this dreary night with the ponderous gold coffin plate on her breast under the bleak pavement of a church in a vault closed up with lime mortar.’ – Charlotte Brontë, ‘Roe Head journal 3’, in *TA*, ed. by Heather Glen (London: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 456-457, (p. 456).

intervention as Mary remained alive in both of their works. In her response to her brother's challenge Charlotte shows signs of tension within the partnership. One of the factors Farrell puts forward which contribute to The Separation Stage in a collaborative group is that 'Difficulties in decision making may lead some members to act without group support.'⁴⁷ In his step to act without the agreement of Charlotte, Branwell dealt a dangerous blow to his collaborative partnership which subsequently hastened its demise.

Once again Zamorna betrays his partner when they dare to contradict him: 'he patronised every man whom I hated and hated every one whom I patronised'. Here we see Northangerland faced with the tyranny identified by Charles; Zamorna will only support those who do not question him. The theme of 'jealousy' returns: no matter how much Zamorna proclaims to 'detest' Northangerland he cannot bear the thought of not being able to control him, the way he did his brother. The hated step-brother Quashia returns to inflame Zamorna's jealousy, and to lure away his partner. Zamorna may have the power to control his female admirers, yet his male partners refuse to be manipulated in the same way.

When previously complimenting Zamorna, Northangerland praised 'an Intellect far farther above that of ordinary men' and yet now he declares he is 'a D–ned fool a confounded Idiot'. Like Charles before him, it is Zamorna's mental capacity which Northangerland brings under question. In a world which is mesmerised by his physical beauty, his partners are the only ones able to see beyond this and question the soul and mind within – both partners find them filled with corruption. Charles and Northangerland are both physically inferior to Zamorna due to age and life choices. In response to this inferiority, both use their elevated mental capacity in order to challenge Zamorna. Northangerland is not a narrator and thus does not wield the same control as Charles. Even

⁴⁷ Farrell, p. 25.

so, in his speeches, and role as Prime Minister, he is able to mould the public's opinion of their King.

In *Mina Laury*, Charlotte presents the emotional suffering Zamorna experiences at the loss of his alliance with Northangerland:

The alienation cost me much, for in two or three particular points his views and mine harmonized, and neither could hope to find a substitute for the other in the whole earth beside. However, though it was like tearing up something whose roots had taken deep hold in my very heart of hearts, the separation was made [.]⁴⁸

Significance is given to family as Zamorna refers to the 'roots' of his relationship. Roots would imply a family tree which Northangerland is at the heart of. However, the 'tearing up' suggests that even family is not invulnerable to destruction. In the confession the shift of tone is continuous; Zamorna's grasp on his emotions and his understanding of his relationship alter as he speaks. At first he acknowledges the extent of his loss but then confides that their minds only 'harmonized' on 'two or three' points. It is consistent with the characterisation of the two heroes that their immense differences prevent them from agreeing in all matters. The minute number offered by Zamorna may undercut the influence of his partner. Even so, the points they harmonised on are few, but they are of the utmost importance. In addition, the negative opinion towards Northangerland may explain Zamorna's attempt to distance himself whilst still acknowledging his debt. This distancing is then undermined by the emotional counter that there is no replacement for either of them. This is significant as Zamorna's wives and mistresses are easily replaceable. Northangerland cannot be replaced by anyone.

⁴⁸ Charlotte Brontë, 'Mina Laury', in *TA*, pp. 3-62, (p. 20).

The relinquishing of a once treasured partnership is portrayed with emotional acceptance by Charlotte. This is indicative of her own collaborative partnership. Farrell explains that in the demise of a collaborative group ‘Eventually, some members may conclude that the costs of working together outweigh the gains.’⁴⁹ In Zamorna’s confession it is clear to see how he has valued his partnership and, beyond their professional connection, the emotional bond is also present in his declaration that their relationship was rooted deep in his heart. Nevertheless, Charlotte portrays an acceptance of the need to sever ties with a partner who, though dearly loved and similar in so many ways, has become a burden and a hindrance to progress. Through Zamorna and Northangerland, and their irreplaceable bond, Charlotte and Branwell give their partnership precedence over the romantic relationships favoured by Charlotte, and the fealty of brotherhood in war preferred by Branwell. By the time Charlotte was writing her novellas it is clear to see a reserved acceptance of the need to end the partnership which had dictated her life and work.

An acceptance on the part of Charlotte that the collaborative partnership must come to an end was not necessarily shared by Branwell. It appears that in the final stages of the Angrian saga the siblings no longer conversed or collaborated on the overarching narrative of their work. There is no intentional conclusion to the Angrian writings regarding the overall narrative. However, in the final interactions between their literary counterparts Charlotte and Branwell leave their characters in very different positions regarding their relationship. In Branwell’s ‘Angria and the Angrians V (d)’ the mob are awaiting Northangerland and, in one final demonstration of love and unity, Zamorna comes to his aid:

⁴⁹ Farrell, p. 25.

“God Damn them!” he claimed with his most awful voice – “take my arm Percy and let them touch us who dare!” [...] when the mob beheld the Object of the Hate arm in Arm with their Hero they knew not what to do. They dared not hurl the stones they dared not press up the steps but they swayed with a sullen indecision and Zamorna and Percy walked calmly down the steps [.]⁵⁰

In the moment a need for apology and forgiveness is unnecessary, loyalty to others is ignored and it is the power of collaborative partnership which triumphs. In this moment it is the two partners against the world, but together they are united, and united they are unstoppable. It is significant that Zamorna states ‘let them touch us who dare’; once Northangerland takes his arm they become one being. In taking hold of his partner Zamorna also takes responsibility for him and his crimes, and is willing to suffer the repercussions of this.

Branwell ends by highlighting the difference between the two characters, as was consistent in both Charlotte and Branwell’s portrayal of the partnership. In this moment there is the demonstration that in times of crisis differences should be overlooked. In addition to this, it is their differences which protects them from attack. Zamorna is the ‘Hero’ and Northangerland is the ‘Object of the Hate’ and it is their union which results in the ‘sullen indecision’ which allows the two to escape. Branwell’s final statement is an acceptance of differences and a recommendation that such difference in a partnership creates balance.

Charlotte concludes the narrative of Angria’s two heroes with a very different tone. In her final novella, *Caroline Vernon*, Zamorna has seduced Northangerland’s younger

⁵⁰ Patrick Branwell Brontë, ‘Angria and the Angrians V (d)’, in *WPBB*, III, pp. 249-270, (p. 270).

daughter, Caroline, even though he is married to Northangerland's older daughter, Mary.

In the final moments we see Northangerland confront Zamorna:

Lord Northangerland snatched something from his breast. It was a pistol. He did not draw the trigger, but he dashed the butt end viciously at his son-in-law's mouth. In an instant, his lips were crimson with gore. [...] The last thing I had in the world is not to be yielded to you, you brutal, insatiable villain!" "Am I worse than you, Percy?" "Do you taunt me? You are worse. I never was a callous brute."⁵¹

At this stage of the juvenilia Zamorna is very much aware that the way to cause Northangerland pain is through his daughters, and yet he gives little thought for his father-in-law when he seduces his teenage daughter.

There is an indication of restraint on the part of Northangerland in that he hits his son-in-law with his pistol rather than shooting him. If his hatred for Zamorna was tantamount he could simply have killed him, or at least attempted to. His decision not to kill Zamorna suggests the ties of their partnership and a difficulty, on the part of Northangerland, to sever them. Once again it appears that, as previously proclaimed, Northangerland does know Zamorna better than he knows himself. In the action of hitting him in the mouth, Northangerland attempts to disable Zamorna as he is more than aware nothing else will prevent his seduction. Zamorna's power is in his appearance, therefore by striking him on the face he is disarmed.

With regard to the partnership of Branwell and Charlotte this silencing may hold further meaning. Scholl argues that 'The siblings' literary interaction reveals Charlotte's early assertion of her voice as equal to her brother's, and even the desire both to dominate

⁵¹ Charlotte Brontë, 'Caroline Vernon', in *TA*, pp. 323-440, (pp. 436-437).

his voice and be recognized by it.’⁵² Northangerland’s shattering of Zamorna’s jaw may represent a final attempt on the part of Branwell to silence his sister but, as the scene progresses, it is apparent this was not possible.

In his scene Branwell highlights the differences between the two characters, something Charlotte also frequently does, yet in this final moment she questions whether this long-held belief remains true. In Zamorna’s taunt, ‘Am I worse than you, Percy?’ the corruption of Angria’s once glorious hero is complete, and we see the final transformation as he becomes the villain that Northangerland once was. Conover observes that ‘Publicly, this pair is portrayed as antithetical and antagonistic, in continuous rivalry for political dominance of the Angrian kingdom. Privately, however, they operate as one another’s *doppelgänger*, illustrating obverse routes to the same increasingly demonic end.’⁵³ In Charlotte’s preoccupation with the private lives of her heroes she proposes that what were initially perceived as two antithetical characters have actually morphed into one being. This neglects Branwell’s notion of acknowledging and celebrating the differences in a partnership. Yet Branwell also recognises that together the pair unites to become one unconquerable entity.

In Charlotte’s final novella her characters are left as antagonists, rather than the united front portrayed by Branwell. However, in the acceptance that the once glorified hero Zamorna has now become as contemptible as the despised antagonist Northangerland there is a suggestion of unity, but a unity which corrupts. Charlotte demonstrates the danger of partnership with regard to influence. When there is corruption within a partnership it can spread to both members. Charlotte’s collaboration with Branwell was, reputedly, minimal by the stage she was composing her final novellas and the concluding note with which she

⁵² Scholl, p. 282.

⁵³ Conover, p. 25.

leaves her fictional partnership may indicate why. Certainly, Northangerland is not solely responsible for the corruption of Zamorna and, as is apparent in this scene, he frequently draws Zamorna's attention to his wrong doing. Nevertheless, whether intentional or not, in joining in partnership with Angria's antagonist an aspect of Zamorna's character emerges which overwhelms him. Branwell's juvenilia concludes with the acknowledgement of corruption within a partnership, but also the demonstration that loyalty to a partner should supersede this. Charlotte's view, on the other hand, is pessimistic as she concludes that partners will eventually corrupt and betray each other.

1.4 'Come, walk with me':⁵⁴ Emily, Anne and the isolation of Gondal

The writing community of the Brontës splintered off into partnerships after only a few years. The chapter up until this point has focused on the prolific partnership of Charlotte and Branwell, but Emily and Anne's collaborative relationship was also integral to the sisters' development as writers, and had greater longevity. Lamonica explains that:

By the beginning of 1831, Emily and Anne felt the need to devise another imaginative landscape in order to accommodate their differences, which led to the founding of Gondal. They set Gondal against Charlotte and Branwell's Angria [...] These distinctions suggest that Emily and Anne consciously sought to distinguish their imaginary world from that of their siblings.⁵⁵

Difference enabled Charlotte and Branwell to combat each other through their writing, but in the case of Emily and Anne it resulted in a need to pursue independence. Lamonica's use of 'against' and 'distinguish' puts forward the notion of a considered break, by Emily

⁵⁴ Emily Brontë, 'Come, walk with me', in *EBCP*, ed. by Janet Gezari (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 94-96, (p. 94).

⁵⁵ Lamonica, p. 42.

and Anne, from the writing community. By placing Gondal against Angria the sibling partnerships evolved from collaborators to competitors. However, Emily and Anne's poetry demonstrates the ramifications of the separation, and how the sisters came to process their new positions as partners rather than members in a larger writing community.

London argues that, due to their gender, Emily and Anne's partnership has been undervalued compared to Charlotte and Branwell's: 'Projected as two of a kind rather than two of a trade, female collaborators were, in fact, almost never represented as engaged in writing. Instead, they were compulsively represented as twin-like in their sameness, the doubled embodiment of feminine features.'⁵⁶ This notion of 'twin-like' beings is frequently associated with Emily and Anne. As a result of this, the focus is often on their bond as sisters rather than how their relationship affected their creative partnership. In addition to their gender, the tendency to undervalue the work of Anne results in a preoccupation with Emily, to the detriment of her literary partner. London notes the absence of Anne in Ratchford's *Gondal's Queen* (1955) which highlights its unreliability.⁵⁷ Despite Ratchford's work, no definite narrative of Gondal exists. Even so, the overarching themes of loss and isolation in their poetry, leading up to 1839, are notable and shall be the focal point of this section. I suggest that this motif relates to the process of Emily and Anne coming to terms with the altered dynamic of their writing community and, through their work, we see them develop their own identity as partners, separate from their elder siblings.

In Branwell's 'The Monthly Intelligencer March 27 1833' he presents his response to Emily and Anne's decision to branch off to form Gondal:

⁵⁶ London, p. 9.

⁵⁷ London, p. 56. London is referring to Fannie E. Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen – A novel in verse by Emily Jane Brontë* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955).

When a Parent leaves his children young and inexperienced. and without a cause absconds. never more troubling himself. about them those children according to received notions among men if they by good fortune should happen to survive. this neglect and b[e]come of repute in society are by no means bound. to believe that he has done his duty to them as a parent. merely because they have risen. nor are they indeed required to own or treat him as a parent. this is all very plain. and we believe that 4 of our readers will understand our aim in thus speaking [.]⁵⁸

There is clear accusation in Branwell's tone here, playful accusation but still an acknowledgement of betrayal. The 'children' he refers to are likely Ross and Parry – Anne and Emily's central characters in Glass Town. By making the characters the focus, rather than himself or Charlotte, it portrays their response to this betrayal as objective whilst still allowing them to be emotionally manipulative. Branwell mentions how the 'Parent' has left 'without a cause' which demonstrates his lack of understanding for their desire to seek independence. In addition, his rejection of any reason they may offer reinforces their need for separation as their words are ignored. The representation of Emily and Anne as parents who have abandoned their children emphasises the level of betrayal. It also shows the degree of importance Branwell, and likely the sisters, gave to their creative work.

Ross and Parry continue to appear in Charlotte and Branwell's juvenilia after Emily and Anne left to create Gondal. It is likely the source of this piece from Branwell stems from his and Charlotte's continued use of these characters. After the initial accusations of neglect, the rest of the extract is fixated on the development of the 'children' after their abandonment. We do not know if Ross and Parry played a role in Gondal. However, Branwell's comment that 'never more troubling himself. about them' implies that Gondal

⁵⁸ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'The Monthly Intelligencer', in *WPBB*, I, p. 250.

features a new cast and Ross and Parry remain in Glass Town. Branwell's comment that should they 'b[e]come of repute in society are by no means bound. to believe that he has done his duty to them as a parent' suggests that he and Charlotte have taken ownership of the characters and any further developments have nothing to do with their creators. We see Branwell taking full creative control away from his younger sisters and finalising their separation from the writing community.

Whether this complete separation was Emily and Anne's intention we cannot know, but the impact of separation and isolation from their siblings is apparent in their early Gondal poetry. The theme of parting is central. In Anne's poem 'Alexander and Zenobia' Alexander muses:

'And shall we never meet again,

Hearts that have grown together?

Must they at once be rent away

And kept apart for ever?'

'Yes, Alexander, we must part,

But we may meet again' (69-74).⁵⁹

The relationship of the pair is not apparent; the mention that their hearts have 'grown together' could indicate a sibling relationship, though the tone of the whole poem appears to propose a romantic partnership. Even so, drawing on the poetical inspiration of Shelley and Byron, a romantic tone to represent a sibling bond is possible. Furthermore, the imagery is very reminiscent of Charlotte's language when depicting the demise of

⁵⁹ Anne Brontë, 'Alexander and Zenobia', in *PAB*, ed. by Edward Chitham (London & Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1979), pp. 52-59, (p. 54).

Zamorna and Northangerland's relationship. As such, it could be that Anne and Charlotte are both responding to the symbolic roots of a family tree, and the pain of severing family ties.

On the part of Alexander the separation appears forced, the use of 'rent away / And kept apart' shows an intervention of some sort. It is clear the parting of the two is not done willingly, and in order for it to be enacted they need to be forced apart. The use of question marks shows that for Alexander, the one who is leaving, there is still uncertainty.

Alexander has not accepted that their parting is inevitable nor imperative. However, the questions are posed to Zenobia. Zenobia, the one who is left, is given the power to decide.

Similarly to the separation of the writing community, it is the female sibling who takes control. Zenobia's response is calm and assured as opposed to the passionate pleading of Alexander. There are no questions; she enforces the imperative tone in her statement 'we must part' which Alexander resists. In her position of power she is able to offer the prospect of hope. However, the tone of certainty is abandoned as she replaces 'must' with 'may', indicating that the offer of hope may simply be a tool to placate. As the poem progresses, Zenobia's uncertainty of their reunion continues to be explored:

'He will not come! I might have known

It was a foolish hope;

But it was so sweet to cherish

I could not yield it up' (203-206).⁶⁰

The use of the exclamation mark demonstrates Zenobia's pain as she relinquishes the hope she established for the pair. Though the tragedy of parting is a theme which dominates the Gondal poetry of Anne and Emily, here Anne considers an alternative to

⁶⁰ Anne Brontë, 'Alexander and Zenobia', in *PAB*, p. 57.

grief. Though Zenobia's hope was 'foolish' she confides that 'it was so sweet to cherish'. Most of the poem depicts the bittersweet time Zenobia spends waiting for Alexander. Therefore, though parting is an inevitability, the love left behind, and the hope of reunion, is enough to sustain. This foreshadows the relationship of Helen and Gilbert in Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Unable to be with Gilbert whilst her first husband survives, Helen sustains herself with the hope and memory of her love for Gilbert, not knowing if they will ever be reunited.

The imagery of dungeons and prisoners is a common trope adopted by both sisters to convey the pain and isolation of parting. By using a dungeon, the sisters present the permanence of separation, but also an outside influence which endeavours to destroy families. In Anne's poem 'A Voice from the Dungeon' the poetic voice bewails:

Long have I dwelt forgotten here
In pining woe and dull despair;
This place of solitude and gloom
Must be my dungeon and my tomb.

No hope, no pleasure can I find;
I am grown weary of my mind;
Often in balmy sleep I try
To gain a rest from misery (5-12).⁶¹

In this poem, Anne raises a new topic regarding separation – the risk of being 'forgotten'. Anne demonstrates a fear that when a family member leaves the family unit a bond has been severed, and to leave is to symbolically die.

⁶¹ Anne Brontë, 'A Voice from the Dungeon', in *PAB*, pp. 60-61, (p. 60).

This notion of emotional death is continued in the description of the dungeon as a tomb. With no one to love or remember the individual she has become a ghost. Following the splintering of the community, Anne thoroughly explores the feelings of loss and the ramifications in her dramatisation. The prisoner awakes from a dream to find, 'The father and the child are gone, / And I must live and die alone.' (53-54) ⁶² It is unclear whether the family members are gone because the prisoner has awoken, or because they are dead. The loss of the family due to death further enforces the prisoner's fear of being 'forgotten' as no one now lives to remember her. The prisoner describes her cell as a tomb and her final thought is to 'die alone'. Without a family to live for, and to be faced with the eternal separation of death, the character longs for her death. Only in heaven can she be free and reunited with her family.

The loss of family also explains the absence of hope in the poem. In Anne's previous poem her characters also faced permanent separation, but relief was found in hope. However, in this poem there is 'No hope, no pleasure'. The description of 'dull despair' presents a pain that is so sustained and persistent that the potency is no longer unbearable. With no family to return to there is no longer the need for hope, the despair remains only for her. Her 'pining woe' is in a state of decline. With her lack of hope she has nothing more to long for, only death.

In her poem 'The Captive's Dream', Anne continues with her theme of prisoners and separation. Her heroine dreams she sees her love and wishes she could tell him where she is so he can rescue her. Upon awaking from her dream she bewails the sorrow of her imprisonment and the pain it causes for those she loves. There is no indication as to why the speaker is imprisoned. It is the effect on the relationship which is the focus. In this

⁶² Anne Brontë, 'A Voice from the Dungeon', in *PAB*, p. 61.

poem Anne presents an alternative to her previous work as she dramatises the response of a prisoner isolated from a partner:

O how I longed to clasp him to my heart,
Or but to hold his trembling hand in mine,
And speak one word of comfort to his mind,
I struggled wildly but it was in vain,
I could not rise from my dark dungeon floor,
And the dear name I vainly strove to speak,
Died in a voiceless whisper on my tongue
[...]
A dream? Alas it was reality!
For well I know wherever he may be
He mourns me thus – O heaven I could bear
My deadly fate with calmness if there were
No kindred hearts to bleed and break for me! (15-27).⁶³

The reserved, despairing voice of the previous poem is replaced by passion and longing. The preoccupation of the prisoner is with her partner rather than herself, and it is the partner's well-being which dominates the heart of the poem. There is emphasis on the loss of physicality caused by separation. The prisoner longs to 'clasp', 'hold', 'comfort' her partner. This demonstrates a deeper form of connection in which the partners may be physically separated but, despite imprisonment, emotionally they remain connected. Their shared mental and emotional connection is further enforced with the certainty in the claim 'I know wherever he may be / He mourns me thus'. There are no doubts in the declarations

⁶³ Anne Brontë, 'The Captive's Dream', in *PAB*, p. 62.

of this prisoner: she does not fear to be forgotten, she knows her lover lives on, and she is certain of their bond.

In 'A Voice from the Dungeon', the loss of a partner and a child result in a 'dull despair' and reserved acceptance of death. However, in this poem the existence of the partner is the source of distress, and hope becomes a weapon used against the captive. She confides 'I could bear / My deadly fate with calmness if there were / No kindred hearts to bleed and break for me!' In this declaration we see how the power of partnership imbues an individual with the desire to live, to fight. However, it also intensifies pain, as death is no longer of consequence solely for the captive but also for her partner. This foreshadows the grief experienced by Heathcliff; the death of a partner results in the emotional death of the other.

There is also a more active response to the separation than in the previous two poems. Zenobia and the prisoner accept their fates and either succumbs to despair or relies on hope. However, in this poem the captive 'struggled wildly' upon thinking about her partner. The desire to regain the physical connection with her lover results in an extreme reaction to overcome their separation. In keeping with the theme of physicality it is not the captive's will which prevents her escape, but her body as she reveals 'I could not rise'. This may be an indication that she is chained, or she may have been wounded in battle, but even against such physical impairments she is still willing to struggle.

Emily builds upon Anne's fixation with parting and grief in her poetry through her experimentation with the theme of death. In the three Gondal poems I will explore, death is the principal factor in Emily's consideration of the demise of families, specifically sibling relationships. In her poem 'O mother I am not regretting' we see the separation of siblings and the oncoming death which follows this:

O mother I am not regretting

To leave this wretched world below

If there be nothing but forgetting

In that dark land to which I go

Yet though 'tis wretched now to languish

Deceived and tired and hopeless here

No heart can quite repress the anguish

Of leaving things that once were dear

[...]

Ten years ago in last September

Fernando left his home and you

And still I think you must remember

The anguish of that last adieu

[...]

And there I stood where he had left me

With ashy cheek but tearless eye

Watching the ship whose sail bereft me

Of life and hope and peace and joy

It is past that night I sought a pillow

Of sleepless woe and grieving lone

My soul still hovered o'er the billow

And mourned a love for ever flown (1-8, 37-40, 53-60).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Emily Brontë, 'O mother I am not regretting', in *EBCP*, pp. 60-61, (pp. 60-61). In poems which have no title the first line has been used as an alternative.

Similarly to Anne's poem, 'A Voice from the Dungeon', the speaker is resigned to death. However, in Anne's poem the prisoner fears being forgotten whereas here it is 'forgetting' which is pursued. Death is portrayed as the release from emotional ties which bind the speaker to the earth. Where hope kept Zenobia alive in Anne's poem, here it only prolongs pain. The speaker describes themselves as 'Deceived', 'tired' and 'hopeless'. Without hope to alleviate the pain the separation remains potent and such pain is exhausting. It appears that the deceiver is life and it is the realisation of this deception, that Fernando will not return, which has destroyed the speaker's hope. Yet, even though death is accepted there is the acknowledgement of 'anguish'. As in Anne's poem 'The Captive's Dream', the existence of a separated partner makes death an enemy as well as an ally.

In 'Alexander and Zenobia', though Zenobia is the one being left she is granted the power in the relationship. She has the ability to enforce that Alexander does leave, in spite of her personal feelings. The language in Emily's poem makes her character passive, the focus is turned away from Fernando leaving and towards the speaker being left. The description that 'I stood where he had left me' presents the speaker as the victim, and emphasises not just that he has left but specifically that he has left her. However, there is an indication of an attempt to regain control in her 'tearless eye'. In a situation where she has no power the only agency she can exert is over herself. This is a topic which Charlotte and Emily later explore in their novels through the depictions of Jane, Caroline and Cathy. Consistently the Brontë heroines exert, frequently damaging, control over their bodies as a way of achieving some form of agency when faced with a situation they cannot control.

The sheer importance of siblings, and what they provide for one another, is made apparent here. The speaker lists what she lost when Fernando left her: 'life and hope and peace and joy'. The repetitive use of 'and', rather than commas, gives each word emphasis

and builds the scale of the speaker's loss. To lose a partner is not only to lose happiness but also your life and the offer of peace. This level of connection between siblings is very reminiscent of Cathy and Heathcliff. Through this poem we see how the significance of sibling relationships, and the ramifications of their loss, was an integral theme for Emily nearly a decade before the composition of *Wuthering Heights*.

In Emily's poem 'From our evening fireside now', we see her interact with the theme of brotherhood during conflict. This is also a common theme in Branwell's juvenilia. Earlier in the chapter, I explored Charlotte and Branwell's representation of the threat of sibling loss during warfare in their portrayals of Charles and Arthur. However, whereas in Charlotte and Branwell's work the brothers survive, Emily depicts the death of a brother:

'One is absent, and for one
Cheerless, chill is our hearthstone –
One is absent, and for him
Cheeks are pale and eyes are dim –

Arthur, brother, Gondal's shore
Rested from the battle's roar –
Arthur, brother, we returned
Back to Desmond lost mourned:

Thou didst purchase by thy fall
Home for us and peace for all;
Yet, how darkly dawned that day –

Dreadful was the price to pay!' (17-28).⁶⁵

Here Emily explores the ramifications of a sibling separation that has taken place to protect the family. In this poem, we see Emily explore the notion of the family placed in conflict against the sibling partnership. Farrell explains that in creative partnerships, 'When two minds are linked in a trusting relationship, such that they can openly share ideas and cognitive processes, the likelihood of discovering new solutions to problems increases.'⁶⁶ Emily is able to process the feelings of isolation but also suggest an alternative approach in which the power of a partner is glorified through her partnership with Anne. The poem highlights the good that has been achieved due to Arthur's death, 'Thou didst purchase by thy fall / Home for us and peace for all'. The 'Home' is used as a representation of the family, and it is for this that Arthur has sacrificed himself. However, Arthur's sacrifice does not bring unity. The home is described as 'Cheerless' and 'chill'. Arthur's death is used to protect and ensure the family survived, but ironically it leads to its demise. Unable to cope with the loss of Arthur, the home and the family unit ceases to function.

There is a recurrent theme of the cost of life, the value of an individual. The language used to signify Arthur's sacrifice is centred on material transactions. Arthur's death is used like money to 'purchase' his home and peace; they are not gained or earned, they are bought. This imbues Arthur's death with agency; it is an intentional sacrifice, an exchange of goods, rather than solely loss. Even though the poem proclaims 'Dreadful was the price to pay!' it gives meaning and value to death. Arthur becomes a martyr for his family.

⁶⁵ Emily Brontë, 'From our evening fireside now', in *EBCP*, pp. 94-96, (p. 95).

⁶⁶ Farrell, p. 23.

Death and the impact it has on sibling relationships remains the central theme in Emily's poem 'Come, walk with me'. However, she evolves her theme to consider the positive aspects which need to emerge out of these sites of separation:

'Come walk with me, come walk with me;
We were not once so few
But Death has stolen our company
As sunshine steals the dew –
He took them one by one and we
Are left the only two;
So closer would my feelings twine
Because they have no stay but thine –' (14-21).⁶⁷

The overall tone of the poem is not one of sadness but of childlike joy. The repeated request, 'Come walk with me' shows a shared activity and the desire to spend time and energy with each other. It also suggests the need to have a partner in life's journey. Emily portrays partnership as the remedy for the pain of loss due to the influence of her collaborative pairing with Anne. By walking together they face the world as partners, rather than alone. However, the shadow of death is ever present.

Consistently within Emily's poetry death is the source of separation. Nevertheless, the representation of death here does not portray the extent of tragedy seen in the previous two poems. Certainly, there is anger and resentment towards 'Death' in the use of 'stolen' which reveals that the deaths of their siblings were sudden and unexpected. Death has had to enter the family home like a thief to carry away their siblings as they would not willingly give them up. However, by comparing their deaths to how 'sunshine steals the

⁶⁷ Emily Brontë, 'Come, walk with me', in *EBCP*, p. 119.

dew' it gives a sense of nature's inevitable course. Emily demonstrates awareness of the unavoidable deterioration and, at times, permanent loss of sibling relationships in life and in their creative community. At this point Emily, alongside Anne, had rebelled against the established community and witnessed her older siblings go through *The Separation Stage* of their creative partnership. As a witness to this loss, Emily praises her own partnership.

Unlike the previous two poems, the focus is not on loss but the close bond which has grown between the two remaining siblings. The speaker reveals, 'So closer would my feelings twine / Because they have no stay but thine'. The speaker draws our attention to the good which has emerged rather than express the grief experienced by the loss of their other siblings. The intensity of their bond is credited to the absence of their siblings. With regards to a commentary on the literary partnerships this may indicate that by fracturing the writing community it enabled closer bonds to form; this in turn resulted in the creativity which spawned the juvenilia. In choosing to leave the writing community and forge their own partnership Emily and Anne were able to obtain creative control. However, the sense of isolation and the ramifications of separation haunt their Gondal work.

1.5 Conclusion

The collaboration of the Brontë siblings in the composition of their juvenilia dictated the rest of their lives as writers. The importance of family and partnership, and the isolation experienced when ostracised from these, echo down to their adult work. Mintz sheds some light on the intellectual stimulus siblings could find with each other – 'The pattern of education prevailing in certain Victorian homes buttressed sibling attachments. For children who received the bulk of their early education at home, their primary intellectual and emotional outlets might be found among brothers and sisters.'⁶⁸ In educating his

⁶⁸ Mintz, pp. 149-150.

children at home in their early years Revd Patrick Brontë established a community amongst his children. This community enabled them to have their first literary partners, their first readers and their first critics. Lamonica argues that ‘The desire of each sibling to outmaneuver the other allowed both to find distinct literary voices and styles and to distinguish themselves as writers.’⁶⁹ Therefore, by learning to write together, to write for each other, and against each other the Brontës were able to discover and establish their own individuality within their community.

By exploring Charlotte and Branwell’s juvenilia, I have shown how significant the sibling partnership was to the early development of their fictional world. Through the evolving relationship of Arthur and Charles we can see both Charlotte and Branwell exploring the sibling bond – the all-encompassing love and the devastating betrayal. Maurianne Adams argues that ‘The Branwell-Charlotte sagas, therefore, show more of the inter-relation of brother and sister than of the later support network among the three sisters’.⁷⁰ The evidence in this chapter supports this claim; Charlotte considers the roles of brothers in all of her novels but never as extensively as she does in her juvenilia with Branwell. Nor does she replicate the rivalry and unity of two demagogues like Zamorna and Northangerland. Through the course of writing their juvenilia, Charlotte and Branwell evolved through all but one of the stages of development put forward by Farrell. Though, as Farrell suggests, their separation was inevitable, and a part of the development of a collaborative circle. Once his collaboration with Charlotte was over, Branwell never again collaborated within the writing community of his family, and his isolation from this is apparent in his letters and poetry.

⁶⁹ Lamonica, p. 46.

⁷⁰ Maurianne Adams, ‘Family Disintegration and Creative Reintegration: The Case of Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*’, in *The Victorian Family – Structure and Stresses*, ed. by Anthony S. Wohl (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 148-179 (p. 151).

In choosing to leave the world ruled by their elder siblings, to create Gondal, Emily and Anne achieved creative control over their work. Nevertheless, they were also faced with the implications of breaking away from the writing community of their siblings. The themes of separation and isolation dominate the early Gondal poetry as a result of this. They each explore the consequences of parting within partnerships and families, and the ramification of these. However, it also establishes a central theme which dominates the rest of their creative work – the intense bond of partnership, particularly between siblings. In forming their own partnership, the longest collaboration within the Brontë community, Emily and Anne were able to develop and establish the central core of their work. In addition, it is clear to see that working together did not limit their individuality, rather it enhanced it.

The quality of the juvenilia, naturally, may not compare to the Brontës' later works but the significance of their writing at this stage cannot be overlooked. Conover argues that 'The siblings' extraordinary interdependence contributed crucially to their later work and helped prompt their mutual artistic maturation. Each brought particular strengths to the collaboration which, in time, enhanced one another's writing, rather than diminished it'.⁷¹ It is within the juvenilia that we have the most extensive examples of the siblings working and writing together. By approaching their work critically, as well as biographically, we are able to explore how each sibling imaginatively experimented with the notions of power dynamics which were intrinsic to their writing community. This chapter has shown the Brontës' preoccupation with the intense bond of siblings but also the ramifications, and isolation experienced once these bonds were broken. Through their collaborations they were able to develop as writers, whilst also using their writing as a method to explore their own feelings regarding their sibling relationships.

⁷¹ Conover, p. 17.

**Chapter Two: ‘we hope he will be better and do better in future’:¹ The creative
manipulation of reality**

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the dynamics of the writing community of the Brontë siblings through a close analysis of their life writing. Their letters and diary papers have been invaluable tools to numerous biographers, but they have very rarely been considered as literary texts in their own right. It is through literary analysis of these sources that we are able to move beyond the biographical information provided, and further our understanding of the Brontës as writers. I will demonstrate through a close analysis of a selection of letters, diary entries and essays by the Brontë siblings, how the Brontës fashioned their sense of community. Due to the time period covered in this chapter the texts move beyond the rivalry and isolation displayed in the previous chapter. They capture the importance of the partnerships formed by the juvenilia, particularly for Emily and Anne, but they also chronicle the tensions which underlie a common purpose. Each sibling can be seen seeking independence of voice in their life writing.

Moreover, it is necessary to study these pieces of writing alongside the Brontës’ creative work because it is within their letters, diaries and essays that we see the siblings begin to adopt tropes they use in their fictional prose works. Each sibling can be seen testing new writing styles in their pursuit of independence, whilst continuing to acknowledge the debt to their community. Charlotte and Emily, in their life writing, experiment with the boundaries between personal reflection and fantasy, a technique which make their novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* so compelling. Anne moved away

¹ Anne Brontë, ‘Diary paper 31st July 1845’, in *BLL*, ed. by Juliet Barker (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 132-133, (p. 132).

from the fantastical elements of the writing community and towards the realist style which define her novels. In Branwell's case, he abandons his family's writing community and attempts to establish a separate writing partnership with his friend J. B. Leyland - only to lose himself within the creative persona he fashioned.

In Farrell's consideration of collaborative circles he relies on letters and diaries as sources of biographical evidence rather than locations of collaboration. However, I will show that in order to assess the family as writers it is essential to consider all available aspects of their writing. Charlotte's letters have received the most focus with recent essays by Sharon Connor and Steven Earnshaw, but little attention has been paid critically to the letters of Branwell, Emily and Anne.² Simon Marsden, one of the few to critically explore Emily's diaries, comments that they have suffered 'almost total neglect from literary critics'.³ Myra Curtis and Augustin Trapenard suggest that the lack of scholarly attention is due to the negative implications they will have for the reputations of Charlotte and Emily.⁴ With regard to the Belgian essays Sue Lonoff, editor of the standard scholarly edition, comments that 'This material remains little known and less examined...Perhaps because, as literature, they seem so insignificant, so foreign to the Brontës' English writings.'⁵ However, I show that the essays hold immense significance, particularly in the case of Emily. It should not be overlooked that, alongside *Wuthering Heights*, these are the only other example of creative prose writing we have from Emily. Lonoff has continued to write about the Belgian essays and the role of Constantin Heger, but any other study remains

² Sharon Connor, 'Loneness' in the Letters of Charlotte Brontë', *Brontë Studies*, 33.2 (2008), 91-96. Steven Earnshaw, 'Charlotte Brontë's Fictional Epistles', *Brontë Studies*, 40.3 (2015), 201-214.

³ Simon Marsden, 'Imagination, Materiality and the Act of Writing in Emily Brontë's Diary Papers', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 28.1 (2006), 35-47, (p. 36).

⁴ Myra Curtis, 'Charlotte Brontë in her Letters', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 13.5 (1960), 411-424. Augustin Trapenard, 'Auctorial (Im)Postures in Emily Brontë's Diary Paper', *Brontë Studies*, 34.2 (2009), 93-106.

⁵ Sue Lonoff, 'Preface', in Charlotte Brontë & Emily Brontë, *BE*, ed. & trans. by Sue Lonoff (London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. xii-xvii, (p. xiii).

biographical.⁶ The focus is the Brontës' time in Brussels, rather than the work which they produced.⁷ However, in order to establish how the Brontës expressed a sense of community a close analysis of these texts is required. They may appear as individual compositions, and thus separate from purposeful collaboration, but in actuality the majority were still, to varying degrees, composed communally.

The life writing of the Brontës, which we know to exist, include: hundreds of letters from Charlotte, a small collection from Branwell, and less than ten from Emily and Anne. With such variations in quantity, I have chosen to explore letters from each sibling that were written around the same period and to a similar recipient – a friend – in order to retain as much consistency as possible. There are two joint diary papers from Emily and Anne – as well as two individual papers from each – five from Charlotte, and none from Branwell. In the case of Charlotte, I only focus on the life writing aspect of her entries and not the creative Angria sections. Charlotte and Emily were the only siblings to attend the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. There are thirty *devoirs* in total, less than a third of which are assigned to Emily; the rest are Charlotte's due to her lengthier stay. However, I am only concerned with the *devoirs* which were composed whilst the sisters were together.

The form of these works encourage biographical, rather than literary, readings. Rebecca Earle explains that it was the nature of the genre: 'Personal or familiar letters have long been viewed, along with diaries and other forms of autobiographical writing, as a means of self-expression.'⁸ Therefore, the self becomes the dominant feature. However, this is a self which the Brontës construct on the page. All the Brontës can be seen fashioning an identity for themselves in their letters and diaries when these sources are

⁶ Sue Lonoff, 'The Three Faces of Constantin Heger', *Brontë Studies*, 36.1 (2011), 28-37. Sue Lonoff, 'The Mystery Behind the History of the Brontë-Heger Letters', *Brontë Studies*, 38.1 (2013), 1-7.

⁷ See Helen MacEwan, *The Brontës in Brussels* (London: Peter Owen, 2014) and Helen MacEwan, *Down the Belliard Steps: Discovering the Brontës in Brussels* (Brussels: Brussels Brontë Editions, 2012).

⁸ Rebecca Earle, 'Introduction: letters, writers and the historian', in *Epistolary Selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945*, ed. by Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), (pp. 1-12), p. 2.

analysed. This manipulation of their own identities is a result of their experimentation with style as they blur the boundaries between reality and fiction.

It is important to consider the Brontës' works in relation to the form of writing they adopt to understand the literary value of these compositions. Anne-Marie Millim explains that there were so many variations in form, with regards to letters and diaries, that they became very individual pieces:

While spontaneity and emotional candour are often seen as the fundamental characteristics of the diary genre, the extent of self-disclosure and the elaborateness of style vary enormously from one diaristic text to another. Despite a general tendency to monitor the intensity of the emotions displayed in the diary, the emotional management that diarists execute in and through their diaristic writing varies according to individual conceptions of privacy.⁹

The variation of what Millim terms 'emotional management' suggests the need to look at the diaries of the three sisters analytically to assess how they each stylistically employ the diary form. With regard to the epistolary form, Janet Gurkin Altman comments: 'In numerous instances the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed'.¹⁰ Therefore, formal and stylistic constructions must be considered as it is not only an indication of the individuality of the writer, but it is also integral to the meaning. These forms of writing are also particularly significant to my exploration of community. Emily C. Bruce proposes that letter writing was often a communal activity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'Sibling collaboration

⁹ Anne-Marie Millim, *The Victorian Diary – Authorship and Emotional Labour* (Luxembourg: University of Luxembourg, 2013), p. 9.

¹⁰ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 4.

was a common aspect of education in correspondence, again grounding the genre in social interaction'.¹¹ With an established communal aspect to the genre, these texts are invaluable to my investigation of the writing community of the family and its altering dynamics.

The importance of life writing to the Brontës is apparent in their works of fiction. There they conceive of life writing as a tool for narrative construction, and also as a method of accessing the thoughts and emotions of characters. Rebecca Steinitz remarks, 'It is self-evident, if soon forgettable, that *Wuthering Heights* opens as a diary'; 'Lockwood's diary can be seen as the most literally material aspect of *Wuthering Heights*. Housing the narrative, his diary becomes the book itself, the cover we hold, the pages we turn as we read.'¹² Emily's experimentation with the diary form may have only been minor but was clearly significant. Lockwood's is not the only diary described; our first access to Cathy is through her diary. Both Emily and Anne use the diary form to bring past events and characters to the forefront of their narratives. Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is similarly framed. Neil Hayward Cocks explains: 'the narrative is dependent on an extended exchange, of diaries, books and letters, with the whole framed by Gilbert's letter to Halford'.¹³ Helen's diary is the central piece of the narrative, and the method through which Anne allows the reader to access her heroine's emotions.

Charlotte's novels differ somewhat from her sisters' when it comes to the framing of her narrative. *Jane Eyre* was originally presented as an extended work of life writing, with Currer Bell as the editor rather than the author. This method is also adopted by Anne for her first novel, *Agnes Grey* (1847). The structural aspects of the form are less apparent, but it allows for a more personal relationship between the reader and the protagonist.

¹¹ Emily C. Bruce, 'Each word shows how you love me': The social literacy practice of children's letter writing (1780-1860)', *Paedagogica Historica*, 50.3 (2014), 247-264, pp. 256-257.

¹² Rebecca Steinitz, 'Diaries and Displacement in *Wuthering Heights*', *Studies in the Novel*, 32.4 (2000), 407-419, (p. 407 & 416).

¹³ Neil Hayward Cocks, 'The child and the letter: Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Textual Practice*, 27.7 (2013), 1125-1147, (p. 1136).

Earnshaw observes that ‘Charlotte does not write an epistolary novel, as her sister Anne does with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but she is certainly interested in the potential letters offer as a form of writing’.¹⁴ The narrative of *The Professor* is framed with letters, and Charlotte clearly depicts the social and emotional importance of letters in *Villette* (1853). The process of writing the *devoirs* also resonates through Charlotte’s novels. Lonoff notes that Lucy Snowe and Frances Henri each produce *devoirs* which their love interest reads. *Shirley* (1849) also contains the *devoir* ‘The First Blue-Stocking’ that Louis Moore reads to Shirley – which relates to Heger reading the works out loud to Charlotte and Emily.¹⁵

As life writing plays such an integral role in the novels of the Brontë sisters, I believe it is necessary to critically explore their own life writing in order to access and determine the site of development for their later fiction. Furthermore, they demonstrate multiple literary techniques such as: the use of creative personas, and the experimentation with personal reflection and fantasy which reveal that the Brontës used their letters, diaries and essays to develop as writers. By using these texts not only biographically but also critically, we are able to see how the Brontës fashioned an image of community consistently throughout all their work, whilst striving for independence.

2.2 ‘all unite in sending their kind love’:¹⁶ Personas and collective voices in the Brontë letters

Due to the insular nature of the Brontë siblings’ community their writing was, at times, used as barrier against others. Initially their writing united the four siblings, but did not include their father. As the group splintered into partnerships their writing segregated the siblings from each other. It appears, from the self-fashioning and personas adopted by all

¹⁴ Earnshaw, p. 201.

¹⁵ Sue Lonoff, ‘Introduction’, *BE*, xxi-lxxvi, (pp. lxxiv-lxxv).

¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë to Reverend Patrick Brontë, ‘23rd September 1829’, in *LCB*, ed. by Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995-2004), I (1995), p. 105.

the Brontë siblings in their epistolary compositions, that they used their writing to maintain a barrier between their true identity and their recipient, even when the recipient is a trusted friend. As a result of this the sisters frequently adopt a communal voice in the role of spokesperson; the family is the central feature of the letter rather than the individual. The sisters write on behalf of the family, rather than solely for themselves. For this study I have selected a single letter from each sister composed between 1845-1847 to the same recipient – Ellen Nussey. This first letter was written by Charlotte and dated 27th June 1845. This is clearly one in a series of letters between Charlotte and Ellen in which the pair are trying to arrange a visit. Even in this personal letter to her friend, Charlotte still gives precedence to her family:

I have told Emily and Anne that I should not like again to put you off – and for that and some other reasons they have decided to give up the idea of going to Scarbro’ and instead, to make a little excursion next Monday & Tuesday to Ilkley or elsewhere – so that the place only is changed the days remain the same If all be well they will be back on Wednesday – therefore if the day be fine on Thursday and all other things right I hope no other obstacle will arise to prevent my going to Hathersage – I do long to be with you and I feel nervously afraid of being prevented or put off in some way.

Branwell only stayed a week with us but he is to come home again when the family go to Scarbro’¹⁷

Emily and Anne are mentioned as they affect Charlotte and Ellen’s plans, but Charlotte gives far more information about her sisters’ plans than are required. Furthermore, the structure of the letter, placing Emily and Anne’s schedule before

¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, ‘27th June 1845’, in *LCB*, I, pp. 402-403, (p. 402).

Charlotte's, suggests the weight of sibling responsibility as their needs are given precedence over her own. Charlotte leaves a notable gap between her sisters' plans and her own personal input. There is an indication, in this segregation of structure, that Charlotte wants her own voice to stand alone, away from the obligations of family and community.

When Charlotte allows herself to become the focus she uses a succession of 'I's to bring her identity into the letter. Furthermore, it is when she stops writing as the spokesperson, and commences to write solely for herself that she uses more personal and emotive language. In this letter Charlotte openly declares: 'I do long to be with you'. This is taken with Charlotte's confessed anxiety surrounding a fear of their separation: 'I feel nervously afraid'. Charlotte writes unashamedly to Ellen about her affection for her in clear, heartfelt language. There is no indication of pretence or an obligation to write such sentiments. This demonstrates the level of trust and confidence which Charlotte had in Ellen. However, whilst Charlotte clearly shows her affection, she also conveys a plethora of emotions in this letter: affection, desperation, anger. In stark contrast to her previous affectionate tone she later comments, 'This is one of your contrivances for which you deserve smothering'.¹⁸ This angry scolding from Charlotte is a result of Ellen asking her brother to write a letter inviting Charlotte, rather than Ellen doing so directly. This hyperbolic language from Charlotte is also present in her diaries as well as her novels, particularly *The Professor*. It is an indication of the level of trust between the writer and the recipient that Charlotte can vary so dramatically in tone, fully confident that this will be accepted by Ellen.

All the letters which are known to survive from Emily are to Ellen, and they are all brief. Despite their brevity, they nevertheless demonstrate that Emily adopted, like Charlotte, a communal voice in her letters as she is selected as the spokesperson for the

¹⁸ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, '27th June 1845', in *LCB*, p. 402.

family. The letter also suggests that Emily was more familiar with the form than the remaining manuscripts reveal. The selection of Emily as spokesperson implies a confidence in her proficiency:

Dear Miss Ellen,

If you have set your heart on Charlotte staying another week she has our united consent: I for one will take everything easy on Sunday – I’m glad she is enjoying herself: let her make the most of the next seven days & return stout and hearty –

[Love to her and you from Anne & myself and tell her all are well at home
– Your affect –¹⁹

Emily informs Ellen that Charlotte has ‘our united consent’ which shows that Emily has been selected as the writer by the family. Emily’s role as the family representative is further enforced by her adoption of authority; she takes on the parental role and gives her blessing and instructions. The collective voice represents the family as a single unit. However, the specific writing partnership of Emily and Anne is emphasised in this letter as the closing comment shows they are both aiding in the composition.

In Emily’s life writing her voice is frequently representative of a collective – in most cases herself and Anne. Given her adoption of their united voice in her letters, as well as her diaries, it indicates that it was a common practice for the pair to unite as one voice in all aspects of their writing. This differs somewhat from Charlotte’s role as the spokesperson: Charlotte includes information regarding the family, whereas Emily

¹⁹ Emily Brontë to Ellen Nussey, ‘16th July 1845’, in *LCB*, I, p. 403. The last section, indicated by the open bracket, which is more indicative of the traditional letter form was added posthumously by Ellen so this is less reliable. Ellen added this line, the original having been previously removed, a number of years after she received the letter thus the accuracy is already questionable. The question of reliability regarding this addition is further supported by Ellen being much more familiar with the letter form, hence she may have embellished.

includes Anne's voice in her writing, though not always directly. There is the possibility that this partnership within the letter may be due to Charlotte's absence – Charlotte has the whole family to represent, whereas Emily only needs to represent herself and Anne. However, Emily's technique of partnership is also adopted in Anne's letter which shows that within this communal voice, in their epistolary writing, Emily and Anne had their own individual technique.

As in Charlotte's letter, Emily does allow for a moment of individuality to emerge where her voice becomes dominant. She adopts the use of the successive 'I' to indicate her own personal opinions within her role as spokesperson. Both Emily and Charlotte reserve their individual voice until after the communal one has achieved its goal. This demonstrates the precedence of the community over the individual. However, the fact that there is the adoption of the individual voice implies that the siblings were able to break forth from the community to seek independence.

As with Emily and Charlotte, Anne takes on the responsibility of writing as a representative for the whole family. However, Anne's letter is full of self-deprecation and hesitance. Her language reveals that she is anxious regarding the engagement of her reader; as a result, she begins to edit herself.

It is not choice, but necessity that has induced me to choose such a tiny sheet of paper for my letter, having none more suitable at hand; but perhaps it will contain as much as you need wish to read or I to write, for I find I have nothing more to say except that your little Tabby must be a charming creature, – and when the wedding fever reaches you I hope it will be to some good purpose and give you no cause to regret its advent, and—that is all, for as Charlotte is writing or about to write to you herself I need not send any message from her. Therefore, accept my best love and believe me to be your affectionate friend

Anne Brontë

I must not omit the Major's compliments²⁰

In the course of the letter she lets both Charlotte and Emily supersede her own words. Anne's use of 'must' when referring to the inclusion of Emily's content indicates the significance of Emily's voice within Anne's writing. This is further enforced by the inclusion of the nickname 'Major' which casts Emily in the role of an authoritarian leader. However, the control is not solely Emily's. The addition of 'need' when referring to supplying a message from Charlotte further supports the notion of a communal voice within the sisters' letters. It is not something they choose to do, but rather something they feel is imperative to their epistolary writing. Anne immediately begins to censor herself, and concludes her letter in reaction to the discovery that Charlotte is also writing to Ellen. Anne comments 'as Charlotte is writing or about to write to you herself I need not send any message from her.' Her role as a representative is no longer required now she does not have Charlotte to document.

However, whilst Anne fulfils the representative role to the same extent as her sisters; she also demonstrates confidence in her voice by frequently including her feelings and opinions in the letter. The sequence of pronouns adopted – 'me', 'my', 'I', 'you', 'your' – reveal that the majority of the letter contains a personal exchange between Anne and Ellen. There is comedic irony in Anne's section about herself, as she observes the limited size of her piece of paper but still takes an extensive amount of space to express this point. This comedic approach continues in Anne's comment 'I have nothing more to say except' and then proceeds to give numerous comments regarding Ellen. There is a sense that Anne gets carried away with the personal aspect of the letter in the use of 'and–

²⁰ Anne Brontë to Ellen Nussey, '4th October 1847', in *LCB*, I, pp. 544-545, (p. 545).

that is all'. The dash separates Anne's personal contribution from her required role as spokesperson. The dash indicates the moment Charlotte's intent to write a letter to Ellen is revealed and thus Anne's contribution is silenced.

In each of their letters the Brontë sisters represent the family as a whole; the role of spokesperson frequently overshadows their individual voices. Yet, to varying degrees, each sister ensures that there is an aspect of her individuality within the letters. These shifts between the communal and the individual voice also show the level of skill the sisters possessed as writers who knew how to manipulate the identity they portrayed. The communal voice gave them control over their identity and allowed them to conceal themselves behind their role as the family representative. Branwell did not contribute to this communal voice, and whilst the others represented him he did not reciprocate this in his own letters. I shall now explore a selection of Branwell's letters, and demonstrate that, like his sisters, Branwell also conceals himself, not behind a communal voice but behind a persona.

Branwell's letters to his friends Francis H. Grundy and J. B. Leyland differ in nature. With Grundy, Branwell discusses personal matters, in particular his relationship with Lydia Robinson, whereas he uses Leyland to discuss his creative projects. The letters to Leyland are a clear demonstration of Branwell's attempt to form another writing partnership; at this stage his partnership with Charlotte was over. The different recipients may result in a varied focus, but Branwell's self-fashioning and adoption of a persona is apparent throughout. All of Branwell's letters to Grundy share a similar focus – Branwell. No questions are asked in this extract, or the entire letter, with regard solely to Grundy. Any enquiries that are made relate back to Branwell:

Since I saw Mr. George Gooch, I have suffered much from the accounts of the declining health of her whom I must love most in this world, and who, for my fault,

suffers sorrows which surely were never her due. My father, too, is now quite blind, and from such causes literary pursuits have become matters I have no heart to wield. If I could see you it would be a sincere pleasure, but...Perhaps your memory of me may be dimmed, for you have known little in me worth remembering; but I still think often with pleasure of yourself, though so different from me in head and mind.²¹

Branwell adopts hyperbolic language; the central theme is made clear with the repetition of 'suffer' in regards to himself and Mrs Robinson. His language is emotive and personal, like Charlotte's letter to Ellen but even more so. He uses the language of devotion to describe Mrs Robinson as the one he 'loves most in the world' further enhancing the power of his attachment that he 'must' love. In the language of this letter we see Branwell attempt to adopt the persona of a tragic romantic hero. This is a figure Branwell would be very familiar with from his reading of Byron and Walter Scott. Drawing on these sources of inspiration, he is able to assume the role of a character which absolves him of blame as he is a victim of the overpowering will of love, like so many tragic figures before him.

In his letters, Branwell adopts a persona more so than the other Brontë siblings. He portrays himself as a tortured artist and lover, with dramatic language which emphasises his suffering. Branwell's frequent use of adjectives makes the language of his letters more expressive than his siblings', imbuing them with a tone of desperation and a sense of drama. The reason behind this adoption is a method of denying to others, and himself, the reality of his situation. By performing the role of a tortured lover, he conjures a sense of glory and romance which his reality lacked and thus makes the situation more acceptable.

²¹ Patrick Branwell Brontë to Francis H. Grundy, 'July/August 1846', in *LCB*, I, pp. 490-491, (p. 490).

Through performing the role, Branwell does not need to acknowledge or process a sense of responsibility or guilt. His creativity allows him to manipulate and control the version of reality he presents, as if it too were a piece of fiction.

In Branwell's letters to Leyland, the focus is not on personal confessions but on Branwell as a writer, as he attempts to create a new writing community. As such he assumes the role of a tortured artist, rather than the persona of a tortured lover portrayed in his letters to Grundy. These letters to Leyland reveal a need to share his creative work with someone, particularly during the composition stage:

Literary exertion would seem a resource, but the depression attendant on it, and the almost hopelessness of bursting through the barriers of literary, <cliques> circles, and getting a hearing among publishers, make me disheartened and indifferent; for I cannot write what would be thrown, unread, in to a library fire: Otherwise I have the materials for a respectably sized volume, and if I were in London personally I might perhaps try Henry Moxon [sic] – a patronizer of the sons of rhyme; though I dare say the poor man often smarts for his liberality in publishing hideous trash.²²

In this letter Branwell also includes a list of questions as well as two poems, thus demonstrating his ability to produce several different forms of writing – a deliberate act on his part. For, the main aim of this letter is to elicit, from his new writing partner, as much assistance as possible for his compositions. Branwell assumes the persona of a tortured artist and adopts multiple forms within the letter to imbue his persona with credibility. He asks questions to aid his writing whilst also quoting poetry to demonstrate his knowledge.

There is a tone of resignation and despair – 'exertion', 'despair', 'hopelessness', 'thrown, unread' – which are used as an excuse for his lack of success. Under the guise of

²² Patrick Branwell Brontë to J. B. Leyland, '28 April 1846', in *LCB*, I, pp. 467-469, (p. 468).

his persona the sense of resignation in the letter removes, once again, the responsibility from Branwell for his failings. He discusses the hopelessness of not being a member of a literary circle – this is the way he imagines publications are achieved. It appears counterintuitive on the part of Branwell to confess his lack of confidence in his future success to the friend he is asking for assistance. As such, this raises questions regarding the true intent of the letter. Branwell uses the persona to entice Leyland into a frequent correspondence; this appears to be Branwell's main aim, rather than assistance with his writing.

Branwell remains elusive not only on the topic of his personal experiences but also regarding his work. By refraining from offering specific information about his manuscript, he can encourage Leyland with the assurance that he is working without providing precise details. Branwell is able to portray himself as a knowledgeable writer, but when it came to the task of writing he was less confident. He is already making excuses for his failure before his work is even finished. In the letter, he uses a lot of commas that subsequently create a list of excuses which he provides to avoid responsibility for his presumed failure. Branwell's excuse that he does not have literary friends, and the literary world is corrupt, not only expresses a sense of depression and despair, but once again characteristically rids himself of any accountability for his failings.

Using the persona of the tragic artist, he presents himself as knowledgeable about the business of writing. This is undermined by his pre-emptive despondency about his chances – which are, of course, nothing to do with his talent but the corruption of the publishing world. Branwell's attention is consumed with himself. He shows no concern for the recipient; he makes sure to compliment him but the emphasis rapidly returns to Branwell. The focus on Branwell may be a result of the portrayal of his personas; he is the protagonist of the letters and the depiction of these different characters requires his central

focus. Branwell adopts two different personas for Leyland and Grundy and they each enable him to achieve the same aim – to absolve himself of all blame.

Branwell may not share his sisters' communal voice in his epistolary writing but the content of his letters shows his desire to form a new community with his friends. Furthermore, they reveal how Branwell used his own creativity to vary how he presented himself to his recipients. This need to control, and create, the portrayed version of the self through letter writing is also adopted by the sisters. By using a communal voice they are able to have power over how much of their own identity is presented in the letter. This manipulation of reality is developed further in their diary papers. In the next section, I will address how the sisters use the diary form to experiment with the boundaries between their fictional worlds and their lives. Their creativity allows them to construct and edit the version of reality they wish to preserve through their writing.

2.3 'The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine':²³ Reality vs. the fantastical in the Brontë sisters' diary papers

In Emily and Anne's diary papers their partnership remains integral. They allow us to see the communal voice shared by the partnership, but also how they used these diary papers to explore their own individual writing styles. In the latter papers, which were written individually, we see Emily and Anne begin to experiment with tropes which appear in the sisters' novels. The pair wrote two shared diary entries in 1834 and 1837, they then composed individual papers in 1841 and 1845. Their initial movement into writing independently occurred due to Anne working away from home. However, for their final papers they were reunited but continued to write alone rather than return to joint composition. It is made apparent from their initial entries that the purpose of the papers

²³ Emily and Anne Brontë, 'Diary Paper 24th November 1834', in *BLL*, pp. 29-30, (p. 29).

was to act as preserved documentation of a significant date. Every four years they would write a paper documenting the day, which subsequently came to land on Emily's birthday. They would also read their previous entry to remind themselves of their lives four years previously. These diary papers clearly offer valuable information for a biographical reading. However, they offer even more to our understanding of the Brontës when considered stylistically.

Marsden is one of the few scholars not only to explore Emily Brontë's diary papers critically, but also to defend their validity as literary texts. Marsden argues that:

Though the 1834 and 1837 diary papers appear stylistically unsophisticated, largely due to the poor spelling and punctuation, there is evidence to suggest that Emily was paying attention to structure. The chronological progression, the locating of the family members and the conclusion expressing her hopes for the future suggest that a structure that may or may not have been predetermined in 1834 was being consciously employed in 1837. John Hewish has suggested that the references to domestic animals in the 1834 paper (which recur in 1845) were an attempt on Emily's part to reproduce the style of Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron*, which includes several extracts from Byron's letters and personal papers in which he refers to his pets.²⁴

I shall use Marsden's proposal of experimentation to help inform my analysis of the early diary papers of Emily and Anne. By taking Anne's work into equal consideration, and the impact of their partnership on these joint pieces of work, I am able to build upon and demonstrate the important role their community performed in their writing.

²⁴ Marsden, 'Imagination, Materiality and the Act of Writing in Emily Brontë's Diary Papers', p. 46. For Hewish see: John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1969).

Emily and Anne's first attempt at diary writing conveys a clear overarching theme of experimentation:

November the 24 1834 Monday Emily Jane Bronte Anne Brontë I fed Rainbow, Diamond, Snowflake Jasper pheasant alias this morning Branwell went down to Mr Drivers and brought news that Sir Robert peel was going to be invited to stand for Leeds Anne and I have been peeling Apples for Charlotte to make an apple pudding and for Aunts [illegible] and apple Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly and she was of a quick but lim[i]ted Intellect Taby said just now come Anne pillopatate (ie pill a potato) Aunt has come into the Kitchen just now and said where are your feet Anne Anne answered on the floor Aunt papa opened the parlour Door and gave Branwell a Letter saying here Branwell read this and show it to your Aunt and Charlotte – The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine Sally mosely is washing in the back-Kitchin [.]²⁵

The entry is a chaotic stream of consciousness, rapidly jumping from one event to the other. The piece reads as a form of journalism, in which the young Brontës chronicle the events as they occur around them. Up until this point, Anne and Emily's writing had been predominantly imaginative. This entry shows them having fun with a new genre of writing which later informs their creative work. Furthermore, it reveals the pair experimenting with the depiction of a scene in a domestic setting. Upon Charlotte's comment the pair capture the moment and transcribe the various pieces of speech uttered by the inhabitants. Their portrayal abruptly ends when Emily and Anne are excluded from their father's news.

The inclusion of Gondal is one of the most significant aspects of Emily and Anne's diaries. In this entry, more so than any other, the separation between reality and fiction is

²⁵ Emily and Anne Brontë, 'Diary Paper 24th November 1834', in *BLL*, p. 29.

the most elusive. There is no alteration in the language used between reality and fiction, and the only form of separation is the use of dashes. The lack of differentiation results in confusion regarding the identity of Sally Mosely, and the only aspect which confirms her place within reality are the mundane nature of her actions. The placing of the fictional aspect is significant due to the preceding line. Emily and Anne document the arrival of their father with a letter, which they are excluded from hearing, at this moment they document Gondal. They retaliate with their writing as a method of excluding the rest of the family from their activity. In this extract, they step away from the actions of their family to make their partnership, and their shared work their focus.

The language adopted in this entry is very basic – there is no elaboration or imagery, rather it is a simple stating of facts, which is reminiscent of Emily’s writing style in her letters. However, there are some indications of creativity, such as the inclusion of dialogue which suggests a playful approach to this composition. The dialogue is humorous and, in the case of Anne’s response, implies a tone of sarcasm. This is further supported by the sisters’ attempt to transcribe the Yorkshire dialect, something all the siblings experimented with throughout their writing. The use of ‘pillopatate’ is not only an attempt at accuracy but also comedic mimicking. This mimicking follows on from another joke from Emily and Anne where they use word play between Robert Peel and peeling apples. The comedic coincidence of Branwell mentioning Peel whilst they are peeling fruit is clearly not lost on their creative minds.

In this initial entry, Emily and Anne share a united voice. However, the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ indicates a more specific voice, and the comment ‘Anne and I’ identifies this dominant voice as Emily. It is not apparent what Anne is adding to the entry as there is no clear indication of a change of voice. It could potentially be that Anne was dictating while Emily wrote, which explains the rushed nature of the entry, and the absence

of structure. This exhibits the nature of their collaborative partnership. Farrell argues that ‘During the stage of greatest instrumental intimacy, when merger is at its highest point, in their dialogues with one another it is common for the participants to find their ideas emerging in a cascading flow, such that neither one knows or cares who thought of the ideas first.’²⁶ Therefore, it is possible their contributions to the paper were so similar that separate voices were not required.

The pair conclude their paper with the future as their central focus. This reveals still more regarding the complexity of Emily and Anne’s writing persona:

Anne and I say I wonder what we shall be like and what we shall be and where we shall be if all goes on well in the year 1874 – in which year I shall be in my 57th year Anne will be going in her 55th year Branwell will be going in his 58th year And Charlotte in her 59th year hoping we shall all be well at that time we close our paper [.]²⁷

The adoption of I, rather than we, in the opening comment of ‘Anne and I say I wonder’ is unusual and telling. At times they present themselves as one identity, one voice. It could also be another indication of Emily’s dominance, but this is counteracted by the comment ‘Anne and I’; if it were just Emily’s opinion and voice there would be no need to acknowledge Anne. The subsequent ‘we’ represents all the siblings therefore, in this case, ‘I’ means Emily and Anne. The act of recording their shared experience, rather than their individual experience, also supports this notion of shared identity. As is apparent from their letters, within the communal voice of the family Emily and Anne each gave specific attention to their shared voice within their partnership. Furthermore, the topics which are

²⁶ Farrell, p. 158.

²⁷ Emily and Anne Brontë, ‘Diary Paper 24th November 1834’, in *BLL*, p. 30.

covered in the paper – events they were witnessing and the events in Gondal – are shared by the sisters. Therefore, there is no need for them to write separately. The focus of the piece is their shared experience.

The next diary entry, composed in 1837, follows the same style and structure of the first, focusing on the events of the day and locating each member of the family:

A bit past 4 o’Clock Charlotte working in Aunts room Branwell reading Eugene Aram to her Anne and I writing in the drawing room – Anne a poem beginning Fair was the Evening and brightly the Sun – I Augustus – Almedas life Ist vol – 4th page from the last a fine rather coolish thin grey cloudy but Sunny day Aunt working in the little Room papa – gone out. Tabby in the Kitchin – the Emperors and Empresses of Gondal and Gaaldine preparing to depart from Gaaldine to Gondal to prepare for the coronation which will be on the 12th of July Queen Victoria ascended the throne this month Northangerland in Monceys Isle – Zamorna at Eversham. all tight and right in which condition it is to be hoped we shall all be on this day 4 years [.]²⁸

The evolution in this entry is the ease with which Emily and Anne are able to move between the portrayal of the fantastical and their reality. There is a significant indication of their continued experimentation between the realist and the fantastical as they appear to parallel the coronation of Queen Victoria with a coronation in their juvenilia. They mention that their father has gone out and in the next line note the departure of their fictional characters from Gaaldine to Gondal. This shows that the consideration of reality within their fiction has not been abandoned, but the focus on the fantastical does reveal its dominance. Furthermore, it indicates the precedence given to their creative work. Their

²⁸ Emily and Anne Brontë, ‘Diary Paper 26th June 1837’, in *BLL*, pp. 53-54, (p. 53).

fictional characters are considered alongside the inhabitants of the parsonage which reveals how embedded Gondal became in their day-to-day lives.

The most significant moment of this entry is Emily and Anne locating the characters Zamorna and Northangerland – Charlotte and Branwell’s central Angrian characters. This gives an insight into the writing community not previously shown. At this stage, the siblings’ partnerships were clearly established. For Emily and Anne to know the locations indicates a different dynamic to the community. It alludes to the possibility that the creation of ideas, at this point, may still have been shared and discussed as a group, even though the actual writing was separate.

The concluding lines of the extract demonstrate the moment when the united voice splinters and Anne is given a direct voice:

I guess that this day 4 years we shall all be in this drawing room comfortable I
hope it may be so Anne guesses we shall all be gone somewhere together
comfortable We hope it may be either

Aunt. come Emily Its past 4 o’Clock.

Emily Yes Aunt

Anne well do you intend to write in the evening

Emily well what think you

(we agreed to go out Ist to make sure if we get into a humor we may Stay [out?])

[.]²⁹

This is the first indication of independence within the diary entries. Anne disagrees with Emily to such an extent that her voice overpowers Emily’s for the first time and her own

²⁹ Emily and Anne Brontë, ‘Diary Paper 26th June 1837’, in *BLL*, p. 54.

individual opinion is noted. The content of the dialogue reveals that Emily may have been the composer of the communal voice in the paper, but she was also willing to consider and include Anne's input. Emily may appear as the dominant voice in their joint diary entries but in this extract Anne is portrayed as the dominant partner. Anne may ask Emily about her intention to write but the decision is given to Anne, and Emily concedes to Anne's opinions about the future. This reveals a different aspect to the power dynamic of their partnership not revealed in their previous diary papers. Even so, the piece concludes with the united 'we', so whilst there is enough of a difference in opinion to break the unified voice, it is only momentary, and unity is quickly restored.

This moment of action also allows Emily and Anne to continue with their portrayal of domestic scenes. Initially, the fantastical dominated the piece and there were no events for them to document. Thus, the entrance of their Aunt into their writing space offers them the opportunity to experiment with documenting reality once more. Notably, it is during this point that the comedic aspect of their writing returns, and their playful treatment of language. Furthermore, there is continued development from their previous entry as they experiment with structure. They show an awareness of the need to separate dialogue from prose and subsequently present their speech in the format of a play.

The pair were forced to abandon their communal voice due to the separation of work, but they still retained their promise to each other to continue with their diary entries. The separation of the partnership was forced rather than chosen, but it nevertheless allowed each sister to progress in her life writing. Emily demonstrates very specific ideas rather than abstract concepts in her first solo life writing piece:

I guess that at the time appointed for the opening of this paper – we (i.e.) Charlotte, Anne and I – shall be all merrily seated in our own sitting-room in some pleasant and flourishing seminary having just gathered in for the midsummer holydays our

debts will be paid off and we shall have cash in hand to a considerable amount.

papa Aunt and Branwell will either have been – or be coming – to visit us – it will be a fine warm summery evening. very different from this bleak look-out Anne and I will perchance slip out into the garden a minutes to peruse our papers. I hope either this [o]r something better will be the case – [.]³⁰

By writing creatively about reality, Emily progresses from the realistic approach she adopted in her initial entries. Emily previously captured events as they happened, whereas at this point she uses her creative skills to alter the portrayal of her own reality. This shows Emily's progression in her depiction of scenes. In her previous entries, she only portrays the present whereas here she creates an entirely fictitious scene for their future. Her reality can be shaped by her creativity just like her fictional world. We can see Emily using her creativity to make her hopes tangible, as she does in her early Gondal poetry. The scene is idealised; Emily exhibits her awareness and skill by using her creativity to overwrite reality, to exert control over it. In her diary paper, Emily is able to creatively manipulate her own life, and that of her family, as though they are Gondal characters.

There is clear progression in the use of language in this entry: Emily is more creative and elaborates her points, where previously they were simple statements. In the previous entries, the sisters chronicled moments whereas this section is imaginative; Emily adopts a more creative approach as she is no longer constricted by facts. Even though the image Emily creates of the future in this extract is quite specific, there still remains an aspect of conjecture indicated by the use of 'guess', 'either', 'or', which suggest uncertainty. Yet, as the extract progresses, Emily adopts more assertive language – 'shall',

³⁰ Emily Brontë, 'Diary Paper 30th July 1841', in *BLL*, pp. 94-95, (p. 95).

‘will’ – demonstrating a firmer belief in the image she creates. Therefore, the ‘guess’ aspect is more likely an indication of Emily’s creative process, and acknowledges the moment she fashioned the image she proceeds to describe. The language used shows a sense of hope for the future, but the line ‘very different from this bleak look-out’ reveals a tone of pessimism with regard to the present. This may explain why so much of the content of the entry concerns the future and Gondal, creative aspects which Emily can control rather than her uncertain reality. This desire to realise a fictional interpretation of the future foreshadows the actions of Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*. Unhappy in her current situation Cathy chooses to marry Edgar in order to achieve her imagined future in which, ‘he will be rich, and I shall be the greatest woman in the neighbourhood’.³¹ However, the result of Cathy’s choice retains the pessimism which Emily demonstrates in this paper. Creative control can only go so far.

Thus far, the progression in language exhibits the freedom Emily gains through individual writing. However, she also persistently uses the united ‘we’, ‘our’ and ‘Anne and I’ which indicates that Emily still very much relies on the family sense of community, particularly between herself and Anne. This is the first entry in which Emily writes as an individual. This piece gives her the opportunity to demonstrate her individuality, even though she was the dominant voice in the previous entries. The most significant alteration is the separation between Emily’s reality and her fictional world which allows her to give equal consideration to each. Previously, the fictional elements were intermixed within the depiction of real life events. In this entry, the Gondal section is very clearly separated from reality and is given its own extensive section. When writing alone Emily takes the opportunity to give more detailed attention to her writing, her own source of focus and interest:

³¹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, ed. by Pauline Nestor, [1847] (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 78.

The Gondalians are at present in a threatening state but there is no open rupture as yet – all the princes and princesses of the royal royalty are at the palace of Instruction – I have a good many books on hands but I am sorry to say that as usual I make small progress with any – however I have just made a new regularity paper! and I mean verb sap – to do great things – and now I close sending from far an exhortation of courage courage! to exiled and harassed Anne wishing she was here [.]³²

The entire paper is certainly more revealing than the preceding entries, but the Gondal section is the most revelatory of the entire piece. Emily gives the reader an insight into her ‘usual’ writing practice; she even confides her failures. This indicates an awareness of audience from Emily. However, her intended reader is Anne who was most likely aware of these aspects covered by Emily. As such, Emily’s failures would not be considered a shocking revelation by either.

The segregation between Emily’s reality and Gondal demonstrates a change in her approach as a writer. It allows Gondal to be given focus, and highlights the significant role it plays in her life. It also suggests a conscious decision on the part of Emily to separate the fantastical from her reality at this stage. I believe this shows a progression towards the consideration of herself as a writer. Gondal is no longer discussed alongside her daily activities, like a game, instead it is given serious focus as a piece of work. The segregation of the two also exposes a realisation, whether voluntary or forced, that her writing is an aspect of her life rather than the entirety of it.

Despite her apparent struggles, Emily’s comment regarding a ‘regularity paper’ gives an indication of her writing practice. Emily’s determination ‘to do great things’ show

³² Emily Brontë, ‘Diary paper 30th July 1841’, in *BLL*, p. 95.

the scope of her plans, as well as her confidence in her writing skills. Her personal plans for the future may be specific but they are also uncertain. However, in regard to her writing Emily shows far more confidence and certainty. This confidence from Emily reveals that even though the loss of community had a negative impact on her writing, she possessed a drive and determination specifically her own.

Anne, when given the opportunity to write independently, does so with notable differences, not only from her previous entries but also from Emily's. In this entry, Anne develops further the portrayal of reality she and Emily had experimented with:

All these diversities, with many others, are things we did not expect or foresee in the July of 1837. What will the next four years bring forth? Providence only knows. But we ourselves have sustained very little alteration since that time. I have the same faults that I had then, only I have more wisdom and experience, and a little more self-possession than I then enjoyed. How will it be when we open this paper and the one Emily has written? I wonder whether the Gondalians will still be flourishing, and what will be their condition. I am now engaged in writing the fourth volume of Solala Vernon's Life.

For some time I have looked upon 25 as a sort of era in my existence. It may prove a true presentiment, or it may be only a superstitious fancy; the latter seems most likely, but time will show.³³

This piece exhibits the difference in the dynamic of their voices within their entries: where Emily is dramatic, extreme and decided, Anne is questioning, unsure, with a thread of uncertainty running throughout. This is an early indication of the theme of doubt which is so prominent in her poetry. Unlike Emily, Anne does not use her creativity to invent an

³³ Anne Brontë, 'Diary paper 30th July 1841', in *BLL*, pp. 96-97, (pp. 96-97).

imagined future for herself. Her comment about the diversities experienced that ‘we did not expect or foresee’ implies the futility of dreaming an ideal future which cannot prepare them for the reality. She does consider her future in the paper, focusing on the importance of her twenty-fifth year, but she only conjectures and does not elaborate. Anne does not appear to believe in the ability to creatively manipulate her reality.

These diary papers were intended as a source of preservation, and thus the lack of detail in this entry shows the lack of desire to preserve the memory of such issues. The diary form lends itself to confessional writing, an aspect both Emily and Anne appropriate to varying degrees, but the entries demonstrate the sisters were never strictly bound by the rules of the form. Rather, they were bound by their own formal rules of chronicling the moment in time and foretelling their future. The decision, by Anne, to retain the established structure in her individual paper demonstrates the impact the communal nature of the compositions continued to have on her. This is the first diary entry Anne composes individually, but it still contains apparent aspects of community and partnership in the form of Anne’s continuous use of ‘we’. However, she does take the opportunity to consider herself; ‘I’ is used repeatedly in rapid succession as she uses the diary as a form of self-reflection to assess her personal growth. Anne’s paper reveals her pursuit of independence whilst continuing to acknowledge her debt to her partnership and their joint compositions.

In her final entry, Emily returns to the established structure of interspersing Gondal alongside family news, rather than an individual section. Her writing is now once again considered alongside her family routine:

The Gondals still flo[u]rish bright as ever I am at present writing a work on the First Wars – Anne has been writing some articles on this and a book by Henry Sophona – We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us which I am glad to say they do at present [...] we are all in decent health – only that papa

has a complaint in his eyes and with the exception of B who I hope will be better and do better, hereafter. I am quite contented for myself – not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty and having learnt to make the most of the present and hope for the future with less fidget[i]ness that I cannot do all I wish – seldom or ever troubled with nothing to do and merely desiring that every body could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding and then we should have a very tolerable world of it – [.]³⁴

Language concerning Gondal may appear overtly positive but there is a suggestion of the demise of their fictional world. Emily notes ‘We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us which I am glad to say they do at present’. The ‘at present’ implies that Emily and Anne’s writing is potentially in a state of transience. Within this explanation of their intention to continue to write there is the implication that the question of ceasing to write has been discussed. Emily presents herself as feeling positive about the progress of her Gondal writing, but the uncertainty revealed in Anne’s paper indicates that their writing and their partnership is in an undeniable state of unrest.

The continued use of ‘we’ still indicates a sense of community and partnership between Emily and Anne. However, the use of ‘I’ and ‘my’ is far more predominant in this entry. Emily has become the central focus of her paper, as Anne does in her 1841 entry; Emily now shares her thoughts, her desires, and her reservations. The language used is far more personal in nature – ‘cannot do all I wish’, ‘contented’ – which demonstrates an emotional aspect of Emily’s writing which had not been displayed in her previous entries. This shows a clear progression in Emily’s confidence as a writer; she confides more about herself and thus claims her identity as a writer.

³⁴ Emily Brontë, ‘Diary paper 31st July 1845’, in *BLL*, pp. 130-132, (p. 131).

The inclusion of full stops in this entry is significant, as Emily had previously disregarded the use of them in her previous diary papers. The inclusion here is of significance because of the moment she chooses to adopt it. In the first section, Emily discusses her family and events which have occurred, specifically regarding Branwell. She then closes this section with a full stop and proceeds to discuss herself, her hopes and aims. The full stop is a clear indication of Emily's consideration and separation of her own feelings from the events concerning her family. The incident Emily is referring to is far too significant to not be included thus she complies. However, her use of a full stop acts as a barrier, blocking Branwell off from the rest of her entry. It is a clear demonstration of Emily stepping away from the communal voice which was so apparent in her other life writing. In this paper, Emily puts herself and her work as the focus; she embraces her individuality.

Anne's final diary entry gives an indication of the breaking down of her composure. The emotional impact of recording these events is apparent even in her more fluid use of punctuation. She feels the need to chronicle these moments but struggles so much recounting them that she abandons structure to chronicle these distressing events as rapidly as possible:

How many things have happened since it was written – some pleasant some far otherwise – Yet I was then at Thorp Green and now I am only just escaped from it – I was wishing to leave it then and if I had known that I had four years longer to stay how wretched I should have been but during my stay I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt of experience of human nature – Others have seen more changes Charlotte has left Mr White's and been twice to Brussels where she stayed each time nearly a year – Emily has been there too and stayed nearly a year – Branwell has left Luddenden foot and been a Tutor at Thorp Green and had

tribulation and ill health he was very ill on Tuesday but he went with John Brown to Liverpool where he now is I suppose and we hope he will be better and do better in future – [...] I for my part cannot well be flatter or older in mind than I am now – Hoping for the best I conclude [.]³⁵

Unlike Emily, who does not offer any detail in regards to Branwell's digression, Anne confides that he has been 'very ill'. This is certainly far from offering specific details, but it demonstrates more willingness from Anne to interact with and record these incidents. The most striking phrase in both the 1845 entries is in regard to Branwell – hoping he 'will be better and do better'. Both Emily and Anne use this exact line to describe Branwell; the fact that the phrase is written verbatim in each entry indicates a collaborative notion of secrecy. It implies that this was the family line with regard to Branwell and his troubles. Even in their personal documents they repeat this line rather than expose their brother's shame. Peter Heehs states that 'only a naïve historian would take every statement in a diary or memoir at face value. It is hard for us to be honest with ourselves, harder to be frank with others, still harder to write the truth as we have seen it and preserve what we have written.'³⁶ This refusal to describe the details of Branwell's current state is not only due to a lack of desire to preserve the memory of this dark matter, but also an inability to force themselves to write it and thus accept it.

Alongside the line about Branwell, the most striking aspect of the 1845 diary papers is the sheer difference in the voices adopted by the two sisters. Now Emily is the one disclosing more personal information in an undeniably positive composition. Anne, on the other hand, is more reserved, except when it comes to her own emotions, and more

³⁵ Anne Brontë, 'Diary paper 31st July 1845', in *BLL*, pp. 132-133, (p. 132-133).

³⁶ Peter Heehs, *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 6-7.

private and protective of family members. Anne's despair is palpable throughout her diary paper; the confessional moments are those when she recounts the tragedy of her own life.

Emily's contentment seems an anomaly when considered alongside Anne's misery, and the events regarding Branwell and Charlotte. Emily is satisfied to remain in the fantasy world of Gondal and overwrite reality, ultimately creating a character out of herself. Anne is unwilling to conceal the harsh reality, and whilst she does not elaborate extensively she acknowledges it. There is the possibility that Emily is portraying a persona. This would explain why she suddenly becomes more revealing in this final entry, particularly regarding her own emotions, as they were for a positive persona she adopts in order to conceal the trauma of reality. After all, if Heehs's argument is considered, it is unlikely Emily would use the diary as a way of facing the horror of her reality. Instead Emily uses it to create a persona who is content and untouched by the family's troubles. Emily uses positive phrases such as 'flo[u]rish bright as ever', 'they delight us', 'having learnt to make the most of the present and hope for the future'. This is in complete contrast to Anne's despondent language: 'I am only just escaped', 'how wretched I should have been' 'I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt of experience'. As the sister's entries act as works of preservation, Emily may use her creativity to overwrite reality to preserve a more positive memory. Her desire for others in the family to feel as she does implies she is the only one to feel this contentment. This further indicates the falsity of these emotions and Emily's creative attempt to change her reality. The sheer difference of opinion with regard to Gondal indicates a division within the partnership and a change in focus, which foreshadows their novels.

Emily and Branwell were not the only members of the family to use their creativity to overwrite their lives. Charlotte's experimentation with the boundaries between reality and fantasy are even more extensive than Emily's. In her Roe Head journals, she

persistently eclipses herself with her creative work in order to escape the drudgery of her life. Charlotte's Roe Head journals differ considerably from Emily and Anne's diary papers. Emily and Anne's papers are collaborative, where they could be, while Charlotte's are very much an individual exercise. She rarely acknowledges her family in her journals. Charlotte's Roe Head journals not only differ from her sisters' diary entries but also from the diary form in general, as Glen explains:

They do not constitute a journal in the usual sense of the word. They are not entries in a single notebook, but a series of disconnected fragments, scribbled on spare scraps of paper in a miniscule uneven print. Although they are frankly expressive of passionate private feeling – [...] they are not simply confessional. For they also contain a series of sharply realized images of scenes and characters from the totally imaginary world of Angria.³⁷

I support Glen's point that the most striking difference is Charlotte's interaction with her fictional world Angria. Emily and Anne relate what they had been working on and the events of Gondal. Charlotte used her papers to write scenes for Angria to such an extent that she becomes eclipsed by her work. The focus which is given to Angria and her creative work is so extensive that it could easily be argued that these are not journal entries at all, but rather fictional pieces interspersed with some musings by the writer. However, my focus will not be on Charlotte's Angria sections. Rather, I will consider the brief moments in which Charlotte experiments with the form of life writing as they reveal insights into her writing process. Charlotte commences her first paper with the confession:

Well here I am at Roe Head, it is seven o'clock at night the young ladies are all at their lessons the school-room is quiet the fire is low. a stormy day is at this moment

³⁷ Heather Glen, 'Introductory Notes', in Charlotte Brontë, *TA*, pp. 443-446, (p. 443).

passing off in a murmuring and bleak night. I now assume my own thoughts my mind relaxes from the stretch on which it has been for the last twelve hours & falls back onto the rest which no-body in this house knows of but myself. I now after a day's weary wandering return to the ark which for me floats alone on the face of this world's desolate & boundless deluge it is strange. I cannot get used to the ongoings that surround me.³⁸

There are indications that she was aware of the diary form and she uses aspects of it for her own benefit. She comments on 'my own thoughts' revealing her intention to use the piece as a form of confession. Furthermore, her belief that 'no-body in this house knows' shows her appropriation of the secrecy and privacy associated with the form.

Charlotte is consistently descriptive; she describes the school-room as 'quiet', the fire is 'low', the day is 'stormy'. This demonstrates Charlotte warming up to write her fictional section. She captures her reality to prepare for her creative writing. Like Anne, Charlotte also uses language to express her despair at her current position – the night is 'bleak', 'stormy', 'weary', 'desolate'. The scene she creates encapsulates her current mood. The extracts are an early indication of the realistic portrayal of emotion that Charlotte relays so well in her novels. The heartfelt confessions of her own experience can clearly be seen echoed in the depiction of her heroines Jane, Caroline and Lucy. Furthermore, this intermingling of reality and fiction are integral to her novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.

Charlotte's second journal entry is the only one of her Roe Head journals in which she is the focus, rather than her fiction:

³⁸ Charlotte Brontë, 'Roe Head journal 1a', in *TA*, pp. 447-450, (p. 447).

The thought came over me am I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage, forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness the apathy and the hyperbolic & most asinine stupidity of those fat-headed oafs and on compulsion assuming an air of kindness, patience & assiduity? Must I from day to day sit chained to this chair prisoned within these four bare walls, while these glorious summer suns are burning in heaven & the year is revolving in its richest glow & declaring at the close of every summer day that the time I am losing will never come again?³⁹

The language used is very emotional, dramatic, aggressive and despairing. She describes her position as ‘wretched’ and her students as ‘fat-headed oafs’; her desire to emphasise her frustration results in dramatic and cruel language, but is undoubtedly honest. As Anne does in her poetry and final diary entry, Charlotte draws upon the community trope of the prisoner in her description of ‘wretched bondage’, ‘chained’, and ‘prisoned’. She casts herself in the role of a prisoner to reflect the constrictions of the situation for herself and many women during this period. This foreshadows her portrayal of Bertha who is literally imprisoned in the home. The language used is that of desperation; there is a sense of time running out, conveyed by a creative mind who is accustomed to depicting dramatic scenes. Unable to write creatively, Charlotte dramatises herself and her life to express her frustration.

In this entry Charlotte attempts to create an exaggerated version of herself. The dramatisation of herself as a suffering teacher later goes on to inform her novels *The Professor* and *Villette* where, particularly in the former, she adopts very similar language to describe the characters of the students her protagonists teach. Aside from *Shirley*, all of

³⁹ Charlotte Brontë, ‘Roe Head journal 2a’, in *TA*, pp. 452-453, (p. 452).

Charlotte's protagonists are teachers and this episode of dramatising her own life as a teacher undoubtedly informed her later work. As Emily does in her diary papers, Charlotte uses the power of language to manipulate and overwrite her reality. She could create a more dramatic version of herself in order to add some form of interest to her stifling role.

Due to the separation caused by Charlotte's employment, Branwell becomes the dominant writer of *Angria*. As a result of this, Charlotte faces the prospect of having her work taken away from her:

I'm just going to write because I cannot help it. Wiggins might indeed talk of scriblo–mania if he were to see me just now encompassed by the bulls (query calves of Bashan) all wondering why I write with my eyes shut – staring, gaping, hang their astonishment. A C–k on one side of me E L–r on the other and Miss W–er in the back-ground, Stupidity the atmosphere, school-books the employment, asses the society. what in all this is there to remind me of the divine, silent, unseen land of thought, dim now & indefinite as the dream of a dream, the shadow of a shade.⁴⁰

Charlotte is no longer just concerned with her fictional world, but also with herself as a writer and her process. She confides, 'I cannot help it'; she describes her desire to write as beyond her control. She creates a persona for herself as a born artist. The language suggests possession or being overpowered by creativity. Her closed eyes are an indication of being overwhelmed by a force outside herself, her creative muse. There is also a sense of pride in the level of control her creativity has over her. The language to describe herself is graphic, yet she writes 'hang their astonishment'; she is proud to be overwhelmed by inspiration and the power of her mind.

⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, 'Roe Head journal 3', in *TA*, pp. 456-457, (p. 456).

Her language is dramatic in order to demonstrate the power of her need to write. She portrays herself as possessed, once again adding a melodramatic, creative aspect to the depiction of herself. This rather extreme description, which she believes will be seen by no-one but herself, is not only a confession but a form of excuse. Her hateful language regarding her job and students is so extreme that the confession of a need to write acts as the excuse for her failings as a teacher. Her opening line, 'I'm just going to write because I cannot help it', reveals a tone of stubbornness and defiance; this outpouring of emotion is her rebellion against the rules which confine her life, and they are also the reason for her failures. Her aggressive language of critique – 'Stupidity', 'asses' – is similar to the language she uses when scolding Ellen in her letters. This demonstrates not only that this style of language was characteristic of Charlotte but also the lack of reserve she could show in her use of language when writing for a trusted reader.

Charlotte's fourth entry is the most extensive of her Roe Head papers and covers a span of two weeks:

I was called to hear a lesson & when I returned to my desk again, I found the mood which had suggested that allegorical whim was irrevocably gone – A fortnight has elapsed since I wrote the above – this is my first half-hour's leisure since then and now once more on a dull Saturday afternoon, I sit down to try to summon round me the dim shadows, not of coming events, but of incidents long departed of feelings, of pleasures, whose exquisite relish I sometimes fear it will never be my lot again to taste – How few would believe that from sources purely imaginary such happiness could be derived.⁴¹

⁴¹ Charlotte Brontë, 'Roe Head journal 4', in *TA*, pp. 457-465, (pp. 458-459).

The language here is confessional and dramatic; additionally there is an indication of a new emotion – fear. There is fear that she will lose her writing gift and creativity. This is further enforced by continuous indications of struggles within her writing partnership. She no longer has close access to her partner and his creative support and inspiration. There is the sense, repeated from the previous entry, that her creative ability was a gift and an integral part of her identity, but it also suggests that Charlotte is not convinced that this will remain a permanent state. As in her previous entries, the piece ends with a sense of questioning but in this case, it isn't Charlotte questioning herself, but rather a sense of others questioning her. However, the lack of a question mark, which Charlotte used in her previous distressed questioning, indicates that Charlotte has no intention of answering these questions.

There is also the indication that Charlotte uses her writing as a shield between herself and reality, thus explaining her concern about losing her gift. This theory also supports the importance of the writing community to Charlotte at this stage. Unlike her sisters, Charlotte rarely mentions her family in her journal papers, but by discussing her writing she still demonstrates her connection to the community. As with Emily and Anne, Charlotte too suffers doubts concerning her writing when separated from her family, and most specifically her writing partner. To lose her ability to write is arguably to lose her ability to communicate with and connect with her siblings, as they had up until this point.

Charlotte describes her writing with 'exquisite relish'; her language regarding her writing is reminiscent of a lover. However, in this section she appears less concerned about herself and more about returning to her creative work. Therefore, even though there is a personal aspect within this section, she ultimately eclipses herself with her writing. By focusing on her writing over herself, she strives to quench her doubt and reassure herself.

As Charlotte's experimentation with the diary form began whilst she was away at Roe Head, this results in the lack of inclusion of her writing partner Branwell. In her final

paper Charlotte demonstrates the sheer intensity, as well as the imperative nature, of her creative partnership with her brother:

About a week since I got a letter from Branwell containing a most exquisitely characteristic epistle from Northangerland to his daughter – It is astonishing what a soothing and delightful tone that letter seemed to speak – I lived on its contents for days. in every pause of employment – it came chiming in like some sweet bar of music – bringing with it agreeable thoughts such as I had for many weeks been a stranger to [.]⁴²

This extract clearly depicts the impression of Branwell on Charlotte and her writing.

Branwell is able to reawaken the creativity in Charlotte she fears she is losing.

Furthermore, Branwell is able to alleviate her fears with regard to her lack of control, and she is reassured. The confession ‘I lived on its contents for days’ hearkens back to the elevated language Charlotte used previously to describe the relationship between herself and her writing. Formerly, she portrayed herself as possessed and, in this case, her brother’s creative work is sustenance to her. It is the delight she could not find in the reality of her own life. It also demonstrates the importance of Branwell and their partnership. At this stage Anne is present at Roe Head with Charlotte, but it is Branwell and their creative partnership which brings her relief. The entry clearly reveals Charlotte’s creative struggles, and how her partner rejuvenates her. It indicates her reliance on the writing community, and specifically on Branwell. As seen previously in this chapter, Charlotte is certainly not the only one to demonstrate this reliance.

The association between creativity and life writing results in each of the sisters using either diaries or letters as narrative devices in their novels. As the Brontë sisters

⁴² Charlotte Brontë, ‘Roe Head journal 5’, in *TA*, pp. 465-466, (p. 465).

develop as writers they are able to establish clearer boundaries between their fictional writing and their life writing. However, this does not mean that they did not creatively embellish the version of themselves, and their lives depicted in their diary papers. To conclude this chapter, I shall explore the Belgian essays of Charlotte and Emily to examine how their individuality develops as they were forced into an unfamiliar partnership.

2.4 ‘they seem so insignificant, so foreign’:⁴³ Charlotte and Emily’s Belgian essays

It is undeniable, as Lonoff argues, that ‘these writings were pivotal for both the Brontë sisters’.⁴⁴ These essays are the connecting pieces of prose between the juvenilia and the novels. Aside from the early stages of the writing community, Charlotte and Emily had not collaborated on any creative work. Since the sisters were required to write about the same topic, these pieces of writing stand as clear examples of how different they are as writers, particularly with regard to approach and character presentation. Lonoff describes the conditions in which these essays were most likely written: ‘Probably they sat side by side in the classroom while Heger dictated in curt phrases...perhaps they compared guidelines or conferred about their claimants. Still, their responses take widely different tacks, not because they disregard the terms of the assignment, but because they remain such different writers.’⁴⁵ The environment of sitting together in a classroom indicates the possibility of collaboration, but persistently in these essays the sisters demonstrate their individuality as writers. As shall be seen in the pieces explored, Emily demonstrates a stylistic choice to portray multiple characters whereas Charlotte is more focused on the individual. They both show characterisation and the ability to depict emotional scenes, but they do this at completely different points.

⁴³ Sue Lonoff, ‘Preface’, in Charlotte Brontë & Emily Brontë, *BE*, pp. xii-xvii., (p. xiii).

⁴⁴ Lonoff, ‘Preface’, in *BE*, p. xiv.

⁴⁵ Sue Lonoff, ‘Comments for The Palace of Death/Le Palais de la Mort’, in *BE*, pp. 232-237, (p. 232).

Despite the Belgian essays' apparent value, critical considerations of these texts are sparse.⁴⁶ Biographical investigations into Charlotte and Emily's time in Brussels can only suggest how their stay influenced them as writers whereas a critical analysis of their *devoirs* can prove it. Like the Brontës' other pieces of life writing, these essays are invaluable sources, as they offer clear examples of ideas and tropes which later appear in the sisters' novels. They are particularly valuable in the case of Emily as they are the only creative prose, besides *Wuthering Heights*, which remain. With regard to the community, the exercises allow for collaboration but the individuality of Charlotte and Emily is apparent.

In 'The Siege of Oudenarde/ Le siege d'Oudenarde', both sisters respond to Heger's exercise to recount the events of a little-known siege in Belgium during the fifteenth century. The sisters each dramatise a key episode in the siege in which Count Lalaing decides to sacrifice his sons, who are being held hostage, for the sake of his people. Charlotte writes:

A traitor (perhaps the only one in the town of Oudenarde) surrendered the two sons of the Count of Lalaing to them. The count was summoned to a meeting; his two sons were brought before him; he was informed that if he still refused to yield, his children would be sacrificed to the sword. The count saw them surrounded by rude and savage Ghents. He saw their terror, their tears, their hands joined and raised to him as if to entreat him to deliver them. He even heard their feeble cries from afar,

⁴⁶ Aside from Lonoff the following texts also consider the Belgian essays: Lesa Scholl, 'Charlotte Brontë's Polyphonic Voices: Collaboration and Hybrid Authorial Spaces', *Brontë Studies*, 39:4 (2014), 279-291. Rebecca Fraser, 'Monsieur Heger: Critic or Catalyst in the Life of Charlotte Brontë?', *Brontë Studies*, 28.3 (2003), 185-194. Enid L. Duthie, *The Foreign Vision of Charlotte Brontë* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1975). Stevie Davies, *Women and their Work - Emily Brontë* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 1998). Edward Chitham, *The Birth of Wuthering Heights - Emily Brontë at Work* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001). Frederika Macdonald, *The Secret of Charlotte Brontë followed by some reminiscences of the real Monsieur and Madame Heger* (London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1914). With the exception of Lonoff and Davies, the central focus is the impact of the Brontës' time in Brussels and the teaching of Heger rather than an analysis of the work the sisters produced.

and the words, “Father, father, come and help us!” A frightful struggle rent his heart; for some moments he said not a word. He covered his eyes with his hands and pressed his brow against the battlements; before long he stood upright. His face was pale, and his lips livid. He replied in a voice firm and resonant, “Let my children die, God will take them to his breast; for myself I have only one duty to fulfil, it is to remain faithful to my country. Ghents, I am not vanquished, begone!”⁴⁷

The central aspect Charlotte has brought to this task has been to imbue the incident with emotion. She makes the characters personable so the reader can appreciate the human struggle within this political event. Her narrative remains close to the protagonist Lalaing; she persistently uses ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘his’ to enforce a close relationship between the reader and the protagonist. By creating this connection, Charlotte is able to explore the personal emotions of the character. The continuous use of ‘his’, in regards to the children, establishes their bond and makes the incident more emotional as it places consistent emphasis on their relationship. In the final line Charlotte uses ‘my children’ to make the emotional impact of the statement as dynamic as possible. The repetitive use of pronouns builds on the level of responsibility with which Lalaing is battling. The stakes are personal and the decisions are his alone. The repetition intensifies the level of anxiety and drama in the scene, which adds emphasis in order to reach an emotional crescendo.

Charlotte continues to enhance this dramatic scene with the inclusion of direct speech. This is particularly effective when it comes to the pleas of Lalaing’s sons. By allowing them to speak, Charlotte transforms the boys from symbols into real children, about to die, begging their father for mercy. Charlotte continues to imbue the scene with

⁴⁷ Charlotte Brontë, ‘The Siege of Oudenarde/ Le siege d’Oudenarde’, in *BE*, pp. 72-75, (pp. 72-74).

feeling with ‘their terror’, ‘their tears’, ‘their feeble cries’. She adds human emotion to the children to demonstrate the dramatic tension of the episode. The more Charlotte describes the children the more anxiety there is in the scene, which makes the final statement even more shocking and devastating.

Charlotte also relies on the sensory aspects: she repeatedly writes ‘He saw’, with regard to Lalaing looking at his children, and he ‘heard’ their cries. She shows that Lalaing is overwhelmed by the physical presence of his children. Therefore, it is significant that when Lalaing makes his decision he covers his eyes with his hands and presses his brow against the battlements. To make the awful decision Lalaing must remove all sensory connections to his children; he must block them out of his head and heart and physically punish himself in order to make the painful choice.

As is the case with her juvenilia, the focus for Charlotte is the human experience within the political events rather than the wider ramifications. Her focus is very much on the conflict in loyalty between the dual roles of father and ruler. Charlotte chooses to emphasise what Lalaing was sacrificing rather than what his sacrifice would achieve which makes his final statement fraught with tragedy. There is little glorifying of Lalaing and his heroism – it is rather a bitter resignation. Focused on the human experience, Charlotte conveys the suffering of Lalaing: she presents him as a father faced with a terrible choice, rather than a stoic hero who performs his duty without hesitation.

Emily’s account of this scene differs notably from Charlotte’s. Her focus is less on the personal experiences and emotions of her characters, and more on the heroic portrayal of Lalaing:

Still there was one heart, among those men so brave and faithful, one traitor’s soul low enough to weigh a handful of gold in the balance against the independence of his country. That wretch found the means to seize the two sons of Commander

Lalaing, and he delivered them to the enemy at a moment when its patience was starting to run out and its energy to weaken. The Ghents, joyful at this prize, led the children within sight of their father and announced that either the town must surrender at once, or the boys would die. It rested with Lalaing to pronounce the sentence; his refusal would be the signal for their death. The commander regarded his sons, whose eyes, filled with tears, implored his help. At their side he saw the soldiers armed with glaives who would end their days. For a moment he hesitated; nature wrestled strongly with honor; his breast swelled with a terrible emotion. But finally the patriot subdued the father; he turned to face the Ghents: "Take," said he, "the life of these poor children. I cannot weigh it against the liberty of my country, and as for their souls, I entrust them to God. My sentence is pronounced."⁴⁸

Emily's portrayal of Lalaing is much more regal: she is concerned with presenting him as the hero. There is a distance between him and his children, whom Lalaing does not acknowledge as his own. This contrasts with Charlotte's interpretation which made this epic moment personal with the use of the determiner 'my' with regard his sons. Emily's Lalaing is dismissive in entrusting his children to God, whereas Charlotte adds an emotional aspect by including the loving relationship of God for his children. Emily notes Lalaing's 'terrible emotion' but it is not the focus of her essay. Lonoff comments: 'Emily's version, spare though it is, implies a different vision of loyalty, one in which valiant individuals join forces and a commander sacrifices ruthlessly to guard the independence of his homeland.'⁴⁹ Ruthless is a not a term which easily applies to Charlotte's emotional reading of Lalaing, but the emotionally distant aspect Emily adopts reveals a different

⁴⁸ Emily Brontë, 'The Siege of Oudenarde/ Le siege d'Oudenarde', in *BE*, pp. 68-71, (p. 68).

⁴⁹ Sue Lonoff, 'Comments for The Siege of Oudenarde/ Le siege d'Oudenarde', in *BE*, pp. 76-79, (p. 79).

interpretation. Though both portray Lalaing's sacrifice, the method with which this is presented, as Lonoff argues, exhibits a difference in focus. Emily's stoic rendering exhibits an understanding of the need to disregard the feelings of the individual for the greater good of others. In Emily's reserved, political rendering the sacrifice becomes heroic rather than tragic.

In Charlotte's essay, Lalaing remains her focus whereas Emily moves her attention to the Ghents and the traitor. These incidents are briefly covered in Charlotte's extract whereas Emily's demonstrates further consideration; she describes the traitor and gives possible reasons for the betrayal. This implies that Emily's attention is on the scene and the narrative rather than any individual character. This reveals an individual approach to their writing which can also be seen in their subsequent novels. In Charlotte's novels, it is the individual which is the central focus. Even in her social commentary novel *Shirley*, the narrative frequently focuses on either Shirley and Caroline, or the Moore brothers. The narratives of Emily's that remain consistently focus on multiple characters rather than an individual. *Wuthering Heights* is very much an ensemble piece; Cathy and Heathcliff may appear as the central protagonists, but Cathy dies half way through the narrative. In addition, the reader is never given direct access to Heathcliff; he is observed and interpreted by Nelly and Lockwood. Emily's focus on the Ghents, as well as Lalaing, shows that she is consistently interested in the portrayal of a wide cast of characters.

A comparison can be drawn from the final statement of each extract in which Lalaing gives his final decision. Both sisters opt to use dialogue to add dramatic emphasis to the moment: though the meaning is the same, the presentation of the dialogue is different. Charlotte emphasises the personal sacrifice of Lalaing by stating 'my children', in contrast Emily writes 'these poor children'. There is an emotional distance in Emily's statement. Due to the difficulty of the decision and the emotional sacrifice that has been

taken, Emily's Lalaing must cease to see the children as his own. Both statements are emotional, but Emily's is more reserved which is in-keeping with her overall representation of Lalaing.

Emily's essay reveals a dark undertone in the final statement 'My sentence is pronounced.' In this final line, Emily's protagonist takes on the role of executioner and appears to sentence his children to death. Charlotte's speech ends with a statement of defiance which deviates from the stark reality of her protagonist's decision. Emily does not shy away from the horror of these consequences. This foreshadows the difference which can clearly be seen in the novels of the two sisters. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily explores the darker aspects of humanity unflinchingly, a technique Charlotte made clear she did not approve of in her 'Editor's Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*'. Of Emily's creation she declares: 'Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done.'⁵⁰ However, this essay, and the subsequent one, demonstrate that Emily is clearly familiar and comfortable with the depiction of these brutal characteristics. Repeatedly adopting this type of character indicates intent rather than an unconsidered error as Charlotte suggests. This is further challenged by the implication that Heger, as their teacher, read these essays. Therefore, this demonstrates that, contrary to Charlotte's assessment, Emily did not create such characters because she did not know what she was doing and did not anticipate the readers' reactions. Emily was very much aware these essays would be read, and this knowledge does not curb her pen. Furthermore, Charlotte was aware of Emily's devoirs and that they, like her novel, had been read by others outside her family. This seems to portray a recurring trope in Charlotte's interaction with Emily's work in which she positions herself in between Emily and her reader. Charlotte may not

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*', in *WH*, pp. l-liv, (p. lii).

have been able to exert her control over Emily's writing in Brussels but she could do so after her death.

In 'The Palace of Death/Le Palais de la Mort' the sisters are instructed to write about a pre-biblical time where Death selects her viceroy. As is apparent in the previous essay, the sisters are given an identical scene to depict and each produces very different results. One of the key differences in this particular essay is their interpretation of the character War. Charlotte writes:

Death did not answer. She raised her scepter a second time and a new candidate was introduced. It was a form of Amazon, garbed like Thalestris in a scarlet robe, short and tucked up; she bore a bow in her hand and a quiver over her shoulder; she led on a leash two huge dogs, ferocious as two wolves; the features of this woman resembled those of a man; her bearing was proud and bold; her muscular arm appeared strong enough to wave about the lance of an Achilles. "I am War!" said she. "I come from a battlefield; my garments are still stained with the blood I have seen flow. Who can serve you more faithfully than I, oh Death? Who has led more victims to your feet? When I unleash Massacre and Carnage on the human race (and she pointed to the fierce beasts she held on the leash) the moans of widows and cries of orphans announce your victory."⁵¹

The most significant aspect of Charlotte's interpretation of this exercise is to make all her characters female. This has been a deliberate decision on Charlotte's part as the characters in Emily's interpretation are male and female. The relevance of Charlotte's decision is further enforced by an annotation from Heger in which he inquires about the reasoning behind Charlotte's selection of an Amazon. The choice is clearly significant as

⁵¹ Charlotte Brontë, 'The Palace of Death/Le Palais de la Mort', in *BE*, pp. 216-223, (p. 220).

most of the extract is dedicated to the description of her Amazon. This indicates the independence Charlotte already had as a writer and her determination to stand by her ideas. It also clearly shows Charlotte's interest, at this stage, in strong female protagonists. In her juvenilia, her central character is male but at this point Charlotte shows her preoccupation with female characters, which dominate her novels.

This appears to be a gendered comment from Charlotte. She manipulates ancient mythology to fit her own agenda by the inclusion of Amazons and the gendering of War as female – potentially inspired by the Greek goddess Athena. Charlotte continues to experiment with her representation of gender through her characterisation. In the two *devoirs* I have explored, Charlotte reverses the gendered roles and represents her male character through his emotions and her female characters through their physicality. War's features 'resembled those of a man' and she is strong enough to 'wave about the lance of an Achilles'. We can see Charlotte's experimentation here as she blends masculine physicality with the female gender. Yet the comment that her female War is as strong as Achilles demonstrates equality between the genders. It is also a role reversal of women as the bringers of life; in Charlotte's *devoir* women become the takers of life and the sources of death and war. This is further emphasised by the mention of the moans of widows and orphans as 'victory'. In this case, it is women who are responsible for the destruction of families and they take glory from it.

In contrast to her previous essay, there is less characterisation and emotive language in this piece; the overall tone is more reserved. In the dialogue there is the suggestion that War has not committed the killing, as she comments on the blood she has seen rather than caused. Charlotte does not elaborate on the suffering of the victims as she does in the previous essay. There is no attempt to humanise the mothers or orphans as she does Lalaing's sons. This is due to Charlotte's characterisation of War. Lalaing is a

historical figure whereas War is a concept; therefore Charlotte does not imbue her with human emotions, which in turn add to her grandiose inaccessibility, and sense of threat.

The emotional reserve of Charlotte's *devoir* demonstrates a shift in her work.

However, even with this shift Emily's essay remains notably different from Charlotte's:

On hearing these words, Fanaticism shook his savage head, and raising toward Death an eye burning with the fire of obsession, he began: "I know this blusterer will happily borrow my weapons and march under my banners, but is that any reason that she should presume to compare herself with me? Not only will I be as powerful as she at overturning states and desolating realms, but I will enter into families; I will set the son against the father, the daughter against the mother; inspired the faithful friend will become a mortal enemy, the wife will betray her husband, the domestic his master. No sentiment can withstand me; I will traverse the earth beneath heaven's banners and crowns will be as stones beneath my feet. As for the other candidates, they are unworthy of attention; Wrath is unreasonable; vengeance is partial; Famine can be conquered by industry; Plague is capricious. Your prime minister must be someone who is always close to men, who surrounds and possesses them. Decide then between Ambition and me; we are the only ones between whom your choice can hesitate."⁵²

As with her previous *devoir*, Emily's focus is with the wider narrative aspects rather than individual characters. This can be seen in how Emily rapidly lists multiple characters and their deficiencies. She once again includes a wide cast of characters, but it is the outcomes of their actions, rather than the characters themselves which receive Emily's

⁵² Emily Brontë, 'The Palace of Death/Le Palais de la Mort', in *BE*, pp. 224-231, (pp. 226-228).

focus. Fanaticism does not discuss himself but rather his plans and actions; it is his victims and his enemies who receive the most focus.

What is also significant is her adoption of Fanaticism/Le Fanatisme rather than War/La Guerre. They may be connected, but Fanaticism has not simply been used as an alternative word to represent the same thing. It creates a different character. Emily's piece suggests it is not simply War which is responsible for the mass slaughter of mankind, but rather War when it is adopted by a fanatic and used to reap destruction. It reveals innovation on Emily's part and, like Charlotte, a moment of creative rebellion in her decision to present her own interpretation rather than following Heger's instructions, or using the same characters and approach as her sister. Lonoff proposes that, 'In the year before her death, she was absorbed in depicting the effects of fanatical belief; civil wars between the Republican and Royalists tear Gondal's families apart.'⁵³ Lonoff's statement implies that this piece may have been the start of Emily's preoccupation with fanaticism which she continued to interrogate and explore in her creative work in the years following this composition. Emily is also concerned with the separation of family members and loved ones which is a central theme in *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff's fanatic pursuit of revenge, which is inspired in part by Hindley's fanatical hatred of Heathcliff, destroys three families throughout the course of the novel.

In this exercise it is Emily, rather than Charlotte, who opts for a more nuanced telling as she focuses on the personal sacrifice. Charlotte chooses to represent the faceless masses lost in war to convey the scale of destruction, whereas Emily focuses on the impact fanaticism can have on humanity. She discusses the destruction of families and friendships; the affect is felt not just on the battlefield but in homes. This appears to be an inversion of her previous essay in which the personal cost is overshadowed by the wider ramifications;

⁵³ Sue Lonoff, 'Comments for 'The Palace of Death/Le Palais de la Mort', in *BE*, pp. 232-237, (p. 237).

in this piece Emily makes war more personal and focuses on the results of warfare on the family. However, both essays still portray the notion that unyielding commitment to ideals will ultimately lead to the destruction of the family. The sense of betrayal and revenge between loved ones, and masters and their servants is very reminiscent of the subject matter of *Wuthering Heights*. When Fanaticism declares, ‘No sentiment can withstand me’, the sinister character of Heathcliff and his cruel desires can be seen.

Unlike Charlotte, Emily has chosen speech to portray her character rather than focusing on his physical appearance. The only indication that is given with regards to the physicality of the character is his ‘savage head’ and ‘an eye burning with the fire of obsession’ – once again very reminiscent of *Wuthering Heights*. As is apparent in her previous essay, Emily spends a lot of time elaborating her points. In the case of opposition between the characters, Charlotte’s War asks rhetorical questions but does nothing more to acknowledge her competition; such is the degree of her confidence. Emily on the other hand has Fanaticism list his opponents and explain why he is superior to each. War assumes her worth whereas Fanaticism proves it through his opposition to others. This is once again an example of the difference in depiction by each sister. As is apparent in the previous essay, Charlotte consistently remains focused on individuals whereas Emily opts to represent a wider range of characters in her prose.

There is considerably more characterisation of Fanaticism in comparison to Emily’s Lalaing, but this is achieved through an interpretation of his actions rather than in any detail of the character himself. Charlotte achieves a sense of intimidating grandiosity through her description of the physicality of War whereas Emily uses the sinister content of Fanaticism’s dialogue to convey threat. In a reversal, it is Emily who uses the humanisation of the victims in order to create drama whereas Charlotte uses the heroic reserve seen in Emily’s Lalaing. The pair are able to write in a similar manner to each

other, but the fact that they choose such different approaches in both cases demonstrates their evident difference as writers.

Charlotte and Emily's Belgian devoirs are critically overlooked, yet they were fundamental to their development as writers. The nature of the controlled, educational exercises do not necessarily allow for the creativity displayed in their other work. Nevertheless, the strict confines of the written tasks allows us to extract clear evidence of the differences in approach and technique exhibited by the two sisters. By being compelled to depict the same scenes Charlotte and Emily present their individual writing styles. To solely consider the sisters' time in Brussels through a biographical approach is to overlook the significance of the written work produced during this time. The analysis of these essays reveal how the sisters experiment with tropes and themes which they employ in their novels.

2.5 Conclusion

In Farrell's consideration of collaborative circles the letters and diaries of his subjects are used to garner biographical details. However, in this chapter I have shown how the life writing of members within a literary community is invaluable evidence to aid in our understanding of the effect of their collaboration on their development as writers. The letters, diaries and essays of the Brontë siblings reveal that communal collaboration was not solely restricted to their creative work but seeped into every aspect of their writing. The Brontës' writing community was integral; we see Emily and Anne rely upon their creative partnership in every aspect of their writing. However, what these pieces of life writing also demonstrate are the early indications of individualism when the members were forced to write alone. Their life writing acts as the connection between the juvenilia and their published works and displays the progression of their individuality as writers. Furthermore,

it is within their diaries and essays that we see the Brontë sisters experiment with themes and techniques which inform their novels.

Running throughout all the Brontë letters there is an apparent aim to conceal the individual: the sisters by the adoption of their communal voice, and Branwell in the creation of his personas. This is a product and impact of their writing community. Their family and community were insular and as a result their writing displays a reluctance to expose their individual voices to members outside of their group. It also demonstrates the impact of their creative endeavours upon the rest of their writing. This is most clearly shown in Branwell's letters, in which he blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality; the creation of his personae allowed him to dramatise himself and his life. In the case of the sisters, by acting as a spokesperson they wrote about others rather than allowing their letters to be their own personal expressions. Even so, from within this role they each allow a glimpse into their own individuality, but these are easily lost within the communal voice.

The Brontë sisters were by no means prolific diary writers. Yet, whilst their entries are only a small section of the extensive collection of writing they completed during their lives, they are invaluable to understanding their journey as writers and the importance of their community. In their individual compositions we see Emily, Anne and Charlotte develop prose writing techniques which come to be so important in the composition of their novels. In addition, we see how even in Charlotte, Emily and Anne's life writing the sisters' dependence on each other and their community remained tantamount as they all struggled as writers when separated from each other. However, it is a result of this forced separation that their individuality as writers developed.

In the Belgian essays there is clear foreshadowing of the novels which follow them. With Charlotte, we can see her interest in the depiction of the individual, and a narrative style which remains close to the protagonist. She reveals her interest in the importance of

the representation of personal suffering, within a wider piece, in order to evoke emotion and imbue the work with sentiment. In Emily's devoirs we can see her preoccupation with the portrayal of brutal aspects of life and her interest in the role fanatical beliefs could have in the destruction of the family. As Lonoff states, Emily continued to explore fanaticism after Brussels in her poetry and in her novel. In her devoir we see her begin to explore this notion which continued to inform and fascinate her.

Throughout their entire lives the Brontës wrote as writers; they imbued their lives with creativity. Consistently they tried to adopt their skills as writers in a futile attempt to have some form of control over their lives, the way they did over the lives of their characters. The only member of the community to not do this is Anne, who chose to use her creativity to portray the harsh reality of life which is the central aim of her two novels.

**Chapter Three: ‘Should Life’s first feeling be forgot, / As Time leaves years
behind?’¹ Collaborative identity and the isolation of Branwell**

3.1 Introduction

Janet Gezari states that ‘the importance of *Poems* for our understanding of the Brontë sisters as poets is considerable.’² I take this notion a step further and establish how *Poems* is important not only in our understanding of the Brontë sisters as poets but as a family of writers. The Brontë poetry published in their 1846 collection *Poems* is the only time the three sisters published together.³ However, this apparent moment of collaboration by the sisters is actually a constructed fallacy. Gezari explains:

Poems (1846) comprises nineteen poems by Charlotte and twenty-one poems each by Emily and Anne. [...] In some cases, contiguous poems have a common subject; in others, poems seem to respond to each other by taking up a common theme. For example, three consecutive poems – Anne’s ‘If this be all’, Charlotte’s ‘Life’ and Emily’s ‘Hope’ – address the abstractions signalled by Charlotte’s and Emily’s titles.⁴

Here, Gezari shows that the collection of poems demonstrates similar themes, and she introduces the notion that the sisters’ poems ‘respond’ to each other. However, this synergy between the poems is one which was created in the editing process rather than through collaborative writing. There is the potential that there may have been some

¹ Patrick Branwell Brontë, ‘Song’, in *WPBB*, III, p. 371.

² Janet Gezari, ‘The poetry of the Brontës’, in *The Brontës in Context* ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 134-142, p. 136.

³ They did attempt to publish their first novels together with the notion that *The Professor*, *Agnes Grey*, and *Wuthering Heights* would combine to make a three volume collection. However, due to the rejection of the *The Professor*, and the subsequent composition of *Jane Eyre*, the Brontë sisters would never again publish as a collective.

⁴ Gezari, p. 136.

collaboration between Emily and Anne. However, as the 1845 diary entry explored in the previous chapter shows, Emily and Anne reached a stage in their partnership where they were not always aware of the details of each other's writing projects. It is clear Charlotte had not shared in the collaborative process which is evidenced in her reaction upon discovering Emily's poetry.⁵ As such, any similarities and connections made between the poems, with regards to theme, has been orchestrated by the sisters after the writing was completed.

Malfait and Demoor suggest that 'The custom of collaboration, however, seems to have applied only to the genesis of the Brontës' juvenilia and prose writings – the poems, apparently, were a matter of private composition, exempt from the sisters' habitual candidness. For Emily especially, writing poetry was a thoroughly private process.'⁶ The use of 'genesis' is significant here as Malfait and Demoor acknowledge that it is only the initial aspects of a creative project which stem from group collaboration. Though the notion that the novels were commenced collaboratively is problematic, the construction of unity in their poetry is clear from the individuality which emerges in the poems.⁷ Helena Michie proposes that 'sisterhood, in Victorian culture, depends on differences between women, and provides a safe, familiar, and familial space for its articulation. Victorian melodrama abounds with pairs of sisters who work out issues of identity and difference with relation to each other.'⁸ As such, the collecting and editing of their separate poems

⁵ 'One day, in autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a MS. Volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting. Of course, I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse: I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me, - a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write.' – Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in Emily Brontë, *WH*, pp.xliii-xlix, (pp. xliii-xliv).

⁶ Malfait & Demoor, p. 191.

⁷ The notion that the initial composition of the novels is problematic here as Anne's diary entry suggests she commenced work on *Agnes Grey* whilst away at Thorp Green. See Anne Brontë, 'Diary paper 31st July 1845', in *BLL*, pp. 132-133, (p. 133). Charlotte began *Jane Eyre* whilst caring for her recovering father in Manchester, see Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Abacus, 2010), pp. 599-600.

⁸ Helena Michie, *Sororophobia – Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 17.

allowed the sisters the opportunity to display their differences whilst also pursuing themes of unity.

There appears to be a desire on the part of the Brontës to represent themselves as a writing family through the adoption of the pseudonym Bell. Lamonica suggests that ‘their adoption of a common surname publicly professed their loyalty to a shared family identity.’⁹ However, there is a notable absence in their presentation of this family: that of their brother Branwell. Beverley Southgate conjectures that ‘In the run up to the publication of *Poems*, a decision had been taken, presumably by Charlotte, that Branwell should be excluded from the project [...] Perhaps Charlotte believed that Branwell’s involvement was no longer necessary now that she had recreated with her sisters the sense of literary community which she had enjoyed with him years before.’¹⁰ The absence of Branwell from *Poems* demonstrates the extent to which he had ostracised himself from the writing community of previous years. His sisters may have chosen not to include him in their first attempt at publication, but Branwell had already achieved publication of his own without their assistance. In his adult writing, it is the individual artist and poet which takes precedence. It is his isolation which defines his work.

Gezari, Lamonica and Southgate all put forward the notion that the portrayal of family was integral to the Brontës’ first publication. Certainly, the collection is characterised by the shared themes of faith, hope, nature and, most prominently, death.¹¹ However, I intend to determine in this chapter that individuality is as integral as the similarities shown in the Brontë sisters’ collection of poems. The structural aspects of

⁹ Lamonica, p. 62.

¹⁰ Beverley Southgate, ‘Minds Cast in the Same Mould’ Thoughts on Charlotte’s Relationship with Branwell’, *Brontë Studies*, 28.3 (2003), 225-235, p. 232.

¹¹ Betty Jay and Angela Leighton have written, respectively, about Anne and Emily’s explorations of death in their poetry. See Betty Jay, *Anne Brontë* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2000) and Angela Leighton, ‘The poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. by Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 53-71.

publication may present three siblings united in poetry, but their actual work reveals three distinct individuals. In Branwell's published poems we see him responding to similar themes as a way of writing back to the community. Branwell established himself as a writer within the writing community of the family and, even though he was no longer working with his sisters, the impact of their collaboration on his work is still apparent.

The creation and publication of *Poems* marks a significant moment in the evolution of the Brontës as a group of collaborative writers. Here we see them progress through The Creative Work Stage to The Collective Action Stage. Farrell explains: 'The collective action stage begins when the members decide to carry out a large project together. [...] During the collective action stage, the circle participants deal directly with the outside world.'¹² *Poems* marks the moment the three sisters chose to collaborate on a specific piece of work. In addition, it is the moment they shared their work with a wider audience. They attempted to replicate this again with their first novels, but the external forces of their publishers divided their community. Farrell explains how it is frequently the impact of members outside the group which leads to the collaborative circle's demise: 'The public's reactions to the circle can have significant consequences for the group. [...] For a variety of reasons, conflict among members is likely to increase during the collective action stage.'¹³ It cannot be confirmed that 'conflict' resulted in the Brontës no longer collaborating together. Nevertheless, once The Collective Action Stage had been achieved, outside influences subsequently cause the demise of the community.

In this chapter, I shall explore the striking moments of individualism within the Brontës' published poetry and how, within their portrayal of community, they were able to pursue their independence as writers. Once the Brontë sisters united they rapidly

¹² Farrell, pp. 24-25.

¹³ Farrell, p. 25.

progressed to The Collective Action Stage. By publishing their poems under the assumed family name, Bell, the sisters commenced the representation of themselves as a family of writers. However, as the poems submitted for publication had predominantly been written separately, action was required in the collating stage in order for their work to support their portrayal of themselves as family. It is in the structuring of their publication that we can see the attempt to represent community. In the first editions, the poems of the three sisters are interspersed, rather than sectioned off for each individual. In addition to this, there is no clear indicator of which sibling wrote each poem.¹⁴ As such, no clear attempt has been made to identify the sisters as individuals.

In the curation of *Poems*, the Brontë sisters connect their work through a number of shared themes. Through these common themes the sisters were able to present themselves as a united family of writers. Farrell explains that, 'For members of the collaborative circle, each person's work is an expression of the circle's shared vision filtered through his or her own personality.'¹⁵ Therefore, as these were themes they had each addressed separately, their poems display independence. Alongside character-driven poems, the collection includes poems which address themes such as dreams, doubt, and subjugation. In their consideration of dreams Emily explores her notions regarding transcendence through the creative mind, whilst Charlotte uses it as the catalyst in her dramatic monologue. Religious doubt and the challenge to overcome it threads throughout Anne's poems in the collection. Emily also tackles the crippling impact of doubt but it is not religious doubt which plagues her speaker. Each of the sisters include character-driven poems but they use them to develop very different characters. In their depiction of the subjugated, Charlotte and Anne experiment with themes which they tackle in their novels,

¹⁴ A scanned copy of the 1846 edition of *Poems* can be accessed on Google Books: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=h1hpAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&ad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false [accessed 05 May 2018].

¹⁵ Farrell, p. 12.

and Anne characteristically uses her work to present a fierce challenge to oppressive forces.

The collection may suggest a family identity so entwined that the poems could be accredited to any of the three authors. Even so, the poems themselves, though united through shared themes and sources of inspiration, proclaim the individuality of each Brontë sibling. Where possible, I explore the poems in the order in which they appear in the collection, in order to interact with proposed connections formulated in the editing process.¹⁶ Through the exploration of dreams, doubt, subjugation and character I shall demonstrate how, through a presentation of unity, the sisters' works demonstrate their pursuit of independence whilst acknowledging a debt to their community through their construction of unity.

I shall then continue with an exploration of Branwell's published poems, to investigate how he struggled to write in isolation from his writing community and, as a result, formed a new community with his literary brotherhood of friends. I show how Branwell's poems are dominated by a preoccupation with loss and estrangement. These are themes which are shared and explored by all his sisters. As such, I present a direct comparison with a poem by each sister to show how, even in isolation, Branwell continued to be influenced by and respond to his writing community.

The Brontë family's poetry is a greatly overlooked resource in our understanding of the family as writers. This chapter will establish that a consideration of the poetry of the Brontës is integral to our understanding of their writing community. It is through these first publications that the Brontë sisters publicly established themselves a collective and Branwell as an isolated individual. However, as this chapter will show, from within this

¹⁶ The nine poems analysed here are not the first nine poems of the collection. However, aside from 'A Day Dream' they are discussed in the order which they appear. The order is as follows: 'Pilate's Wife's Dream' (1), 'A Day Dream' (27), 'The Philosopher' (6), 'The Penitent' (15), 'Frances' (17), 'Gilbert' (20), 'If this be all' (22), 'To Imagination' (30), and 'The Doubter's Prayer' (31).

portrayal of collaboration and isolation the sisters emerge as individuals and Branwell reveals the lasting legacy of the community. Their poetry proves just how integral their writing community remained as they approached publication.

3.2 ‘Dreams, then, are true’:¹⁷ Charlotte and Emily’s study of dreams

Charlotte and Emily both treat dreams as conveyors of profound insight. Each of their speakers address life-altering decisions inspired by a dream. Even so, their interpretation of dreams differ as Charlotte uses a dream to inspire the action of her dramatic monologue. The dream itself is only briefly described, with its ramifications presented as the source of interest. Emily’s depiction of a daydream allows her speaker to transcend reality and consciously participate in the reverie. The vision is described using ethereal imagery as it offers euphoric release to Emily’s speaker. However, both speakers are left with doubts created by their dreams.

Charlotte’s dramatic monologue ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’ opens the 1846 collection.

Gezari comments on this choice by the sisters. She explains that the poem:

sets a tone for the volume as a whole and shares important features with Charlotte’s other contributions. Because the subject of Pilate’s wife had a long history in the visual arts, it would not have signalled that this was a book of poems by women, a signal the sisters hoped to prevent by adopting their masculine-sounding pseudonyms. But ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’ does mark the importance to these poems of female perspectives, dreams and visions.¹⁸

¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’, in *PCB*, ed. by Tom Winnifrith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd, 1984), pp. 3-8, (p. 4).

¹⁸ Gezari, pp. 137-138.

As Gezari highlights, Charlotte's poem is responsible for establishing the tone of the whole collection. The theme of the female perspective, particularly those damaged via their relationships with men, dominates Charlotte's narrative poems. Also, in her adoption of the dramatic monologue, we see Charlotte providing one of the earliest examples of the style which defines Victorian poetry.

Charlotte's poems may have been published in 1846 but her dramatic monologues, Alexander and Smith suggest, were composed in the 1830s. They explain: 'From 1830 onwards short pieces were interspersed with immensely long poems, [...] Charlotte soon began to experiment with a variety of styles, metres, and forms, including dramatic monologues and verse dramas.'¹⁹ Alexander and Smith go on to clarify that Charlotte 'completed a long poem of 439 lines by 9 January 1837, and 48 further poems by the end of January 1838, fifteen of which she thought worthy of revising for publication alongside her sisters' work in *Poems* 1846.'²⁰ In experimenting with the dramatic form, which dominates her poetry in the collection, Charlotte progresses into a poetic style which became dominant in the Victorian period.

E. Warwick Slinn explains the development of the monologue in Victorian poetry:

The massive Victorian production of poems where the speaker is not the poet, or where personal expressiveness is placed in a context which objectifies its process [...] or where a speaker objectifies herself for self-scrutiny [...] marks a literary phenomenon that amounts to a virtual paradigm shift. Obviously conventional lyricism never disappears, but during the nineteenth century the ascendancy of lyrical forms became supplanted by monologues that are in varying degrees 'dramatic'.²¹

¹⁹ Alexander and Smith, p. 382.

²⁰ Alexander and Smith, p. 383.

²¹ E. Warwick Slinn, 'Dramatic Monologue', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), pp. 80-98, (p. 85).

In the collection, Emily and Anne's poems rely predominantly on lyrical forms. Charlotte's experimentation with form pre-empted the 'paradigm shift' put forward by Slinn. Of the three poems I shall explore, 'Pilate's Wife's Dream' is the only formal dramatic monologue. However, 'Frances' and 'Gilbert' each consist of extensive monologues within the body of the overall poem. All three poems make it clear that the speaker is not the poet, and it is in the development of these three individuals that Charlotte excels.

Cornelia D. J. Pearsall explains that characteristically in dramatic monologues, 'Speakers desire to achieve some purpose, looking toward goals that they not only describe in the course of their monologues but also labor steadily to achieve through the medium of their monologues.'²² Charlotte challenges her heroine to free herself from her husband and save the life of Jesus Christ. One of Charlotte's clear strengths in the poem is her ability to develop the biblical character and create an emotional reaction. In her depiction of the marriage of Pontius Pilate and his wife, Charlotte is able to humanise her heroine:

Dreams, then, are true – for thus my vision ran;

Surely some oracle has been with me,

The gods have chosen me to reveal their plan,

To warn an unjust judge of destiny:

I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,

Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.

[...]

How can I love, or mourn, or pity him?

I, who so long my fettered hands have wrung;

²² Cornelia D. J. Pearsall, 'The dramatic monologue', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 67-88, (p. 68).

I, who for grief have wept my eyesight dim;

Because, while life for me was bright and young,
He robbed my youth – he quenched my life's fair ray –
He crushed my mind, and did my freedom slay.

And at this hour – although I be his wife –

He has no more of tenderness from me
Than any other wretch of guilty life;

Less, for I know his household privacy –
I see him as he is – without a screen;
And, by the gods, my soul abhors his mien!

Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood –

Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly?
And have I not his red salute withstood?

Ay, when, as erst, he plunged all Galilee
In dark bereavement – in affliction sore,
Mingling their very offering with their gore.

Then came he – in his eyes a serpent-smile,

Upon his lips some false, endearing word,
And, through the streets of Salem, clanged the while

His slaughtering, hacking, sacrilegious sword –
And I, to see a man cause men such woe,

Trembled with ire I did not fear to show. (43-48, 61-84)²³

The dream is used as the catalyst which awakens feelings of rebellion in the speaker. The dream offers her the chance to save her husband from the 'life of woe' before him. However, her subsequent portrayal of his cruelty is used to sway the readers' judgement if she does not intervene. Even so, the dream forces the heroine to question herself; she is torn between hatred for her husband and curiosity about Christ. As one who has also suffered under the hands of Pilate she can sympathise with Jesus. She demonstrates how she has witnessed her husband's cruelty before and questions whether she should intervene. 'Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood – / Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly?' The mention of 'Innocent, righteous blood' foreshadows the oncoming sacrifice of Christ. The imagery of disgust and cruelty is taken further in the implied rape of the heroine by her tyrant husband. She rhetorically asks 'And have I not his red salute withstood?' In this imagery of blood and the destruction of innocence she confides that she too is a victim. Pilate ravishes the body of his wife whilst still covered in the blood of his victims; their blood mixes with hers and together they represent his brutality. The subsequent language of 'plunged', 'affliction sore', and 'gore' further support the graphic imagery of rape withstood by the heroine. This imagery mirrors the suffering of Christ as the nails and lance are plunged into his body.

Charlotte relies heavily on caesuras to convey the distress of her heroine. She forces the reader to pause and consider each aspect of cruelty the speaker has endured. The heroine declares 'He robbed my youth – he quenched my life's fair ray –'. This pause before the reiteration shows not only the level of abuse she has experienced, but also her desire to emphasise the faults of her husband, in order to condone her betrayal of him. This

²³ Charlotte Brontë, 'Pilate's Wife's Dream', in *PCB*, pp. 4-5.

need to continually pause and reiterate her point shows her lack of position. Even in her own poem, her husband's dominance is prominent and there is a need to prove herself to the reader. This lack of standing is also shown through the absence of a name; in the poem she is only known through her marital status. This lack of identity is further shown in the claim that 'He crushed my mind, and did my freedom slay.' The destruction of her mind by her husband further supports the continuous pauses: he has controlled her thoughts and, in this moment of rebellion, she is unsure whether to trust her own dream. It is the uncertainty which is further exacerbated throughout the poem that ultimately prevents the heroine from acting upon her dream. The loss of her name represents the death of her freedom, and she no longer exists outside of his possession. She is a slave branded with the name of her master and even in a moment of rebellion she cannot trust herself.

Charlotte further pursues her biblical theme in the description of Pilate's appearance. His wife confides she saw 'in his eyes a serpent-smile' drawing the corruption of Lucifer into the depiction. By placing the tempting serpent in the eyes of her husband his wife is cast in the role of Eve, but she does not succumb to his temptation. She presents her legacy of defiance by declaring 'And I, to see a man cause men such woe, / Trembled with ire I did not fear to show.' In the previous stanza she reveals the abuse she receives in her marriage yet, even though she is his slave, she refuses to hide her disdain for him and his actions. In this critical decision, Charlotte shows how significant the influence of a woman could have been. However, whether the hatred for her abuser overpowered her, or she was ignored, the reader knows that she did not succeed in preventing tragedy. Thus, Charlotte forces her reader to consider the implications of the abuse of women, and the consequences of ignoring their opinions.

In Charlotte's poem, the dream enables Pilate's wife to address her own suffering. Through the consideration of the suffering of another she is able to face her own abuse. In

contrast to the dark undertones of Charlotte's poem, Emily's work initially depicts an idyllic scene, but this is soon shattered by the speaker. In Emily's poem 'A Day Dream', the speaker is surrounded by the joys of spring and the promise of summer. In this scene of natural beauty the speaker finds no reason to rejoice. Therefore, the speaker dedicates their time to their imagination. Throughout the course of the daydream the implications of life in a world of inevitable death are considered:

So, resting on a heathy bank,
I took my heart to me;
And we together sadly sank
Into a reverie.

We thought, 'When winter comes again,
Where will these bright things be?
All vanished, like a vision vain,
An unreal mockery!

'The birds that now so blithely sing,
Through deserts, frozen dry,
Poor spectres of the perished spring,
In famished troops, will fly.

'And why should we be glad at all?
The leaf is hardly green,
Before a token of its fall
Is on the surface seen!'

Now, whether it were really so,
I never could be sure;
But as in fit of peevish woe,
I stretched me on the moor,

A thousand thousand gleaming fires
Seemed kindling in the air;
A thousand thousand silvery lyres
Resounded far and near:

Methought, the very breath I breathed
Was full of sparks divine,
And all my heather-couch was wreathed
By that celestial shine! (21-48).²⁴

Margaret Homans finds the proposal of transcendence in Emily's poetry problematic. Referring to 'A Day Dream' she claims that 'Although the poet convinces neither herself nor her reader of her belief in transcendence after death, she clings to the effort to do so because to abandon it would be to concede that nature's death is final.'²⁵ Certainly there is doubt in this poem, but the persistence with which transcendence continues to be pursued is not only a way to escape death but rather to offer an alternative faith in which the mind overcomes the confines of the earth. She presents a belief in

²⁴ Emily Brontë, 'A Day Dream', in *EBCP*, pp. 17-18, (pp. 17-18).

²⁵ Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity - Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 147.

something beyond death. Doubt plagues Emily's poems about transcendence but through them we see her combating death and pursuing alternatives. She does not reach conviction in these poems, but nor does she give up her quest.

The confession 'I never could be sure' is the key which supports Homans's negation of the portrayal of transcendence. As in Charlotte's poem, dreams are connected with ambiguity and doubt. The language reinforces the uncertainty with 'Seemed' and 'thought'. However, drawing on my suggestion of an alternative faith, certainty is not required. In religion, certainty is rarely offered and thus the significance of faith is found. In this moment in which the mind transcends the body, and the world, and appears to enter the beyond we witness a moment of revelation. One which cannot be proved but can be believed.

The alternation of endings show uncertainty, and also the two realms the speaker is caught between. The stressed syllables of the masculine endings represent the firm reality of earth, and the nature which surrounds the speaker. However, the alternate softer sounds demonstrate the temporality of this: what appears stable is soon undermined. The use of 'fire', 'air', 'lyres' imbues the sixth quoted stanza with celestial mysticism. All represent elements which can be experienced but not firmly grasped; even the lyre is untouchable as it is the music it produces which is interacted with rather than the instrument. Similarly to the creative mind, it can be experienced and have immense power, but it cannot physically be held. Whereas in the seventh quoted stanza the masculine endings of 'breathed' and 'wreathed' refer to the speaker's body as it exists on earth, the language represents the body grounded in reality. Even 'divine' and 'shine', which are used to represent the influence of transcendence, have now become masculine as they have descended to earth.

Though doubt is present in both Charlotte and Emily's poems, Emily gives far more significance to the dream. The importance is seen in Emily's decision to adopt a

waking dream, which allows the dreamer to actively interact, as opposed to the dream Pilate's wife experiences whilst she sleeps. Charlotte's presentation of Pilate's wife shows her lack of agency and thus the dream is forced upon her. Throughout Charlotte's poem the dream continues to fade, and her heroine's doubt is exacerbated. Neither poem offers a definitive answer to the doubts presented by their speaker's dreams. However, through Emily's speaker's active interaction with the dream the poem is able to explore the implications and the magnificent ideas proposed thoroughly.

It is understandable that Homans finds the poem problematic and unconvincing as the speaker appears to abandon the reassurance of nature, which is praised in previous poems by Emily, for the suggestion of transcendence. However, the animosity the speaker feels for nature can be seen in the repetitive, harsh consonance of 'vanished', 'vision vain'; 'birds', blithely'; 'deserts', 'dry'; 'Poor spectres', 'perished spring'; and 'famished', 'fly'. The speaker seems to be spitting the words, trying to rid them from their lips. Homans describes Emily's disparagement of nature as 'poetically suicidal' as Emily's rejection of nature overthrows her previous doctrines in favour of orthodoxy, and as such she silences herself.²⁶ However, I believe it shows Emily's originality, rebellion and also experimentation. The power of the mind is a recurrent theme in Emily's poetry, as seen in chapter one, and here we see her continue to imbue this entity with prominence. In Emily's faith in the mind, she composes a poem in which the certainty of nature, the certainty of its temporality, is inferior to the incomprehensible power of the mind. Emily's speaker finds reassurance in the faith of a concept that may never be proved and thus never denied, rather than in the certainty of loss presented by nature.

²⁶ Homans, p. 145.

3.3 ‘Enough of thought, philosopher!’:²⁷ Portrayal of characters

Charlotte’s contribution to the collection is defined by her character-driven, narrative poems. Through writing her juvenilia Charlotte gradually discovered that her strength lay in prose writing and subsequently it is prose, rather than poetry, which dominates her Angrian tales. As such, in her poems she continues to use her talent for prose through the development of characters and narratives. However, Emily and Anne also interact with the presentation of a character in their poems ‘The Philosopher’, and ‘The Penitent’. Even so, Emily and Anne’s level of intimacy is instantly noticeable as they do not name their characters. Though all three sisters have submitted a character-driven poem, Emily and Anne retain a level of distance. It is their characters’ experience, rather than the character themselves, which is the focus.

Emily’s poem ‘The Philosopher’ is presented as a dialogue. However, it is soon becomes apparent that the poem is an argument between aspects of the speaker’s own consciousness which battle for control over the body inhabited:

‘Enough of thought, philosopher!

Too long hast thou been dreaming

Unenlightened, in this chamber drear,

While summer’s sun is beaming!

Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain

Concludes thy musings once again?

“Oh, for the time when I shall sleep

Without identity,

And never care how rain may steep,

²⁷ Emily Brontë, ‘The Philosopher’, in *EBCP*, pp. 7-8, (p. 7).

Or snow may cover me!
No promised heaven, these wild desires,
Could all, or half fulfil;
No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,
Subdue this quenchless will!”

‘So said I, and still say the same;
Still, to my death, will say –
Three gods, within this little frame,
Are warring night and day;
Heaven could not hold them all, and yet
They all are held in me;
And must be mine till I forget
My present entity! (1-22).²⁸

Marsden proposes that the literary imagination ‘transcends the categories of scientific or rationalist interpretations of the world, opening up alternative possibilities for meaning and experience.’²⁹ The imagination Emily describes in this poem goes beyond the body and even beyond the afterlife. It is the presence of ‘identity’, the existence of the body which shackles the power of the mind. Death is an ever-present theme in Emily’s poetry, and yet here she considers a force stronger than death, something which cannot be conquered or destroyed by the confines of mortality. The Philosopher does not reveal the

²⁸ Emily Brontë, ‘The Philosopher’, in *EBCP*, p. 7.

²⁹ Simon Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 31.

‘alternate possibilities’, but the magnitude of the ‘possibilities’ is apparent in the ‘wild desires’ and ‘quenchless will’.

Isobel Armstrong puts forward that the ‘Three gods’ that war within the Philosopher may represent the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.³⁰ However, I believe the three Gods which are described as ‘A golden stream – and one like blood; / And one like sapphire’ (31-32)³¹ may be linked to the line ‘A triple lust of gold, and blood, and power’ (58) in Charlotte’s poem ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’.³² There is no evidence that the poems were written together and any deliberate connection has been made in the editing process. However, it is likely that the two sisters are responding to a similar stimulus and each gives their own interpretation. Here we witness the poetic mind at war over its central source of influence, the draw of wealth and fame in combat with heroic glory and literary legacy. The mind is torn asunder between the drives that demand its focus. The overwhelming pressure, a pressure which ‘Heaven could not hold’, results in a longing for oblivion. Wealth, ambition and legacy are the corrupting forces of the creative mind.

Similarly to ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’, there is internal conflict within the speaker as different sides of consciousness challenge each other. The opening voice is a firm reprimand of ‘Enough’ which is further supported by the use of an exclamation mark. However, whereas the threat to Pilate’s wife is the dominance of her husband, which causes her doubt, in Emily’s poem the speaker is the threat. It highlights the peril of the self, rather than an external influence, and how it can offer even more danger. The use of ‘once again’ suggests how frequently these moments overcome the Philosopher, which results in a longing for death. In Charlotte’s poem there is an individual to challenge and

³⁰ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry - Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 336.

³¹ Emily Brontë, ‘The Philosopher’, in *EBCP*, p. 7.

³² Charlotte Brontë, ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’, in *PCB*, p. 4.

rebel against. In Emily's poem the adversary is the self, a self which is overwhelming and inescapable, thus the only option left is death.

Emily's presentation of her speaker reveals, in great detail, the inner turmoil experienced. However, the character remains elusive throughout. Matthew Rowlinson highlights that, with regard to lyrical poetry 'the figuration of a mute woman is so characteristic an allegory of the poem's mediating work, in lyrics by women the relation of the poem to speech or song is a problem very often posed in relation to a single subject, rather than for instance in a dramatic mode.'³³ Emily and Anne find themselves writing into a poetic mode dominated by male voices and silenced women. As such, as female writers presenting themselves as men, they are challenged with how to place their own voices within lyrical poetry. The elusiveness may be how Emily has tried to tackle this issue of the right of her female voice.

In 'The Philosopher' the speaker is nameless, genderless, ageless, and without worldly purpose. Emily's Philosopher is absorbed into his/her own mind, and as such it is the thoughts which are given prominence in the poem rather than actions. Similarly to 'A Day Dream', it is the dream which consumes the speaker rather than their waking reality. The Philosopher's description of 'My present entity' shows how far removed they are from their corporeal self. Emily does not spend time describing the character as her character is in a moment of transition, awaiting transcendence. To describe the Philosopher would be to place them within solid reality, a state he/she is trying to escape.

Anne is also not concerned with the description of her character. Throughout the poem they remain nameless, only known by their desire to repent their sins. The speaker, rather than the Penitent, dominates the poem as Anne uses the speaker as a mouthpiece to

³³ Matthew Rowlinson, 'Lyric', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), pp. 59-79, (p. 74).

promote her religious belief in Universal Salvation. Of her faith Anne confesses in her 1848 letter to the Revd D. Thom:

I have seen so little controversial Theology that I was not aware the doctrine of Universal Salvation had so able and ardent an advocate as yourself; but I have cherished it from my very childhood – with a trembling hope at first, and afterwards with a firm and glad conviction of its truth. I drew it secretly from my own heart and from the word of God before I knew that any other held it.³⁴

Anne's faith in Universalism was very private and specific to her, and it wasn't until the last few months of her life that she discovered a wider following. However, this does not prevent her from advocating her faith through her writing in order to offer compassion and solace to those suffering.³⁵

Regarding the teachings of theologian Origen, Diarmaid MacCulloch explains the Universalist belief that 'Since the first fall was universal, so all, including Satan himself, have the chance to work back towards God's original purpose. All will be saved, since all come from God.'³⁶ It is to this particular principle that Anne clings, and explores throughout her poetry. Cynthia Scheinberg discusses how poetry was frequently used to raise unconventional religious notions to a wider demographic: 'Victorian religious poetry became an important site for presenting divergent religious perspectives, providing a dynamic forum where writers frequently explored the fraught experience of living as a religious "other" in England.'³⁷ Once Anne progressed into prose writing she continues with her mission to advocate the beliefs of Universal Salvation to her readers through her

³⁴ Anne Brontë to Revd D. Thom, '30th December 1848', in *LCB*, ed. by Margaret Smith, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995-2004), II (2000), pp. 160-161, (p. 160).

³⁵ I have written further on Anne Brontë's portrayal of Universal Salvation in her poetry in my paper: Kimberley Braxton, 'Anne Brontë, William Cowper and the Pursuit of Individual Salvation', *The Cowper and Newton Journal*, 7, (2017) 39-54.

³⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity – The First Three Thousand Years* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2009), p. 153.

³⁷ Cynthia Scheinberg, 'Victorian poetry and religious diversity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 159-179, (p. 160).

creation of Arthur Huntingdon in her second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Despite his numerous deviances, in his final moments his long-suffering wife retains her faith in his salvation. We see Anne's preoccupation with the redemption of all in her poem 'The Penitent':

I mourn with thee and yet rejoice
That thou shouldst sorrow so;
With Angel choirs I join my voice
To bless the sinner's woe.

Though friends and kindred turn away
And laugh thy grief to scorn,
I hear the great Redeemer say
'Blessed are ye that mourn'.

Hold on thy course nor deem it strange
That earthly cords are riven.
Man may lament the wondrous change
But 'There is joy in Heaven'! (1-12).³⁸

The specific details as to why the subject is classified as a sinner are not given. The speaker is not interested in the cause of sin; the focus is on their penitence. Even so, there is persistent language to highlight the questionable nature of the subject. It is revealed that 'friends and kindred turn away / And laugh thy grief to scorn'. The sins of the subject are so great that all who loved them have withdrawn their affection. However, the use of

³⁸ Anne Brontë, 'Fragment / The Penitent', in *PAB*, p. 124.

'laugh' and 'scorn', rather than enhancing the judgement of the subject, turns the reader's attention to the cruelty of the family and friends of the sinner. The subject's sins are never revealed but we are shown the cruelty with which they are treated by those who should offer their support, thus drawing sympathy towards the subject. Predominantly, this is to show the extent of the Universalists' capability for love and forgiveness. The subject has committed sins so severe it has turned their loved ones from them, and yet the Universalist offers guidance and reserves judgement.

The poem gives pre-eminence to the language of the Bible rather than the speaker. This encourages the sinner to rely on the word of God rather than those who manipulate it for their own benefit. As such, the second stanza ends with the quotation from Matthew 5.4. Anne's readers would be aware that the inclusion of this quotation refers to comfort that will be offered through faith to those who mourn. Rather than reading the words of God, the speaker confides they 'hear' the quotation in order to make the poem as representational as possible. The words of God do not solely need to be read; therefore anyone, no matter what class, is able to receive a message. This further enforces the personal relationship which must exist between the sinner and the Lord. At this stage of the poem, the sinner is deaf to the words of the 'great Redeemer' but the speaker acts as a messenger. They are the intermediary who encourages them to progress with their faith and in their journey to God.

Similarly to Emily's presentation of her Philosopher, Anne remains elusive in her presentation of the Penitent. Anne also faces the challenges observed by Rowlinson of 'whether a woman can speak in a lyric'.³⁹ In choosing to divert attention away from gender, and remain vague about the details of her character, Anne allows her poem to be accessible to as many readers as possible. By not offering specifics, with regard to the

³⁹ Rowlinson, 'Lyric', p. 75.

Penitent's identity or sins, the reader is able to place themselves in that role and receive Anne's promise of forgiveness. By remaining abstract Anne encourages her readers to be active, to bring their own details to the poem. It is also a product of Anne's philanthropic approach to her writing; the development and identity of her own characters is not her central aim. Rather, the need to offer aid and guidance to her readership is her focus.

In her exploration of narrative poetry Charlotte concentrates on the development of her character. Charlotte differs from her sisters in opting to title her poem after the name of her heroine. In her poem 'Frances', Charlotte presents another woman devastated by a man. Frances confides her tale of sorrow as the discarded lover who is torn between hope and the bitter reality of her situation:

'Unloved – I love; unwept – I weep;

Grief I restrain – hope I repress:

Vain is this anguish – fixed and deep;

Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss:

'My love awakes no love again,

My tears collect, and fall unfelt;

My sorrow touches none with pain,

My humble hopes to nothing melt.

'For me the universe is dumb,

Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind;

Life I must be bound, existence sum

In the strait limits of one mind;

‘That mind my own. Oh! narrow cell;
Dark – imageless – a living tomb!
There must I sleep, there wake and dwell
Content, – with palsy, pain, and gloom.’ (53-68)⁴⁰

Charlotte relies on caesuras to add emphasis to her quatrains in order to exhibit the extent of her heroine’s suffering. The pause after ‘Unloved’ transforms the word into a statement; no matter how much Frances may hope later in the poem that her lover will return to her, this declaration here makes her position clear. It also separates her emotions from those of her lover, his lack of love is separated from her love and his lack of tears is firmly separated from hers. Charlotte even uses a semicolon to keep Frances’s love from her lover’s emotionless eyes that shed not one tear at leaving her.

Charlotte presents a world that does not care about the suffering of her heroines. Frances proclaims that, ‘For me the universe is dumb, / Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind; / Life I must be bound’. Like Pilate’s wife, Frances also is a slave, to life she is ‘bound’ against her will. Her body and soul are manipulated and destroyed by a man – to the complete disregard of the world. The use of ‘dumb’, ‘deaf’, ‘blank’ and ‘blind’ not only represents how she is ignored, but also shows her insignificance and isolation. All stimulus and interaction is taken from her and she is forced to live alone and forgotten like a prisoner.

The final stanza I have quoted proves her extrication from the world. Devoid of external stimulus she is imprisoned in her own mind, her ‘narrow cell’ and ‘living tomb’. No longer needed by her lover her body has no purpose, and so she regresses into herself and becomes imprisoned in her mind, a site not accessed by her male betrayer. However,

⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, ‘Frances’, in *PCB*, pp. 22-30, (p. 24).

we see how the male corruption of her body has turned her own mind into a masochistic prison where she tortures herself because of him. Similarly to Emily's *Philosopher*, one's own mind can be a source of overwhelming torment. Even so, she describes her situation as 'Content, – with palsy, pain, and gloom.' The harsh consonance sound of 'p' in 'palsy' and 'pain' shows her bitterness. As with 'Unloved', the pause after 'Content' draws our attention to the ironical statement. She certainly is not peaceful but she suggests she should be appeased. However, the list of her suffering and the pause negates this offer of contentment and challenges the unrealistic expectations of women. She must be content in a situation she has no power to alter, but she will not hide or deny the suffering she feels.

3.4 'The slave of others' will [...] Despised, forgotten still':⁴¹ Charlotte and Anne's rendering of subjugation

The suffering of women threads throughout Charlotte's poems. During the course of the chapter, I have shown how each of her heroines suffer under the control of men. In Anne's poetry the concern of gender is less prominent than in Charlotte's work. In her attempt to aid her readers, Anne considers the subjugation experienced by all in society. Charlotte and Anne, in their depiction of subjugated individuals, begin to develop central themes they explore in their novels. In their poetry they acknowledged the suffering experienced by many, and in their novels they each attempt to suggest an alternative in which their characters achieve empowerment.

In Charlotte's poems we see her forcing her readers to acknowledge the unjust and ever-present suffering of women. She repeatedly uses imagery of slavery and mental torment. In her most extensive poem in the collection, 'Gilbert', Charlotte continues with these themes but this time she alters the perspective. Charlotte has extensive experience

⁴¹ Anne Brontë, 'If this be all', in *PAB*, pp. 111-112, (p. 112).

writing from the perspective of male characters from her juvenilia. In 'Gilbert' she considers the theme of the abused woman but adopts a different perspective to explore another element of her subject.

'Gilbert' describes the title character's love affair with Elinor whom he abandons. It appears to be a conscious choice on Charlotte's part to follow her poem about an abandoned woman with a poem about a man who abandons his love. However, 'Gilbert' goes beyond 'Frances' as the reader becomes aware that Elinor has died at sea. She subsequently haunts Gilbert, who is now happily married with children, until she drives him to suicide as payment for his betrayal. In the section below Charlotte depicts the callous egotism of her character:

The triumph of a selfish heart
Speaks coldly there alone.
He says: 'She loved me more than life;
And truly it was sweet
To see so fair a woman kneel
In bondage at my feet.

'There was a sort of quiet bliss
To be so deeply loved,
To gaze on trembling eagerness
And sit myself unmoved;
[...]
Yet, like a god did I descend
At last to meet her love;
And, like a god, I then withdrew

To my own heaven above.

‘And never more could she invoke

My presence to her sphere;

No prayer, no plaint, no cry of hers

Could win my awful ear.

I knew her blinded constancy

Would ne’er my deeds betray,

And, calm in conscience, whole in heart,

I went my tranquil way. (51-60, 77-88)⁴²

The difference in the dynamics of power is striking; in the previous two poems the heroines are described as slaves and here the male character compares himself to ‘a god’. The positioning of himself as superior to her is shown through the use of ‘descend’, ‘withdrew’, ‘heaven above’. The use of descend shows a literal superiority in which he must lower himself to even reach her. Charlotte unflinchingly exposes the conceit of the male gender in her poetry through Gilbert. His sense of superiority is so elevated that he cannot place himself in the same realm as his love. He reigns in glory in heaven whilst she is left alone on earth to descend into her watery hell.

The biblical imagery recalls the criticism raised in ‘Pilate’s Wife’s Dream’ in which Charlotte challenges the position of women in Christianity. Julie Pfeiffer argues that ‘Gilbert’s language echoes that of the Genius or Muse who descends to illuminate the mind of the poet, but, as Brontë underlines for us, Gilbert’s faith in his own divinity is simply an

⁴² Charlotte Brontë, ‘Gilbert’, in *PCB*, ed. pp. 31-43, (pp. 32-33).

ironic commentary on his selfishness.’⁴³ Through Gilbert we see the sheer lack of empathy men in positions of power have for their female subjects, who they view as lesser beings than themselves. The theme of the slavery of women is continued in the language that describes Elinor. Before Gilbert we see her ‘kneel / In bondage at my feet’. However, this is told from Gilbert’s perspective and thus, in his sense of superiority, it is his interpretation which reduces her to the role of a slave. In addition, his male gaze violates her as he eroticises her submission. He is the maker of her chains; he is the one who holds her in bondage and sexually violates her.

The juxtaposition of the language used between the description of Gilbert and Elinor further enforces difference in position between the two. The language associated with Elinor shows not only her passivity but also the truth of her emotions in comparison to Gilbert’s deceit: ‘trembling eagerness’, ‘love’, ‘prayer’, ‘plaint’, ‘cry’. Elinor’s emotions are imbued with intensity; her love is overpowering her own body and causing her to tremble. Gilbert has the audacity to acknowledge that what she felt for him was ‘love’ and still she is abandoned. As Gilbert has placed himself as Elinor’s God it is likely the ‘prayer’ is addressed to him. The swift progression to ‘plaint’ presents an aggression spurred on by grief which, when ignored, is reduced to a ‘cry’. However, Gilbert constructs this scene so that Elinor’s ‘plaint’ undermines her ‘prayer’. Her ‘plaint’ is the complaint of a discarded lover who descends into hysteria. This presentation attempts to undermine the validity of Elinor’s complaint. Furthermore, Gilbert enforces his power by refusing to offer the reader one word of Elinor’s ‘prayer’, or ‘plaint’. At this stage he is God and he takes her words and erases them.

⁴³ Julie Pfeiffer, ‘John Milton’s influence on the inspired poetry of Charlotte Brontë’, *Brontë Studies*, 28 (2003), 37-45 (p. 43)

In Anne's poem 'If this be all' the religious doubt present in the previous poem is further encumbered with the sorrows of life, and we find the speaker longing for release. Isobel Armstrong comments that, 'Anne Brontë, a poet of great subtlety and far wider range than is often thought, negotiated the sobriety of the religious and didactic lyric to suggest precisely where its conventions are most painful and intransigent by not breaking these conventions, but by simply following through their logic.'⁴⁴ Anne is able to highlight the issues within these works by adopting the tropes of the poetry she is challenging. In addition, she also retaliates by representing the perspective of those they inflict pain upon using the same medium. In this poem, Anne's speaker is in the midst of a prayer discussing their suffering with God. In the numerous uses of 'If' the speaker does not initially appear to challenge God but, as Armstrong argues, negotiates and follows through the painful challenge:

O God! if this indeed be all

That life can show to me:

If on my aching brow may fall

No freshening dew from Thee:

If with no brighter sun than this

The lamp of hope may glow,

And I may only *dream* of bliss,

And wake, to weary woe:

If friendship's solace must decay

When other joys are gone;

⁴⁴ Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry - Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, p. 333.

And love must keep so far away
While I go wandering on:
[...]
While all the good I would impart,
Each feeling I would share,
Are driven backward to my heart
And turned to wormwood there.
[...]
If life must be so full of care,
Then call me soon to Thee;
Or give me strength enough to bear
My load of misery. (1-12, 21-24, 29-32)⁴⁵

The constant use of 'If' is a characteristic aspect of Anne's religious poetry, suggests Chitham. 'She is very rarely adamant, always leaves room for a counter argument or a counter-character. Her religion is a quest, a patient sifting and internal discussion.'⁴⁶ Anne's repetitive use of 'If' is significant in altering the trajectory of the poem. The poem, initially, appears to be a long list of grievances experienced by the speaker which culminates in a plea for death. However, the constant adoption of 'If' shows an aspect of defiance; the speaker does not accept that life has to be like this. The 'If' allows the speaker to indirectly question God for their suffering. They do not ask why, but nor do they accept their suffering as inevitable. Doubt is present as the speaker cannot see beyond their suffering and find consolation in their faith.

⁴⁵ Anne Brontë, 'If this be all', in *PAB*, pp. 111-112, (pp. 111-112).

⁴⁶ Edward Chitham, 'Religion, Nature and Art in the work of Anne Brontë', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 24.2 (1999), 129-145, (p. 133).

The poem overflows with uncertainty with the repetitive use of ‘may’ alongside ‘If’. However, these moments of uncertainty frequently relate to hope and more assured language is used to represent the inevitability of loss and sorrow: ‘hope may glow’, ‘friend’s solace must decay’; ‘may fall’, ‘joys are gone’. With regard to faith Anne may, as Chitham argues, be ‘rarely adamant’ but in her portrayals of suffering she is unyielding in her depiction. Foreshadowing the harrowing episodes of misery she explores in her two novels, Anne refuses to deny the reality of suffering experienced by many. Her poetry forces her readers to acknowledge the inescapable struggle.

In her unflinching portrayal of sorrow Anne demonstrates her philanthropic tendencies which she touches on briefly in this poem. The pinnacle of the speaker’s distress is their inability to aid others, they bewail ‘all the good I would impart, / Each feeling I would share’. The shift in language here is notable as, with regard to Anne’s philanthropic aims, the speaker abandons the theme of uncertainty and is fervent with the rapid repetition of ‘would’. There is no doubt in the speaker’s ability to aid others. However, the use of the past tense ‘would’ rather than the present ‘will’ indicates that these ambitions have already been abandoned and thus further enforces the tone of desolation.

In a reversal of perspectives, Anne’s poem considers the suffering of the deity’s subordinate. In Charlotte’s poem Gilbert silences Elinor, but Anne gives her character a voice. In ‘Gilbert’ Charlotte’s villain proclaimed that ‘No prayer [...] Could win my awful ear’ and as such presents the futility of prayer to an unsympathetic God. Anne’s speaker is plagued with religious doubt, and may have considered the possibility presented in Charlotte’s poem of an ignored prayer. Anne’s speaker longs for the death that is granted to Charlotte’s Elinor. The turning point of Anne’s poem is in the use of ‘Or’; up until this point the speaker has not been able to ask anything directly of God. However, in this moment they reveal the lack of acceptance of their current condition and ask for ‘strength’

from God. At this moment the speaker no longer follows the logic proposed by Armstrong, and in the peak of their despair asks for divine intervention.

3.5 ‘I trust not to thy phantom bliss’:⁴⁷ Emily and Anne’s battle with doubt

Distress and doubt related to faith appear throughout Anne’s poetry. She provides an unwavering testimony of anguish to assist her readers in their moments of weakness. In ‘The Penitent’ the speaker offers solace to sinners but in ‘If this be all’ Anne exposes the scale of suffering which religious doubt could impart. In ‘The Doubter’s Prayer’ she continues with this theme. Doubt also occupies Emily’s poetry but her doubt stems from her fixation with transcendence. Rather than God, it is Emily’s own imagination which she strives to believe. However, both sisters demonstrate the misery experienced when the speaker can no longer trust what they believe.

Emily’s preoccupation with the mind continues in her poem ‘To Imagination’ in which we witness what Irene Tayler describes as ‘Emily’s divided mind’.⁴⁸ The doubt depicted in ‘A Day Dream’ now develops into distrust, as Michael O’Neill proposes: ‘Brontë, here and in other poems, implies an intimate bond between a condition close to despair and the emergence of transcendent vision’.⁴⁹ Emily finds encouragement for her faith in the transcendence of the imagination. However, she is never able to rid herself of the doubts she explores in her previous poem. Even so, in this poem she explicitly interacts with the imperative need for creativity:

When weary with the long day’s care,

⁴⁷ Emily Brontë, ‘To Imagination’, in *EBCP*, pp. 19-20, (p. 20).

⁴⁸ Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts - The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 48.

⁴⁹ Michael O’Neill, ‘The Romantic Bequest: Arnold and Others’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 217-234, (p. 225).

And earthly change from pain to pain,
And lost and ready to despair,

Thy kind voice calls me back again:

Oh, my true friend! I am not lone,
While thou canst speak with such a tone!

So hopeless is the world without;

The world within I doubly prize;

Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt,

And cold suspicion never rise;

Where thou, and I, and Liberty,

Have undisputed sovereignty.

[...]

I trust not to thy phantom bliss,

Yet, still, in evening's quiet hour,

With never-failing thankfulness,

I welcome thee, Benignant Power;

Sure solacer of human cares,

And sweeter hope, when hope despairs! (1-12, 31-36).⁵⁰

What is initially striking is Emily's decision to separate the imagination from the speaker. The imagination is cast in the role of a companion, 'my true friend'. By separating

⁵⁰ Emily Brontë, 'To Imagination', in *EBCP*, pp. 19-20.

the imagination from the speaker she strips it of identity and gender. The poetry can spring forth from the speaker's imagination, unhindered by her gender, and thus, she is able to be her own muse. The agency of the speaker is removed as it is the imagination that speaks. The power is placed with the genderless imagination; the poet is solely a mouthpiece. This also enables her to deviate from questions regarding gender in relation to the identity of the author. Upon composition, Emily was not aware the poem would be published, nor that it would be published under a male pseudonym. The genderless representation of imagination shows how irrelevant Emily considered gender to be with regard to her poetry and creativity. As such the poem, similarly to the pseudonym Ellis, remains elusive with regard to gender.

The issue of gender continues in the description of the 'world within' in which 'thou, and I, and Liberty, / Have undisputed sovereignty.' Drawing on Charlotte's imagery of the enslaved woman in her poems from the collection, we see Emily's speaker also shackled by the confines of society. That 'Liberty' is placed alongside the speaker, and the imagination as ruler reveals the oppressive ties of reality they wish to escape. However, unlike Charlotte's Frances whose mind is a 'narrow cell', Emily's poem offers a world, a kingdom which the speaker can rule rather than be imprisoned within.

The 'doubt' from 'A Day Dream' returns and is listed amongst the evils of reality. Doubt appears to be what Emily's poetry cannot escape. In 'To Imagination' doubt consumes the poem. The speaker declares 'I trust not to thy phantom bliss' and the imagination is described as a 'Benignant Power'. The 'phantom' clearly demonstrates that the speaker is aware the 'world within' is a fantasy, a product of the speaker's making. The capitalisation of 'Benignant Power' shows the superiority with which imagination is imbued. Imagination is portrayed as a deity. The 'Benignant' and 'bliss' of fantasy is in

stark comparison to the ‘guile’ and ‘hate’ of reality. Even in the confession of distrust the imagination is still praised.

However, this distrust and realisation of the fantasy of the imagination may actually bestow the speaker with agency that was previously lacking. Regarding Emily’s poetry, Michael Wood argues that ‘The imagination [...] can only be treated as a liveable version of despair. Despair itself without imagination can scarcely be contemplated’.⁵¹ Certainly, the imagination presented is a source of solace; it offers kindness and bliss to combat the despair to which Wood refers. Even so, imagination offers the speaker more than a balm for despair. By acknowledging that the imagination and the ‘world within’ are products of the speaker’s creation it leaves the speaker in a position of power. By accepting that the imagination is a product of the speaker, the poet now has the power to wield it. The imagination is no longer solely a source of relief against despair, it is a weapon.

Antony H. Harrison proclaims that ‘Victorian poets attempted either to escape or to embrace the ideological constraints of their culture in order to redirect or reinforce existing social, religious, economic, political, or aesthetic values.’⁵² Anne Brontë’s preoccupation with faith establishes not only her attempt to embrace the significance of religion in society, but also to offer guidance and alternate readings in her attempt to assist her readers. Angela Leighton argues that ‘Anne’s real gifts lie with the hymn, which retains the lovely simplicity of the lyric but invokes the saving presence of a ‘Thou’ who turns mourning and misery into comfort [...] Her poems often answer Emily’s more tormented visions with a plea for faith and cheerfulness.’⁵³ However, Anne’s religious poems are not necessarily imbued with the ‘comfort’ and cheerfulness’ Leighton proclaims.

⁵¹ Michael Wood, ‘Crime and Conjecture: Emily Brontë’s Poems’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 370-384, (p. 382).

⁵² Antony H. Harrison, *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems – Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 2.

⁵³ Leighton, p. 60.

Thormählen explains that ‘The poetry of Anne Brontë contains records of acute despondency 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.’⁵⁴ The doubt that plagues Emily in her pursuit of transcendence also haunts Anne in the development of her faith. In her poem ‘The Doubter’s Prayer’ Anne vividly expresses the crippling pain of religious doubt:

While Faith is with me I am blest;
It turns my darkest night to day;
But while I clasp it to my breast
I often feel it slide away.

Then cold and dark my spirit sinks,
To see my light of life depart,
And every fiend of Hell methinks
Enjoys the anguish of my heart.

What shall I do if all my love,
My hopes, my toil, are cast away,
And if there be no God above
To hear and bless me when I pray?

If this be vain delusion all,
If death be an eternal sleep,
And none can hear my secret call,

⁵⁴ Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p. 71.

Or see the silent tears I weep.

O help me God! for thou alone

Canst my distracted soul relieve;

Forsake it now – it is thine own,

Though weak yet longing to believe.

O drive these cruel doubts away (17–37).⁵⁵

Chitham suggests that the simplicity of Anne's language may be an intentional choice: 'We may well remind ourselves of the *Cottage Poems* of Patrick Brontë. These were meant to be simple enough for the common people to read, and they were meant to instruct. In all the art she intended for publication Anne had this purpose.'⁵⁶ In her depiction of the common issue of religious doubt, Anne does not simply use poetry as an outlet to process her own conflicted feelings. Similarly to 'The Penitent', she presents her work in an accessible manner to reassure readers from all backgrounds that they are not alone in their experience of religious turmoil.

As in Emily's poetry, there is a 'longing to believe' which responds to the overwhelming doubt. The use of 'clasp' shows the extent of the speaker's devotion; their faith is treated as a precious thing. However, the extremity of clasp also suggests continuous doubt as the speaker cannot rely on their simple hold on faith. There is a violence to 'clasp'; it is a defence against on-coming attack. The use of 'slide' does not corroborate with 'clasp', as such it appears to personify faith, and it is faith which chooses

⁵⁵ Anne Brontë, 'A Hymn / The Doubter's Prayer', in *PAB*, pp. 91-92, (pp. 91-92).

⁵⁶ Edward Chitham, 'Introduction', in *PAB*, pp. 1-45, (p. 30).

to 'slide away' and leave the speaker rather than being relinquished. This portrays religious doubt as an enforced test of faith, the speaker's faith is taken away and they are challenged to retrieve it.

Anne does not turn away from the stark reality of doubt; she dedicates two stanzas to the exploration of the downward spiral of her speaker. The 'silent' tears show the shame that accompanies religious doubt; it is a pain which cannot be spoken. The significance of Anne's poem is to expose the turmoil experienced by the silent. The progression of the speaker's distress is shown in the different adoption of punctuation. Doubt and searching is apparent in the use of the question mark. However, by questioning it shows the speaker interrogating their doubt in a refusal, yet, to accept. The full stop after 'weep' shows the dire threat to the speaker as they no longer have the power to fight, and have come to accept their religious decline. The repetitive use of diphthongs in 'vain', 'death', 'sleep', 'tears', 'weep' enforces the ever-increasing distress of the speaker. The stanza overflows with grief until the heart wrenching plea of 'O help me God!'. Responding to the certainty of the full stop, Anne counters with the emotional exclamation mark as the speaker begs for assistance.

The overarching themes which thread throughout the Brontë sisters' collection, *Poems*, reveals that even when writing in isolation they still focused on similar topics. The impact of their writing community was so ingrained that shared interests can be found throughout their work. Therefore, in the editing process they were able to fashion an image of community for their collection. However, how each sibling chooses to address these shared themes is notably different. In their attempt to present themselves as a family the Brontë sisters cannot conceal that they developed into three very different writers. On the outside of this collaboration stands Branwell. However, even though Branwell was no longer a member of the community, he does respond to the communal themes which

inform his sisters' work. For the concluding section of this chapter I will demonstrate how Branwell continually writes back to his community from his position of isolation.

3.6 'Farewell, childhood's shores divine!':⁵⁷ Branwell, loss and estrangement

It is often overlooked that, after their father, Branwell, not his sisters, was the first to achieve the goal of publication. Victor A. Neufeldt explains that 'Branwell published at least twenty-six items in his lifetime, and was in print five years before his sisters. Twenty-five of these publications appeared before his sisters published their volume of poems in 1846.'⁵⁸ Neufeldt goes on to suggest that 'Given that his sisters' 1846 volume of poems sold only two copies in its first year, it is safe to say that Branwell's poems enjoyed a significantly wider readership.'⁵⁹ To have multiple publications in various Yorkshire newspapers during the 1840s was a great achievement for Branwell. The number of poems Branwell published challenges the notions that he lacked the skill and drive of his siblings. Branwell's final poem was published the same year as his sisters' novels which shows he pursued his aspiration to be a poet until the end of his life.

Branwell comes forward as the first member of the community to publish as an individual, rather than from within the family. However, there are clear indications that, similarly to his sisters, the power of communal writing is a method Branwell found difficult to sever himself from entirely. Neufeldt argues that, 'Some of the credit for all this activity must be given to the circle of his artistic friends in Halifax – the Leyland brothers, the artist John Wilson Anderson, the poets William Dearden, John Nicholson, William Heaton and possibly Thomas Crossley. The writers in this group read their manuscripts

⁵⁷ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Caroline's Prayer – On the change from childhood to womanhood', in *WPBB*, III, p. 370.

⁵⁸ Neufeldt, 'Introduction', in *WPBB*, III, pp. xvii-xxx, (p. xix).

⁵⁹ Neufeldt, 'Introduction', in *WPBB*, III, (p. xx).

aloud to one another for criticism.’⁶⁰ Branwell’s decision to form a new circle is explained by Farrell’s theory about the formation of collaborative friendship groups. Branwell’s new artistic community resulted from a natural development in Branwell’s life as an artist. Farrell explains: ‘In the period between adolescence and adulthood when a person disengages from the family, masters a discipline, and crystallizes an adult occupational identity, a collaborative circle often becomes the primary group that completes socialization.’⁶¹ It is evident that, as he developed as a writer within a community, Branwell struggled to work creatively without the support, influence and guidance of others. The gendered aspect of Branwell’s new community shows his determination to form a new community, entirely removed from the one he had with his sisters. In a community of men his sisters would be the outsiders, not him.

Even so, the continuing influence of his family is apparent in his work. Branwell never published under his own name, instead adopting the pseudonym of his Angrian protagonist, Northangerland.⁶² Branwell would not have faced some of the gendered restrictions which encouraged his sisters to adopt a pseudonym, thus it is unclear why he did not publish under his own name. There may have been individuals outside the family, such as the Robinson family, who Branwell did not wish to become aware of his publications. Nevertheless, the adoption of Northangerland suggests the continued connection to his initial writing community. We know from Branwell’s letters that at least J. B. Leyland was aware of his pseudonym. Even so, outside of Branwell’s new brotherhood, the only individuals who would have known the significance of the

⁶⁰ Neufeldt, ‘Introduction’, in *WPBB*, III, (p. xxvi).

⁶¹ Farrell, p. 12

⁶² Discussions concerning Branwell’s adoption of Northangerland in his published work can be found in: Victor A. Neufeldt, ‘The child is parent to the author: Branwell Brontë’, in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. by Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 173-187. Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Joetta Harty, ‘Playing Pirate: Real and Imaginary Angrias in Branwell Brontë’s Writing’, in *Pirates and Mutineers of the Nineteenth Century – Swashbucklers and Swindlers*, ed. by Grace More (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 41-58.

pseudonym, and the identity of the poet, were his sisters. All of Branwell's poems were published in local newspapers, but we do not know if the family were ever aware of them. However, in the use of Northangerland, it shows intent, on the part of Branwell, to include his sisters in his publications as they were some of the few individuals who knew the significance of the pseudonym.

Branwell's sisters' influence can also be seen in the overarching theme of his published poems. I shall explore 'Caroline's Prayer – On the change from childhood to womanhood', 'Song', and 'An Epicurean's Song' to demonstrate his ongoing preoccupation with loss and estrangement, particularly the loss of innocence. Gezari criticises his poetry, claiming that: 'Branwell's development as a poet was limited by his susceptibility to the influence of established poets as well as by his inability to compellingly oppose anything to his longing for oblivion. Branwell may have been the most competent versifier in the Brontë family; but his verse lacks the originality found in the poems of his sisters – especially those of Emily.'⁶³ Gezari may position Branwell's poetry as inferior to his sisters' due to originality, but all four siblings can be seen responding to the same themes. The preoccupation with loss, particularly the loss of innocence can be seen in Anne's 'Self-Congratulations', Charlotte's 'Mementos' and Emily's 'Anticipations' which I shall explore in conjunction with Branwell's poems to exhibit his continued interaction with his community.

'Caroline's Prayer – On the change from childhood to womanhood' was published in both the *Bradford Herald* and the *Halifax Guardian* in June 1842. The lyrical poem portrays a young daughter's plea for guidance from her loving father, whilst also exerting her new-found independence:

I'm now no more a little child

⁶³ Gezari, p. 141.

O'ershadowed by thine angel wing,
My very dreams seem far more wild
Than those my slumbers used to bring

I farther see – I deeper feel –
With hope more warm, but heart less mild,
And former things new shapes reveal,
All strangely brightened or despoiled.

I am entering on Life's open tide;
So – Farewell, childhood's shores divine!
And Oh, my father, deign to guide
Through these wide waters, Caroline! (9-20).⁶⁴

The role of the father is significant in Branwell and Charlotte's juvenilia, and the influence is also present here. Branwell plays on the word with his use of 'I farther see', initially referring to the scope which maturity offers. However, it is also a declaration to Caroline's father as well as the suggestion that, even in her gradual maturity, her focus remains on her father. The repetitive sound of father in 'far more wild, 'farther see', 'Farewell', 'my father' demonstrates that, even though the poem centres on Caroline's development, the focus, depicted through the language of the poem, is on her father. Yet, all these words imply distance: 'far', 'farther' and 'Farewell' are used in each subsequent

⁶⁴ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Caroline's Prayer – On the change from childhood to womanhood', in *WPBB*, III, p. 370.

stanza to represent the increasing gulf between parent and child. The poem speaks of the inevitable demise of the parental bond.

There is a tone of rebellion in the poem. The harsh assonance of 'I'm now no more a little child' replicates the rhythm of a child stamping their foot. Caroline initially attempts to enforce her dominance, but this section of the poem actually shows her lingering innocence. Though her father's protection is described as 'thine angel wing' the sentiment is tainted through 'O'ershadowed'. This presents a restrictive, limiting relationship, a shadow from which Caroline wishes to emerge. She revels in the new extremity of her emotions, her dreams are 'more wild', 'I deeper feel', 'hope more warm', 'heart less mild'. Through Caroline, Branwell illustrates the naivety of adolescence. Branwell's gendered portrayal is specifically interested in female innocence. The risks associated with the unworldliness of young women is a topic which Anne also explores extensively in her novels. Caroline rejoices in the changes to her body and mind. Her 'wild' dreams, 'deeper' feelings and a 'heart less mild' imply the prospect of romance. Caroline is progressing from the love of her father into the world of romantic love and carnal passion.

The main body of the poem describes the excitement of oncoming maturity. However, as the poem concludes Branwell introduces the scepticism and foreshadowing of sorrow which will dominate his subsequent poems. Caroline confides that 'former things new shapes reveal, / All strangely brightened or despoiled.' This hints at the corruption of innocence which preoccupies Branwell in his poetry. Adolescence has altered Caroline's childhood and her perception of it, whilst some 'former things' are 'brightened' others are 'despoiled'. Her oncoming maturity has stolen aspects of her youth and altered what remains beyond recognition. There is the implication that she is aware of this loss and she begs her father to continue to 'guide' her into adulthood.

The connection between this poem and Anne's poem 'A Fragment / Self-Congratulation' is striking when considering the poetic voice. As with the majority of Branwell's poems this one was published under the name Northangerland. The name may have been adopted solely as a pseudonym but there is significance in the use of Northangerland here as the character has a young daughter called Caroline Vernon. If the speaker is Caroline Vernon there may be a direct connection to Anne's poem which, prior to publication, she accredits to the Gondal character Olivia Vernon. As such, it is possible that Anne and Branwell are depicting their own variation of the same character. In Anne's poem, Olivia Vernon declares:

'Nay, gentle friends, I can but say
That childhood's thoughts are gone.
Each year its own new feelings brings
And years move swiftly on,

And for those little simple airs,
I love to play them o'er –
So much I dare not promise now
To play them never more.'
I answered and it was enough;
They turned them to depart;
They could not read my secret thoughts
Nor see my throbbing heart. (13-24)⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Anne Brontë, 'A Fragment / Self-Congratulation', in *PAB*, pp. 71-72, (p. 71).

Clear comparisons can be made between the poems. They each open with a response to or from an older speaker challenging their progression from childhood. However, Caroline shows the transition whereas Olivia firmly asserts that ‘childhood’s thoughts are gone.’ Branwell shows a preoccupation with the development from innocence to maturity, whereas Anne depicts her heroine once she has fulfilled her transition. As a result, where Caroline yearns for the changes to occur in her mind and body, Olivia questions her ability to relinquish the aspects of her childhood.

There is a tone of secrecy in both poems which Anne develops further. Olivia refers to the ‘secret thoughts’ that they cannot see. Throughout the course of the poem Olivia alludes to a lost love whose existence she keeps secret from those around her. Olivia has experienced the ‘deeper’ feelings which Caroline longs for. However, Anne’s poem forewarns of the grief which accompanies these emotions. Branwell’s Caroline is elusive because she does not yet have a subject for her developing emotions. Anne’s Olivia is secretive because of her experience, and the tragedy which accompanies it. Even though Branwell and Anne had not collaborated together for a considerable time at this point these poems demonstrate their shared preoccupation and individual approach to the topic of innocence and maturity. From within their community comes a shared need to express the threat and ramifications of loss. Branwell forewarns where Anne reveals the results.

The threat to innocence by maturity continued to inspire Branwell’s poetry. He explores the notions much more significantly in ‘Song’ which was published a week after his previous poem in the *Bradford Herald* and the *Halifax Guardian*. Here we see Branwell longing for the lost innocence and the cherished relationships of youth – which are given particular significance. Branwell makes clear the significance of communities formed during childhood and their irrefutable importance:

Should Life’s first feeling be forgot,

As Time leaves years behind?
Should Man's for ever changing lot
Work changes on his mind?

Should space, that severs heart from heart,
The heart's best thoughts destroy?
Should years, that bid our youth depart,
Bid youthful memories die?

Oh! say not that these coming years
Will warmer friendships bring;
For friendship's joys and hopes and fears
From deeper fountains spring. (1-12)⁶⁶

'Song' appears to evoke Robert Burns's 'Auld Lang Syne' to imbue the poem with a sense of parting, and loss of the past. It resonates with a tone of doubt and fear; the repetition of 'Should' throughout not only represents questioning but also confrontation. There is a challenge from the speaker about the inevitability of the loss of innocence. We see a defiant refusal of acceptance paired with a sorrowful realisation. Each second and fourth line of the first two stanzas end with question marks. The poem opens with the reader bombarded by questions, challenged by Branwell to consider these aspects of life. Even so, as the poem progresses we see the speaker's defiance gradually diminish.

Branwell's use of language in the second stanza depicts the aggressive nature of time, and what is lost. The harsh repetition of 'destroy', 'depart', 'die' portray the distress

⁶⁶ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'Song', in *WPBB*, III, p. 371.

and frustration of the poem. The progression of time is shown as violent and deadly to innocence. In his distress Branwell's language becomes repetitive; he uses 'heart' recurrently in rapid succession in the second stanza to establish what is at risk. In the final two lines of stanza one and two he repeats his language to emphasise his point with 'changing', 'changes' and 'youth', 'youthful'. The repetitive language shows confusion, distress and blind refusal. Branwell poses multiple questions that he does not have the answer to.

The third stanza represents the shift of approach in the poem. Gone are the questions, there are no further questions asked in the rest of the poem, and now Branwell focuses on presenting his counter argument against time. He considers the significance of youth. The sorrow from the previous two stanzas is released in the opening exclamation of 'Oh!' which opens the third stanza. Branwell anticipates the response to his previous questions and puts forward his opposition. The significance that Branwell gives to the relationships forged in youth is important to his notions of community. At the moment of composition Branwell had formed a new writing community with his friends but here the speaker proclaims 'say not that these coming years / Will warmer friendships bring'. He dispels the notion that relationships made in adulthood can ever surpass those from youth that 'From deeper fountains spring.' In this act of independence, the publication of his poetry outside the writing community, Branwell recalls the significance of those family bonds and declares that they cannot be surpassed, even if he must accept that they are over and he is estranged from his collaborators.

In Charlotte's poem 'Mementos' she too focuses on the passing of years. However, Charlotte is less preoccupied with exploring the emotional impact of loss, and instead depicts the material remains altered by the progression of time:

Arranging long-locked drawers and shelves

Of cabinets shut up for years,
What a strange task we've set ourselves!
How still the lonely room appears!
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,
With print all faded, gilding gone;
[...]
I scarcely think for ten long years,
A hand has touched these relics old;
And, coating each, slow-formed, appears
The growth of green and antique mould.
[...]
I fear to see the very faces,
Familiar thirty years ago,
Even in the old accustomed places
Which look so cold and gloomy now. (1-8, 17-20, 41-44)⁶⁷

As in Branwell's 'Song' the progression of time is deadly and it has taken away the inhabitants of the room explored by Charlotte's speaker. Branwell portrays the emotional distress of loss whereas Charlotte is more subtle in her presentation. She uses the decayed objects to highlight the transience of human life. The owners of these articles are long gone and yet their possessions remain as a haunting reminder of their existence.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Brontë, 'Mementos', in *PCB*, pp. 8-15, (pp. 8-9).

Branwell challenges time and presents the significance of youth. Charlotte's poem reveals the futility of such a challenge and how inaccessible the past is. Her use of 'long-locked', 'shut up', 'faded', and 'gone' show the damage inflicted by time and how the past remains untouchable. The notion that these items have been shut away for over ten years suggests a desire to preserve the past. However, Charlotte's poem considers the dangers of being protective of the past. To attempt to preserve is to risk being forgotten. What Branwell glorifies, Charlotte describes as 'faded' and reduced to 'mould'. Such a contrast is reminiscent of the end of their juvenilia in which Branwell presents the need to preserve whereas Charlotte shows an acceptance of the inevitable demise of their collaborative partnership.

Both poems explore fear, but the source of fear differs considerably. Branwell's poem portrays the fear of time and loss of innocence. In 'Mementos' the speaker fears the return of the past and the ghosts of those long gone. Charlotte's poem forewarns that the past should not be visited, the task of looking through relics is deemed 'strange'. However, throughout the course of Charlotte's narrative poem the speaker does divulge the details of the lost family and the tragedy that befell them. The exploration of the past demonstrates that, though the poem begins with a reluctance to interact with the past and a fear of remembrance, it ultimately cannot be avoided. Branwell presents the past as the period of innocence longed for which should be cherished. For Charlotte, the past is a place of pain and tragedy which should be 'shut up for years'. For both siblings the loss of innocence experienced in the past haunts their poetry.

In his examination of Branwell, Neufeldt declares that, 'The progression from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to experience, is painful, and results in hardening of the heart and loss of the capacity for empathy. Life is essentially the experience of loss

and care'.⁶⁸ In the previous two poems, I have shown how Branwell explores the implications of the loss of innocence and his refusal to accept the inevitability of time. However, in the final poem I shall consider, 'An Epicurean's Song' which was published only a month after the previous poem we see, as Neufeldt suggests, Branwell's gradual hardening of heart, and loss of empathy:

For past time has taken
Each hour that it gave
And they never awaken
From yesterday's grave,
So surely we may defy
Shadows, like memory,
Feeble and fleeting as midsummer wave.

From the depths where they're falling,
Nor pleasure, nor pain,
Despite our recalling,
Can reach us again:
Though we brood over them,
Nought can recover them;
Where they are laid they must ever remain.

So seize we the present,
And gather its flowers;
For – mournful or pleasant –

⁶⁸ Neufeldt, 'The child is parent to the author: Branwell Brontë', pp. 173-187, (p. 184).

Tis all that is ours.
While daylight we're wasting,
The evening is hastening,
And night follows fast on the vanishing hours.

Yes – and we, when that night comes –
Whatever betide,
Must die as our fate dooms,
And sleep by their side;
For *change* is the only thing
Always continuing;
And it sweeps creation away with its tide! (8-35).⁶⁹

The inclusion of 'Epicurean' in the title, referring to Greek philosopher Epicurus, immediately establishes a narrative voice inspired by hedonism and indulgence. However, rather than a sensualist poem the theme is used to reveal the Epicurean's inevitable demise. In this poem, Branwell moves beyond the quatrains of his previous poems and experiments with style. The structure of his stanzas can be seen to symbolise the downward fall of cares and emotions as the speaker descends into hedonism, but the final line always returns to the structure of the first, showing his resistance. It also signifies the loss of innocence. As each line becomes shorter we see more of the poet succumb, but ultimately the poem ends on a strong statement.

The poem talks of the 'midsummer wave' and the structure represents this wave like movement; the soul of the poet is taken away but eventually returns. The language is

⁶⁹ Patrick Branwell Brontë, 'An Epicurean's Song', in *WPBB*, III, pp. 372-373, (pp. 372-373).

much more assured than the previous two poems. The use of ‘taken’, ‘never’, ‘Nought’, ‘ever’, ‘Must’ shows an acceptance of the inevitability of change. Branwell returns to his imagery regarding the sea with his concluding statement, ‘For *change* is the only thing / Always continuing; / And it sweeps creation away with its tide!’ As man cannot stop the waves and the tide, nor can he stop change. Rather than a reliance on family, parental love, and friendship portrayed in the other poems, here Branwell states that the only certainty on which you can rely is that of uncertainty, that life will change and resistance is futile.

There appears to be an initial sense of joy in this acceptance with the declaration that, ‘So seize we the present, / And gather its flowers’. However, this is instantly undermined by the subsequent lines ‘For – mournful or pleasant – / Tis all that is ours.’ The pause after ‘For’ and ‘pleasant’ draws the reader’s attention to the middle of the line. Here Branwell plays on the double imagery of flowers in their dual association with new life and death. Precedence is given to death due the placement of ‘mournful’ before ‘pleasant’, and the flowers you reap are your own sorrow. Thus, in this moment of pleasure what is actually shown is the inevitability of death and the need to accept this. The declaration that ‘Tis all that is ours’ further supports this focus on the inevitability of loss and death, as death is the one thing we all have awaiting us.

Throughout these three poems Branwell shows a preoccupation with the glory of youth and innocence. His poems exhibit a desire to preserve this innocence whilst also acknowledging the futility of this. In Emily’s poem ‘Anticipation’ she challenges the significance given to youth:

Why dost thou hold the treasure fast,
Of youth’s delight, when youth is past,
And thou art near thy prime?

When those who were thy own compeers,
Equals in fortune and in years,
Have seen their morning melt in tears,
 To clouded, smileless day;
Blest, had they died untried and young,
Before their hearts went wandering wrong,
Poor slaves, subdued by passions strong,
 A weak and helpless prey!

‘Because, I hoped while they enjoyed,
And, by fulfilment, hope destroyed;
As children hope, with trustful breast,
I waited bliss – and cherished rest.
A thoughtful spirit taught me, soon,
That we must long till life be done;
That every phase of earthly joy
Must always fade, and always cloy:

‘This I foresaw – and would not chase
 The fleeting treacheries;
But, with firm foot and tranquil face,
Held backward from that tempting race,
Gazed o’er the sands the waves efface,
 To the enduring seas – (8-32).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Emily Brontë, ‘Anticipation’, in *EBCP*, pp. 12-13, (pp. 12-13).

There are a number of common themes between Emily and Branwell's poems. Both present maturity as a period of corruption and suffering. Emily describes maturity as 'clouded, smileless' but she takes her approach to maturity in a different direction to Branwell. Branwell proclaims the need to 'seize' the present as a way of combating change. However, Emily declares a desire that 'they died untried and young'. Death is deemed preferable to the loss of innocence and the suffering of adulthood. However, such an extreme statement is supported by the central focus in which Emily's poem differs from Branwell's.

Death is present in both poems, and both siblings portray an awareness and acceptance of the inevitability of death. However, how their speakers address this acceptance differs. Branwell's poem uses death as an incentive to embrace the present whilst always aware of the oncoming shadow of death. In Emily's poem death is presented as the transition which should be pursued. Death is described as 'bliss' which the speaker awaits while others are 'slaves' to 'passions strong'. That the poem is titled 'Anticipation' indicates the significance of this longing for death. In Branwell's poem life is embraced as death approaches, but Emily's poem suggests that life is the challenge that must be overcome so the glory of death can be embraced. Similarly to Charlotte, Emily looks forward, rather than to the past treasured by Branwell, but Emily goes beyond Charlotte and looks towards the glory of transcendence. The loss of community haunts Branwell's poems. Anne also explores the theme of loss in her poem, whereas Charlotte advocates the need to look beyond the past. However, Emily's poem presents an alternative in which none are needed. In the pursuit of transcendence, Emily's speaker abandons companions and stands alone looking out to sea.

Imagery of the sea is used by all the Brontë siblings throughout their writing, and it appears in both Branwell and Emily's poems. The two poems use the sea to represent the inevitability of change and the passage of the soul. Referring to the power of change Branwell describes how 'it sweeps creation away with its tide!' and Emily's speaker looks out 'To the enduring seas'. Though both siblings are using similar imagery their purpose differs. Branwell uses the sea as a representation of continuous change in order to show the transience of life. Emily's poem also acknowledges the inevitability of change. Nevertheless, in her poem the sea is 'enduring', it is a constant. Both siblings acknowledge the inevitability of change in their poetry. However, Emily uses the certainty of change to inspire her to find examples of permanence in nature and death, not in people.

In her assessment of Branwell's poetry Gezari classifies him as 'limited'. However, in these three poems we see Branwell approach the same theme in three very different ways. The final poem may introduce the topic of death, which dominates Branwell's final publications, but it certainly does not represent the 'longing for oblivion' Gezari proposes. There is no longer the rebellion of the previous poems; rather we see Branwell experiment with acceptance. However, acceptance of death is far beyond 'longing'. Branwell shows that the inevitability of death is rather an incentive to live and here, in these earlier poems it is life, rather than death, which he advocates.

The comparison drawn between the poetry of Branwell and his sisters demonstrates that even when he was estranged from the collaborative circle he still contributes to the group's dialogue. Though the siblings did not collaborate with each other when composing their poetry it is clear to see them interacting with shared themes. In his earlier publications Branwell presents a need to step beyond the confines of a family community, but also the belief in its significance. He concludes with the acknowledgement that change can even affect his writing community, and a need to accept this.

3.7 Conclusion

The writing community of the Brontë family was in a constant state of evolution and transience. Emily and Anne's partnership shows the most permanence but, as the diary papers testify, even this was not impervious to change. In the sisters' decision to publish a collection of joint poems we see them progress into The Collective Action Stage which marks their decision to focus on one large piece of collaborative work, and to reveal their community to the public. The publication of *Poems* in 1846 is the only time we see the famous sisters publishing together as a united community. However, the unity is simply a construction. The poems included are products of individual composition and the editorial process created the harmony of shared themes. Within this construction of unity their individuality also emerges. Their independence within their construction of community defines the collection, and may explain the sheer difference in reception for each sister. The undeniable quality of Emily's work subsequently leaves her sisters ignored or harshly critiqued in her shadow. Also standing in the shadows is Branwell, whose poetic success in his lifetime is often overlooked or ignored. To fail to consider Branwell's poetic works is to undervalue his significance within the community. Furthermore, the founding of his brotherhood of artists validates the undeniable impact the community with his sisters had on the formation of Branwell as a writer, and how he sought to replicate this dynamic for the sake of his publications.

It is at this stage that Branwell was entirely estranged from the writing community of his siblings. Even in isolation from his collaborators, Branwell is still preoccupied with notions that each of his sisters also interact with. The preoccupation with the loss of innocence and the pain of maturing haunts all the Brontës, and they all versify this source of suffering. For Branwell it takes precedence and is the dominant theme of his published

poems. Despite the criticism Branwell has received, due to the prominence of Emily and the tendency to apply a biographical reading to his works, Branwell is still able to prove his poetic talent. In the three poems I have explored in this chapter Branwell offers three alternative approaches to his central theme. This shows an attempt to experiment in his poetry and to present a variation of tone and style. Through the comparison with his sisters' works we see how, even in isolation, Branwell continues to write back to the community.

In the three poems I have explored by Charlotte we can clearly see her preoccupation with the role of women. Charlotte shows her desire to expose the oppression and subjugation in society. Drawing on her skills as a prose writer she adopts the mode of narrative poetry as it enables her to develop her heroines in order to expose the experience of women. It is clear from these poems that she had a defined agenda she wishes to present, an agenda she continues to explore in her novels. In her first novel *The Professor*, we see the placid, manipulated Frances from her poetry re-emerge in her prose. However, in her creation of Jane we see a woman who will not be destroyed by her lover. Jane returns, not like Bertha as a ghost to haunt and destroy Rochester, but rather as an individual in a position of power.

Through the poems I have explored Emily can be seen interacting with the power of the mind and combatting the ever-present doubt which plagues her work. Though Emily's poetry interacts with themes raised by her siblings, her response to these themes is specific to her. She is not lured by the debauchery of living in the present: forewarned by Branwell, she will not allow her imagination to be enslaved the way Charlotte's heroines are, and she seeks an alternate source of faith than the one put forward by Anne. Emily's poetry may never be certain in obtaining the transcendence she pursues but in accepting

that imagination is no longer an un-embodied entity, but rather a product of herself, she is able to control it and use it to combat her doubt.

Religion, and specifically Universal Salvation, dominates Anne's non-Gondal poetry. As with her novels, her philanthropic aims dictate the tone, language, and purpose of her creative work. Following the example of her father, her religious poetry is simplistic and lyrical in order to make it accessible to a wider readership. Always unafraid to shy away from the harsh realities of her subject, Anne's poems are agonisingly honest, and foreshadow the brutality of her novels. Within the collection of poems, Anne contributes to the overarching themes of death, doubt, as well as being an advocate for those subjugated by society and religion. However, as with each of her sisters, she uses this first opportunity for publication to pursue her own individual aim – to begin in her mission to inform and aid her readership.

Aside from Emily, the poetry of the Brontës is frequently critically overlooked. However, for our understanding of the Brontës as a writing community the consideration of their poems is integral. The poems reveal a conscious decision on the part of the Brontë sisters to present themselves as a family of writers. Drawing on the experience from the sisters' juvenilia, we see them equate literary success with working together. However, the poems also show that through the sisters' portrayal of a collective voice their work proclaims their individuality. The Brontës emerge from the foundation of community and step forward as individuals.

Chapter Four: ‘attached by ties stronger than reason could break’:¹ Idealised and dysfunctional families

4.1 Introduction

Nineteenth century fiction is often concerned with the place of community in wider society, as Suzanne Graver demonstrates: ‘Victorian social critics often described the loss of community and the need for its renewal to be one of the major problems of the age, and much of the century’s fiction, poetry, drama, theology, history, and philosophy reflects this sense of loss.’² In her work *George Eliot and Community – A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* (1984), Graver reveals how Eliot used her writing to examine the altering dynamics of Victorian communities. Certainly, Charlotte and Anne’s works share similar preoccupations with Eliot. However, it is the Brontës’ particular focus on the community of family which dominates their portrayals as the nuclear family came to replace the village community during the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I shall explore how the Brontës are involved in this interrogation of family, and through this they depict the evolving dynamics of their own writing community.

The nineteenth century saw a shift with regards to the definition of the family. Raymond Williams defines the evolving concept in his work *Keywords*: ‘not **family** as lineage of property or as including these, and not **family** as *household* in the older established sense which included servants, but the near kin-group which define its social relationships [...] **Family**, there, combined the strong sense of immediate and positive blood-group relationships and the strong implicit sense of property.’³ Previously, family was not specific to blood relations but to all those who inhabited the home, including

¹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 321.

² Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community – A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* (London & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 1.

³ Williams, *Keywords – A vocabulary of culture and society*, p. 133.

servants and apprentices. However, with the growth of the middle class, family came to exclusively represent biological relations in order for there to be a differentiation between the middle class family and their servants. It was from this that the Victorian idealisation of the family emerged.

Walter E. Houghton explains, 'At the center of Victorian life was the family'⁴. In his introduction to *The Victorian Family – Structures and Stresses* (1978), Anthony S. Wohl paints a vivid picture of the all-encompassing scope and influence of the Victorians' preoccupation with the family:

From the regal pose of Victoria, Albert, and progeny, and the languid grouping of rural, aristocratic family taking tea on the lawn with servants discreetly gathered in the background, down through the bourgeois family in the drawing-room, the picture of somewhat self-conscious probity and solidarity, to the slum family sullenly peering out at the alien photographer in the dismal court, it was *en famille* that the Victorians liked to be remembered and were so often recorded, not in photographs alone, but also in song, print, and paint.⁵

As Wohl remarks, the Victorians were fascinated by the role of the family in every part of society. The significance of the home, and the role of women within them, was a particularly important factor in the Victorian concept of the family. Houghton explains that 'That idea was the conception of the home as a source of virtues and emotions which were nowhere else to be found, least of all in business and society. And that in turn made it a place radically different from the surrounding world.'⁶ The home was the sanctuary of the

⁴ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 341.

⁵ Anthony S. Wohl, 'Introduction', in *The Victorian Family – Structure and Stresses*, ed. by Anthony S. Wohl (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 9-19, (p. 9).

⁶ Houghton, p. 343.

working man, and the one in charge of the home was his wife, who in turn was ruled by her husband. Lamonica comments on the vast number of publications which strengthened these notions: ‘The 1830s and 1840s witnessed a proliferation of domestic tracts, household manuals, conduct guides, and inspirational writings that reinforced the structure of the family, shaped its internal dynamics, and imparted significant new responsibilities’.⁷ Within this literary realm which encouraged the ideal wife and mother, female novelists respond to and, at times, rebel against the demands and expectations placed upon them by society. However, as is apparent from the Brontë novels, whilst female novelists interrogate these notions they also could not help but be influenced by them.

In the literature of the period, there is an apparent preoccupation in the works of Dickens, Gaskell, and Eliot as well as the Brontës with the representation of family. However, each of these authors shows that the idyll represented by society was far from the reality. Catherine Waters comments on the disjunction between Dickens’s reputation as the iconic portrayer of the Victorian family and the evidence of his works in which very few of the families described are happy: ‘Any close examination of his novels reveals a remarkable disjunction between his image as the quintessential celebrant of the hearth, and his fictional interest in fractured families.’⁸ Graver, with regards to Eliot, notes the damaging aspect of family love displayed in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): ‘the kinship ties dramatized in the family gatherings of *The Mill on the Floss* suggest not brotherly and sisterly love, but exclusive, intolerant, and unloving clannishness’.⁹ In their respective analyses of Dickens and Eliot, Waters and Graver identify a recurrent trope in the literary portrayals of the Victorian family. Writers such as Dickens, Gaskell and the Brontës were

⁷ Lamonica, p. 4.

⁸ Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 15.

⁹ Graver, p. 125.

certainly willing to perpetuate the Victorian preoccupation with the family. Frequently, this involves more realistic depictions of the dysfunctional family, rather than a peaceful idyll.

Nicole Diane Thompson argues that 'The lives and the fictions of Victorian women writers reveal endlessly contradictory perspectives on the woman question. All Victorian women novelists, whether we now label them radical or conservative, were fundamentally conflicted in their own beliefs about women's proper role'.¹⁰ The Brontë sisters certainly appear conflicted in their portrayal of women in their novels. They created controversial female characters such as Jane Eyre and Helen Graham, but it cannot be denied that the majority of their novels follow the Victorian tradition and end with marriage.

In chapters one and two, I have shown the significance of partnership within the Brontë family. However, it should not be overlooked that the Brontës' writing community originally consisted of four family members. Farrell notes that 'During the creative work stage, the group members alternate between times when they work alone or in pairs and times when they meet as a group.'¹¹ Even though partnerships are usually the dynamic in which most work is done, this does not mean the members did not still view themselves as a larger collaborative collective. Through an exploration of the significance of family in the Brontës' prose works, we are better able to understand their interpretation of their own family. By adopting a critical, rather than biographical, approach to their novels we can discover more about how they use their work to process and display their notions of family. In this chapter, I shall investigate the role of family, idealised and realised, in the Brontë sisters' novels, and an extended prose piece by Branwell. Through this I shall analyse how the Brontës interact with the ideology of the Victorian family and how their works support but also critique the notions of an idyllic family. The Brontë novels may

¹⁰ Nicole Diane Thompson, 'Responding to the woman questions: rereading noncanonical Victorian women novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. by Nicole Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-23, (p. 3).

¹¹ Farrell, p. 2.

consistently end in marriage but their protagonists, who are predominantly orphans, witness the dysfunction of the family units from which they are excluded.

4.2 ‘and we saw – ah! it was beautiful’:¹² Observing the idealised family

The sheer importance of the family to Victorian society cannot be overlooked. Wohl explains that:

Whether valued as a nursery of civic virtues or as a refuge from the tensions of society, the family was worshipped throughout the Victorian period; it was more than a social institution, it was a creed and it was held as a dogma carrying all the force of tradition that family life distinguished England from less stable and moral societies.¹³

Family was viewed with national pride; it characterised the culture of the nation. However, as Waters is clear to point out, this shift in the classification of the family from household to blood relations, put forward by Williams, did not immediately change views. This can be seen in the works of Dickens and the Brontës: ‘Clearly, the overlap of the varying senses of lineage, household, large kin-group and small kin-group in the definition of “family” does not disappear with the advent of the nineteenth century; and this ambiguity is evident in Dickens’s fiction, where the shifts in the meanings given to the notion of the family are implicated in the construction of class and gender differences.’¹⁴ This ambiguity is also apparent in the works of the Brontës where the presentations of families are varied and frequently dysfunctional. Each of the Brontës question the idealised notions of family, describing them but then critiquing them. Consistently their protagonists are excluded from the ideal images they play a part in perpetuating. In this section I shall analyse the Brontës’

¹² Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 48.

¹³ Wohl, p. 10.

¹⁴ Waters, p. 13.

interpretation of idealised families to demonstrate how their prose responds to notions of the family portrayed by society and in literature. I will then explore how the Brontës exhibit the stark contrast between the idealised family and the realistic interpretation in their representations of family life. In their work the Brontës offer a much more dysfunctional reading of the nineteenth century family.

Waters proposes that ‘The house became both the setting and the symbol for the middle-class family.’¹⁵ The house itself became an integral part of the Victorian’s perception of the family; at times in the Brontë novels it is the house itself which takes precedence over the inhabitants. In *Wuthering Heights* Emily considers the importance of the family home through Heathcliff’s description of Thrushcross Grange:

Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw – ah! it was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. Old Mr and Mrs Linton were not there. Edgar and his sister had it entirely to themselves; shouldn’t they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven! And now, guess what your good children were doing? Isabella – I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy – lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping, which, from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them. The idiots! [...] We laughed outright at the petted things, we did despise them!¹⁶

¹⁵ Waters, p. 14.

¹⁶ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 48.

Initially the young Heathcliff comments on the grandiosity of the Grange. He marvels at the luxury which appears to be absent from the Heights given the rhapsodic manner of his description. He is so impressed that he pauses, in order to stress the beauty of the home. However, the language of Heathcliff's description also indicates a sinister aspect to the scene. Red, gold and silver undoubtedly represent wealth and it is this which impresses Heathcliff. Alternatively, crimson could represent blood and violence, particularly considering the action the children have just missed in which the young Lintons nearly tear apart their dog. The symbolism of blood and death foreshadows the events at the Grange where all who remain inside the walls – Mr and Mrs Linton, Cathy, Edgar – suffer premature deaths. Lockwood is in a continuous state of illness at the Grange and proceeds to make a premature departure upon discovering its past. A similar use of imagery is apparent in Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre* in which the red room becomes synonymous with death and is the location of Jane's haunting and subsequent seizure. The mention of 'silver chains' and 'red hot needles' also give the impression of a torture chamber or prison, appropriate once again given the treatment of animals within the room. It also foreshadows the chains which bind Cathy to the Grange and hold her there until her death.

In his description, Heathcliff notes the absence of Mr and Mrs Linton; in Heathcliff's view the absence of the parental figure is something to be envied as it offers liberty to the siblings – which he craves in his relationship with Cathy. However, Emily appears to critique absent parents throughout the novel. At the moment when the family should be described it is betrayed by the unreliable parents, who are present in the house, but have left their children to their own devices. The violence the children subsequently enact indicates the parents' failure to educate their children. Potentially, the violent act is a

desperate bid for attention; they perform an act of cruelty in order to seize the focus of their parents. Heathcliff mentions how the younger child Isabella is ‘screaming’ and ‘shrieking’ which not only shows her distress, but also her attempt to gain consideration. This in turn is countered by the silence of Edgar who has learnt that no means will gain them the attention they crave. Heathcliff may describe them as ‘petted’ but in this scene there is no apparent comfort offered. Both are sobbing in distress and yet they are ignored and the scene is devoid of emotional support.

Heathcliff’s envy also reveals the protagonist’s own distorted views with regard to family. He considers them ‘petted’ and yet they are alone: petting in Heathcliff’s opinion does not derive from physical comfort and affection but from material possessions. It is the wealth of the room which Heathcliff admires as he describes it as ‘beautiful’, ‘splendid’, and ‘shimmering’. It is the home itself, rather than the family, which Heathcliff desires. This reading is supported by the events of the text in which the perpetually estranged and outcast Heathcliff strives to own every family home and rid them of the families within. At the death of his son, Heathcliff does not mourn his loss but revels in the knowledge that he is now owner of The Grange. Heathcliff’s desire for material possession and wealth stems from his interpretation of Cathy’s speech that the patriarch must be the provider of a home and wealth. In addition, the home itself, rather than the family within, comes to represent the stability of family to Heathcliff as those whom he considers family continuously leave him: his biological parents, Mr Earnshaw and finally Cathy. The building represents permanence to Heathcliff that the family alone cannot provide.

The scene of the estranged protagonist looking in on an idealised family can also be found in *Jane Eyre*. However, unlike Heathcliff, it is the family members themselves, rather than the household, which draw Jane’s attention. Adams comments that ‘It is precisely Jane’s isolation on the peripheries of family life and her awareness of her

isolation as a consequence of her lack of place, caste and social status, that enable family life in this novel to be seen as a microcosm of genteel Victorian society.’¹⁷ However, it is at the moment that Jane observes a family of her own social status that she is able to imagine an alternative family life than the one offered to her by Rochester. In this scene we see Charlotte interact with Victorian notions of the family at once perpetuating, but also challenging them when she describes Jane observing the Rivers family after fleeing from Thornfield:

I noticed these objects cursorily only – in them there was nothing extraordinary. A group of more interest appeared near the hearth, sitting still amidst the rosy peace and warmth suffusing it. Two young, graceful women – ladies in every point – sat, one in a low rocking-chair, the other on a lower stool; both wore deep mourning of crape and bombazeen, which sombre garb singularly set off very fair necks and faces: a large old pointer dog rested its massive head on the knee of one girl – in the lap of the other was cushioned a black cat.

A strange place was this humble kitchen for such occupants! Who were they? They could not be the daughters of the elderly person at the table; for she looked like a rustic, and they were all delicacy and cultivation. I had nowhere seen such faces as theirs: and yet, as I gazed on them, I seemed intimate with every lineament. I cannot call them handsome – they were too pale and grave for the word; as they each bent over a book, they looked thoughtful almost to severity [...] This scene was as silent as if all the figures had been shadows and the firelit apartment a picture[.]¹⁸

¹⁷ Adams, p. 161.

¹⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, ed. by Stevie Davies [1847] (London: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 381-382.

There is a clear difference in focus; unlike Heathcliff's detailed description of The Grange, the sole feature which Jane mentions is the hearth. An iconic symbol of the home, Jane observes the 'rosy peace' and 'warmth suffusing' which creates a scene of absolute comfort. This comfort is used as a harsh contrast to Jane's reality as she remains outside in the cold. The hearth represents a loving embrace: the 'warmth suffusing' is the family reaching out to share itself with others. Unlike the opulence which intrigues Heathcliff, Jane is attracted by the 'humble kitchen', so different from the grandeur of Thornfield. Jane has seen the corruption within aristocratic families so is drawn to a humbler class.

There is certainly a gendered aspect within the scene as the three women are all to be located within the kitchen, a place of domesticity. However, Charlotte is clear to note that they are found 'each bent over a book'. She carries this point further by specifying that this is not mindless reading to fill the time but rather they 'looked thoughtful almost to severity'. Charlotte shows that the women are intelligent and educating themselves – even though they are confined to this domestic setting. We see Charlotte's struggle with gender roles with her inclusion of Hannah whom she uses as the antithesis of Diana and Mary. Hannah is described as a 'rustic' and therefore belongs in this setting, whereas the two ladies are 'delicacy and cultivation' which leads Jane to describe the location as 'strange'. A clear class difference is established between the three women, yet it is questioned, to a degree, as the ladies are found with their servant. The Rivers sisters have chosen to work in Hannah's realm. In Thornfield, Jane suffers in her difficult social position as a governess and subsequently crosses the forbidden line from the shadows into the rooms of the aristocracy. This new family shows the reverse of this, those of the upper class place themselves in the servant's realm and thus Jane does not risk repeating the mistakes of her past.

Jane portrays the scene as idyllic; she comments how it could easily be a 'picture'. It is evident that, with regard to the Victorian family, there were specific literary tropes with which Charlotte is experimenting. In Charlotte's narrative we see the family and the servant gathered together, working in harmony, surrounded by their pets. Yet even within this picturesque scene there is evidence of strife. One of Jane's first observations is that they 'both wore deep mourning'; this is a family which has been torn asunder by death. There is also a notable lack of men within the household which may be why the scene seems of such 'interest' to Jane. At present, the house represents to Jane an alternative Lowood and in it she finds substitutes for her lost friends. The scene represents a world of women without the corrupting influence of men – an influence Jane has just escaped from. In the place of the absent members are pets: 'a large old pointer dog rested its massive head on the knee of one girl – in the lap of the other was cushioned a black cat.' The physical contact between each lady and her pet is not only a source of comfort but also an alternative form of maternal care in this sorority.

The intrinsic family bond which exists is made apparent in this scene. At this stage in the narrative, Jane is unaware of her biological connection to the Rivers family. Yet, from the first moment she sees them she comments 'as I gazed on them, I seemed intimate with every lineament.' Here Charlotte reveals an internal bond that goes beyond logic. A connection to one's family, even distant family, can be of such intensity that it is felt and known. Jane even observes a physical resemblance when she comments 'I cannot call them handsome'. Throughout the novel Jane's plainness is emphasised and thus Diana and Mary's absence of beauty is a sign of kinship. Their lack of wealth and beauty negates a sense of intimidation and aversion which Jane feels in the presence of the ladies of Rochester's circle. Immediately she sees the Rivers sisters as her equals and allies; this

may only be from appearances, but when the internal bond of family is present it is all the evidence required.

In Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the male protagonist, Gilbert Markham, does not initially appear in need of family the way Jane and Heathcliff do. Gilbert is the favoured child amongst his siblings and doted on by his mother. Nevertheless, like Heathcliff and Jane, Gilbert is also represented as an outsider who observes a family he subsequently becomes entangled with:

The eyes did not notice me, but sparkled with glee on beholding Sancho, my beautiful black and white setter, that was coursing about the field with its muzzle to the ground. The little creature raised its face and called aloud to the dog [...] The child, (a little boy, apparently about five years old) scrambled up to the top of the wall and called again and again; but finding this of no avail, apparently made up his mind, like Mahomet, to go to the mountain since the mountain would not come to him, and attempted to get over; but a crabbed old cherry tree, that grew hard by, caught him by the frock in one of its crooked scraggy arms that stretched over the wall. In attempting to disengage himself, his foot slipped, and down he tumbled – but not to the earth; – the tree still kept him suspended. There was a silent struggle, and then a piercing shriek; – but, in an instant, I had dropped my gun on the grass, and caught the little fellow in my arms.¹⁹

As in *Jane Eyre*, the presence of a dog is relevant to this depiction of family. Gilbert observes Arthur, his future step son, through Arthur's interest in Sancho. Thus, the creature Gilbert cares for enables his introduction to the child he comes to cherish. In subsequent meetings it is the connection between Arthur and Sancho which encourages the friendship

¹⁹ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, ed. by Stevie Davies [1848] (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 24.

between Arthur and Gilbert; this in turn plays an integral role in the relationship between Gilbert and Helen. Helen perceives the caring nature of Gilbert through his treatment of Sancho, and this shared interest with her son enables him to exhibit a paternal strength which Huntingdon lacks.

In this scene, Arthur acts as a symbol for Gilbert and Helen's relationship. Drawn by the life that Gilbert offers, Arthur throws himself willingly towards this man but is caught and immediately snagged by a tree. Helen may wish to immediately love Gilbert but, like her son, she is stopped; the tree is her own fear and knowledge. When Arthur struggles against the tree he falls and risks seriously hurting himself, as Helen risks once again hurting herself the way she did by rushing into her marriage with Huntingdon. In this scene, Gilbert saves Arthur as he would willingly save Helen. However, Helen is no longer the child she was, and does not need to be saved.

The progression of Gilbert's character is seen in his immediate reaction to Arthur's fall: 'in an instant, I had dropped my gun'. The gun is a representation of masculine aggression and we see Gilbert shed this to adopt the caring role of rescuer. By discarding the gun Arthur also encourages Gilbert to let go of the negative aspects of his character. Hunting represents the selfish side of Gilbert and his pursuit of blood sports which he willingly sacrifices for the preservation of life. In this moment it is not Helen who Gilbert observes, but her son. It is the attraction of a family and the role of fatherhood which first intrigues Gilbert.

In her novel, Anne critiques the Victorian notion of family, particularly the rights of mothers to their children, and the rights of wives within their marriages. For the majority of the novel Helen is portrayed as a single mother, even during her marriage to Huntingdon due to his consistent absence. However, through the character of Gilbert, Anne demonstrates a confidence in the role of family, when a family is founded on more than

naïve emotions. It is Gilbert's concern and care for Helen's son which attracts her to him; it is his potential as a paternal figure, rather than his appearance, which is the central factor in their relationship.

In *Villette* the protagonist Lucy Snowe is consistently estranged from all examples of family life. She never introduces her own family to the reader and shrouds their fates in mystery, only revealing that it is a source of tragedy. At the opening of the novel Lucy observes and describes herself on the edge of the Bretton family. In this moment, it is the material components of the house, rather than the family itself, which are her focus:

When I was a girl I went to Bretton about twice a year, and well I liked the visit.

The house and its inmates specially suited me. The large peaceful rooms, and well-arranged furniture, the clear wide windows, the balcony outside, looking down on a fine antique street, where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide – so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement – these things pleased me well.

One child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of, and in a quiet way I was a good deal taken notice of by Mrs Bretton, who had been left a widow, with one son, before I knew her; her husband, a physician, having died while she was yet a young and handsome woman.²⁰

Reminiscent of Heathcliff's observation of The Grange, it is the home rather than the family which has made the lasting impression upon Lucy. It is the home she mentions first rather than the family, and when she does they are not described as a family. The term 'inmates' refers to the people who live in the house, but in turn it also negates and ignores their relationship to each other. In Lucy's depiction they simply share a dwelling rather

²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, ed. by Helen M. Cooper [1853] (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 7.

than the loving relationship of family. Lucy's focus is on the house rather than the occupants.

The entire first paragraph is dedicated to Lucy's loving description of the home. She mentions the 'peaceful rooms', 'well-arranged furniture', 'wide windows', 'balcony' 'fine antique street'. This reveals the transient state of life Lucy has lived and continues to live throughout the novel. She is in awe of the permanence of a home, the stability of material goods. It is the constancy of a home which first draws her attention. It also foreshadows the unreliability of Lucy's acquaintances – she notes the furniture first as these are less likely to change or disappear the way her own family and friends do. Like Heathcliff, she cannot trust in the changeableness of people and so she connects instead to the home itself. Lucy's preoccupation with the 'quiet' atmosphere and the 'peaceful rooms' is a desire for solitude. Lucy does not appear to regret her lack of company, even as a child, instead the quiet solitude of the house 'pleased me well'.

Unlike Heathcliff, Jane, and Gilbert, Lucy is able to observe this family from within. However, her position inside the house does not guarantee a place within the family. Lucy declares that she does receive love and affection from Mrs Bretton but it is in a 'quiet way'. This may be the affection Lucy prefers given her previous preference for peace and quiet. However, her establishing comment, 'One child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of', shows Lucy questioning the affection she receives. The 'usually' implies the affection is expected and therefore Lucy does not trust it. Nevertheless, she continues to note her godmother's kindness in removing her from the impending scene of her family tragedy – 'I believe she then plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed'.²¹ Mrs Bretton's knowledge may derive from

²¹ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 8.

experiencing her own misfortune through the loss of her husband. A shared bond of grief connects the two.

Thormählen observes that ‘Whenever the reader of a Brontë novel encounters a particularly happy domestic environment, it is more likely to be run by a widow or a spinster than by a wife.’²² This is most accurately the case in *Villette* where Lucy finds the most comfort in the care of her godmother, a woman who subsequently influences the rest of her life. At the commencement of the narrative Charlotte establishes and foreshadows Lucy’s life and views of family. In her idealised family there is the widowed woman, Mrs Bretton and at the end of the novel Lucy herself. If there is a child, the child is absent, and it is the household which is the true source of happiness. It is the arrival of other family members – Graham and Paulina – which results in the loss of peace Lucy savours. Her relationship with Mrs Bretton is similar to her subsequent relationship with Miss Marchmont, except in this case it is Lucy who is cared for rather than Lucy as the caregiver. Both scenarios present Lucy happy in a family which consists solely of women, without the complicating element of a man to control the family dynamic. Therefore, by the end of the novel Lucy becomes her idealised version of a family – a self-contained woman in a household she controls, but for this to be achieved the sacrifice is the death of a lover or husband. In her most rebellious text, Charlotte draws attention to the forgotten single woman and proposes that there can be an alternative for this figure which is successful, and does not require the presence of a man.

In this section, we have seen the Brontës’ consideration of the idealised family. However, the consistent trope throughout is that their protagonist is in some degree estranged. The Brontës’ interpretation of an idyllic family is something which can be

²² Marianne Thormählen, ‘Marriage and family life’, in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. by Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 311-317, (p. 313).

observed but rarely interacted with. They present the family as a notion, something that can be seen in art, and described in literature, but whether it is attainable is questioned. Even though these families may seem idyllic, consistently there is corruption underneath which I shall explore in the next section. The Brontës depict dysfunctional families that question the Victorians' idealised notions.

4.3 'it's just what *he* used to do when *he* was a boy':²³ Corruption in the blood and dysfunctional families

In her work *Novel Politics – Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2016), Armstrong explores the role played by illegitimacy within the portrayals of Victorian families. In it she explains that:

The family is an invariant element of the novel of this era, but it is defined through its other, illegitimacy. The family entity, dictating codes of exclusion and entitlement, hierarchy and class, and constantly shifting the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, depends for its stability in civil society on a definition of illegitimacy, by which it is underpinned.²⁴

This epitomises the role of family in the Brontë novels. Consistently the protagonists are striving to find acceptance in a world from which they are excluded. Even in the Brontës' idealised interpretations of family life, which their protagonists observe, they are still presented as sites of strife. None of the Brontës approach the presentation of family as a site of stability and unshakeable happiness; there is a common theme of flux throughout. Thormählen argues that 'It is the more noteworthy that so much of the Brontës' fiction is

²³ Anne Brontë, *AG*, ed. by Angeline Goreau [1847] (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 78.

²⁴ Isobel Armstrong, *Novel Politics – Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 5.

set in unhappy, sometimes hellish, homes.’²⁵ In this section, I shall explore the families which the protagonists find themselves in or create. I will establish how the Brontës each continue to interrogate and critique the idealised notion of the family. They reveal the weaknesses of community, and how the family will inevitably be sacrificed in favour of partnership, just as their own writing community evolved into partnerships and eventually the work of four individual writers.

Anne’s first novel *Agnes Grey* presents the most stable family life in her depiction of the Greys:

Of six children, my sister Mary and myself were the only two that survived the perils of infancy and early childhood. I, being the younger by five or six years, was always regarded as the *child*, and the pet of the family – father, mother, and sister, all combined to spoil me – not by foolish indulgence to render me fractious and ungovernable, but by ceaseless kindness to make me too helpless and dependent, too unfit for buffeting with the cares and turmoils of life.²⁶

Agnes is the sole Brontë protagonist who begins and continues through the narrative with a stable family. However, there is already the foreshadowing of despair. What initially appears as a happy family unit is a family haunted by death. Agnes establishes that the loss of her siblings defines her own position in the family by introducing herself in relation to their deaths. Her older siblings were unable to progress into adulthood and so Agnes is bound to infancy, immortalised as a ‘*child*’. This legacy of loss is why the Greys are so reluctant to allow Agnes to leave; by infantilising her they hope to keep her eternally bound to them, so they do not lose the embodiment of their children.

²⁵ Thormählen, ‘Marriage and family life’, p. 312.

²⁶ Anne Brontë, *AG*, p. 62.

Anne exhibits the affection which can be found in a family by describing the manner in which the family ‘spoil’ Agnes, due to her role as the youngest child. The tenderness within the family overflows for the heroine in a way which is not replicated for any of the other Brontë protagonists. Yet even within this family idyll, Anne draws the reader towards the negative aspect of such affection. Betty Jay comments how ‘the social critique offered by *Agnes Grey* extends to include her own family as much as her employers.’²⁷ The caring nature of her family results in Agnes being ‘helpless’, ‘dependent’ and ‘unfit’. Anne critiques the notion of the family as a warning regarding the unnecessary damage it can do to children, particularly girls. Agnes’s desire to work may be inspired by her family’s financial hardship, but the strife which Agnes must fight to escape is actually the confines of her oppressive family life. Anne’s use of ‘pet’ is significant as it relates to Emily’s comment about how the Lintons are ‘petted things’. Both sisters present the dangers of spoiled children, but Agnes is able to escape the dangers due to her own intelligence. Only by her removing herself from the role of family pet can Agnes be free and avoid the mistakes of the Lintons. However, she cannot prevent her own charge, Rosalie Murray, from making the same mistakes.

Agnes foresees the damage her family will do to her prospects, and her plans for independence are met with staunch rejection. “‘Oh, no!’ said my mother. ‘There is no necessity, whatever, for such a step; it is merely a whim of her own. So you must hold your tongue, you naughty girl, for though you are so ready to leave *us*, you know very well we cannot part with *you*.’”²⁸ Agnes is not only refused, but her ideas are belittled by her mother who describes her aspirations as nothing but a ‘whim’. Furthermore, Agnes is reduced to an antagonist within her family as her mother questions her affection by

²⁷ Jay, p. 33.

²⁸ Anne Brontë, *AG*, p. 69.

critiquing her desire to leave. The power of the family is revealed as their wishes are put above those of Agnes – even though her aspirations come from a place of love and a desire to help.

The theme of the overbearing parent is explored by Anne throughout the narrative. Due to her philanthropic aims, Anne extensively depicts the damage caused by some parents to warn her readers. Anne highlights the importance of education for young girls in her portrayal of Agnes and Rosalie. Agnes struggles in the world of work due to being infantilised by her parents, and Rosalie marries unwisely as she cannot comprehend the ramifications of her choice. During a time when the options for young women were limited, Anne advocates that girls should be made aware of the challenges they shall face.

Agnes stands as a significant contrast to the majority of the Brontë protagonists who are either cast out by their families or are devoid of one entirely. Agnes's wilful desire to depart from her family is shared by Cathy Earnshaw, who chooses to leave her family at Wuthering Heights in exchange for her new family, the Lintons. Both are repressed by their family and desire to break loose from the constraints, Agnes via employment and Cathy via marriage. Subsequently they are shown the harsh reality of their respective choices and the narratives force them to face their error. However both, to varying degrees, sacrifice themselves for the sake of their family.

Agnes desires independence, but she is also afraid of her choice to become a governess and staunchly remains in the role even after discovering the horrors it entails. The decision to continue her suffering is due to her desire to provide for her failing family who subsequently lose their patriarch and sole source of income. Cathy's decision can be read as naïvety, or a desire to be free from the violent household of her brother, but she declares that one of the central reasons behind her decision to marry Edgar Linton is her desire to assist Heathcliff: 'if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out

of my brother's power."²⁹ Both Anne and Emily critique the debilitating level of power offered to women in society. Agnes may find work to support her family but it is mentally and physically incapacitating. Cathy sees no other way to gain financial support for her family, specifically Heathcliff, than by prostituting herself. She sacrifices her body to Edgar Linton for the financial stability he offers. In both cases, the heroines are forced to sacrifice their minds and bodies for their families as their bodies are the only article they can exert power over.

By the end of the narrative, Agnes creates her own successful family with Mr Weston and their children. However, her obligations to her previous family remain as she struggles with the thought of leaving her mother, who is now a widow. Her concerns are answered by her future husband:

She said I might have her consent, if I could obtain yours; and I asked her, in case I should be so happy, to come and live with us – for I was sure you would like it better. But she refused, saying she could now afford to employ an assistant, and would continue the school till she could purchase an annuity sufficient to maintain her in comfortable lodgings; and meantime she would spend her vacations alternately with us and your sister, and should be quite contented if you were happy.³⁰

In a reversal of roles it is Agnes's mother who now rejects the confines of the family. Agnes takes on the role of the mother, wanting to keep all her family close, but her mother has learnt from the independence of her daughter and refuses to live within the Weston household. Mrs Grey sacrifices her own happiness for the sake of her family. Agnes may

²⁹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 82.

³⁰ Anne Brontë, *AG*, p. 250.

be happy in her role as the future wife of Mr Weston, but to be a wife and a Weston she must sacrifice her role within the Grey family. With both daughters married the Grey family ceases to exist, leaving Mrs Grey as the sole remaining member. It is explained that she will spend 'vacations' with her daughters, but predominantly her widowhood will be a life of seclusion spent with a wider community of assistants and pupils rather than her own family. Mrs Grey shares the same fate as Mrs Bretton, and Lucy herself – these women emerge from the loss of their families to become independent and self-sufficient, a possibility not available to them when bound by family responsibilities. Furthermore, Mrs Grey and Lucy are able to find happiness outside of the family and create a new community through education.

There is further evidence of the demise of the original family in the suggestion that she spends her time with her daughters separately. This implies that Agnes and Mary's new roles as wives and mothers have dissolved the sibling relationship between them. Mary is subsequently replaced by Agnes's daughter 'little Mary'. The use of the sibling's name shows continued affection, but Mary's absence in the conclusion of the novel indicates her absence within the rest of Agnes's life. Anne draws our attention to the sacrifices required of women in order to create their own families. In the end, Agnes achieves the independence from her family she initially desired. This enables her to create her own family and await the subsequent abandonment by her own children. However, her mother acts as an example that the loss of a woman's family, though tragic, can offer the possibility for independence and freedom, which was Agnes's aim all along.

The Crimsworth family in Charlotte's *The Professor* follow the same trope established in Anne's *Agnes Grey*. The central maternal figure is outcast by her family due to her choice of partner: 'my mother lived in destitution for some six months after him, unhelped by her aristocratical brothers, whom she had mortally offended by her union with

Crimsworth, the –shire manufacturer.’³¹ The affection shared by sisters in *Agnes Grey* is replaced by the disdain of brothers for their sister. Furthermore, this legacy of uncaring brothers is re-enacted by William and Edward and their animosity towards each other as Charlotte returns to the theme of the warring brothers she explores in her juvenilia. ‘I anticipated no overflowings of fraternal tenderness; Edward’s letters had always been such as to prevent the engendering or harbouring of delusions of this sort.’³² This early introduction to the Crimsworth family, particularly the two brothers, establishes the tone for the portrayal of families throughout the novel. William adamantly declares his independence from such connections and his role as an independent individual. However, he seems to overlook that his life up until the commencement of the novel has been provided for by these despised uncles. It is only his refusal of their subsequent plans which separates their connection, and thrusts him into the arms of his brother. This is reminiscent of Emily’s depiction of the Lintons observed by Cathy and Heathcliff, in which the luxury of their home cannot hide the neglect suffered by the children, as well as the damage of instilling the importance of material possessions on the young. There is the implication that monetary support cannot substitute familial affection. Charlotte continues this thread in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. Jane’s first reaction to the news of her inheritance is to mourn the loss of an uncle she never knew, rather than rejoice at her improved social status. It is the love of a family which Charlotte gives precedence to, rather than simply sources of inheritance.

In Charlotte’s ‘Preface’ to *The Professor* she explains, ‘whatever small competency he might gain, should be won by the sweat of his brow’³³. William does work throughout the narrative, but he tries arrogantly to ignore the reality that the majority of his

³¹ Charlotte Brontë, *TP*, ed. by Heather Glen [1857] (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 41.

³² Charlotte Brontë, *TP*, p. 43.

³³ Currer Bell, ‘Preface’ [1856] in Charlotte Brontë, *TP*, pp. 37-38, (p. 37).

opportunities stem from a family connection. Along with the assistance of his uncles, his first job is provided by his brother and his opportunities in Brussels are assisted by the recommendation of Hunsden – a gentleman whom he meets through his brother. Therefore, whilst William proclaims his independence the impact of his family influence cannot be overlooked. Yet, as Charlotte’s focus is on affection rather than inheritance with regard to the family, his relations are quickly dispensed of and the focus remains on William and what he achieves individually.

William’s relatives may benefit his professional aims, but emotionally he is devoid of connections which subsequently damages his own family with Frances. As Heathcliff’s absence of family and parental care impact on his subsequent families so too does William’s to a lesser extent. Stevie Davies observes that ‘The familial hearth, haven of the working man, seems obscurely awry’ in *The Professor*.³⁴ The close of the narrative appears to show an idyll as William describes his life with Frances. However, this image is soon shattered when William shoots his son’s beloved dog. William’s violent act is committed with little consideration of alternatives nor concern for his son, who witnesses the event. William may do this to protect his son, but the manner with which he describes Victor shows William’s lack of empathy for the feelings of his family members:

Victor learns fast. He must soon go to Eton, where, I suspect, his first year or two will be utter wretchedness: to leave me, his mother, and his home, will give his heart an agonized wrench; then, the fagging will not suit him – but emulation, thirst after knowledge, the glory of success, will stir and reward him in time [...] The step must, however, be taken, and it *shall* be; for, though Frances will not make a milksop of her son, she will accustom him to style of treatment, a forbearance, a

³⁴ Stevie Davies, “Three distinct and unconnected tales’: *The Professor, Agnes Grey and Wuthering Heights*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. by Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 72-98, (p. 80).

congenial tenderness, he will meet with from none else. She sees, as I also see, a something in Victor's temper – a kind of electrical ardour and power – which emits, now and then, ominous sparks; Hunsden calls it his spirit, and says it should not be curbed. I call it the leaven of the offending Adam, and consider that it should be, if not *whipped* out of him, at least soundly disciplined [.]³⁵

There is a clear parallel here between Charlotte and Anne's first novels. Each experiments with the significance of affection within a family, but the gender of their characters impact on their outcomes. In *Agnes Grey*, Anne depicts the damage that controlling affection can cause on young girls. They are left naïve and in a perpetual childlike state which leaves them vulnerable. In *The Professor*, we see Charlotte also tackle the issue of the controlling affection of parents, but due to Victor's gender the outcome is very different. The Grey family cannot bear to part with Agnes whereas William is adamant that he will separate his son from his family at a very young age. However, both approaches lead to negative outcomes. Both sisters determine that there are clear gendered issues in the treatment of children: young girls require more independence, and young boys require more affection.

William's lack of concern for the suffering of his son is a product of the lack of compassion he received from his own family. He understands that his son will suffer 'utter wretchedness' at school, as well as from the separation from his family, but still William forces Victor to relive his own path. William shows little consideration that the difference in their upbringings will mean his son's experience will not mirror his own, and his suffering will be even more acute. However, as Mintz explains, it was common in the Victorian era to encourage independence in children: 'Children had to be trained in

³⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *TP*, pp. 288-289.

independence – to develop a capacity of self-reliance, self-assessment, and self-direction.³⁶ Therefore, what William is doing is arguably what is expected of him as a father, but he still disregards the feelings of his son. Nevertheless, the lack of consideration for a child, particularly a son's, feelings in exchange for improvement was the price many Victorian fathers paid. Davidoff and Hall explain: 'Coming from an affectionate home atmosphere, boys would often suffer greatly when sent away to school or, at a later age, to apprenticeships. Severing close home ties was part of the hardening process of becoming a man.'³⁷ Charlotte displays the cruelty of such an act determined by the father figure in the family, to the distress of the child and the mother.

The narrative reveals that it is the affection of Frances, not William, which has softened Victor. William states: 'she will accustom him to a style of treatment, a forbearance, a congenial tenderness, he will meet with from none else.' William treats his son with the same detached manner with which his uncles and brother treated him. Despite the love and affection of Frances, Victor too must suffer a Crimsworth upbringing. When Victor shows indications of having characteristics unfamiliar to the Crimsworths, William is adamant that these must be curbed out of the boy through 'discipline' if not '*whipped*'. The 'if not' in the sentiment of Victor's punishment implies that the idea has been posed by William but rejected, most likely by Frances. Thus, Charlotte also brings the threat of corporal punishment into the family scene.

Throughout the concluding paragraphs of the novel there are numerous references to William's concerns regarding the damaging influence of Hunsden upon Victor. Victor has an affinity with Hunsden and spends considerably more time with him than his father in the final chapter of the novel. Evidence from the work of Davidoff and Hall offers a

³⁶ Mintz, p. 31.

³⁷ Davidoff & Hall, p. 345.

proposal for the relationship between Hunsden and Victor: ‘While a man’s own children had a clear claim on his protection and support, the concept of fatherhood was by no means limited to biological offspring’.³⁸ As such, other figures within a child’s life could assist with the responsibilities of fatherhood. In this case Hunsden may consider himself as an alternative father figure for Victor, particularly due to the emotional reserve and severity of William. Hunsden may be portrayed as the negative influence, but it is William who mercilessly kills his son’s pet, intends to send him away to school – even though he knows the emotional trauma it will cause – and who proposes methods of corporal punishment to curb his son’s character. It would appear William is unable to escape the dysfunctional nature of his own experience. His own family appear functional upon initial presentation, but their depiction puts forward that they are just as dysfunctional as the original Crimsworths. William is destined to create the same animosity he felt for his own relations within his newly formed family. William is a product of his upbringing and, unlike Agnes, he is unable to overcome the limitations of his own experience.

The neglect of children at the hands of their parents is a recurrent theme in the Brontë novels. Jane is abused at the hands of her surrogate mother, Mrs Reed, but Jane’s strong character preserves her from the influence of her aunt’s cruelty. Caroline is neglected by her father and uncle but also escapes the influence. In the novels, the daughters appear able to escape the negative influence of their parental figures, but the sons are not. A daughter can escape the family of their youth through marriage whereas sons remain bound to their family for life. In *Wuthering Heights*, we see the young Hareton hanging puppies and throwing stones at Nelly due to the negative influence of his drunken father. John Reed becomes a wastrel and dies due, in part, to being spoiled by his mother. The Brontës make a clear comment about the damage nineteenth century views of

³⁸ Davidoff & Hall, p. 334.

masculinity could have on young boys. Lamonica notes that ‘Anne Brontë’s novels are most clearly recognizable as social commentaries on the Victorian family, particularly on the formative influence of the family over its members.’³⁹ Consistently throughout Anne’s novels we see fathers corrupting their sons – replicating their own upbringing. As Lamonica notes, Anne reveals this vicious tradition in order to attract awareness to the damaging results.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the negative influence of Huntingdon and his group is not reserved solely for each other, they eventually turn their focus on Arthur, Huntingdon’s son. Helen records: ‘So the little fellow came down every evening, in spite of his cross mama, and learnt to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sent mama to the devil when she tried to prevent him.’⁴⁰ Here Anne exposes how the flaws of the parents are passed on to the child, and a vicious cycle of sin and abuse is perpetuated. The act of encouraging Arthur appears to be the corruption of innocence, but to Huntingdon he is simply welcoming his son into his life and sharing his experiences with him. Helen does not indicate that Arthur is unhappy in his father’s company, nor that he doesn’t enjoy the experience – he sends his mother away when she tries to intervene in his enjoyment with his father. Given the shared actions and attitudes of the male gentry explored in the novel, it suggests that this behaviour is accepted and most likely learnt from their own fathers. Therefore, Huntingdon is simply raising his son the way he was raised by his father.

Reminiscent of Heathcliff and William, Huntingdon is also unable to escape his own upbringing. It is a reading that is supported by a blend of biological and adoptive families which the Brontës consistently portray. In the case of Arthur, Hareton and

³⁹ Lamonica, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 350.

Catherine Linton we see the beneficial possibilities when children are raised by adoptive parents. In her second novel, Anne makes it clear that Arthur will prosper more raised by Markham, his adoptive father, than by Huntingdon, his biological father. Emily and Anne's novels oppose the notions, put forward by Williams, regarding the importance of biological ties during the nineteenth century. The two sisters establish that a functional family does not require kinship to prosper. When there is corruption in the blood, an outside influence is required for the salvation of the child.

Judith E. Pike observes 'In both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë offers a trenchant critique of how fathers in the upper and middle classes are instilling in their young sons corrupted models of manliness.'⁴¹ As I have shown, it is not only the impact of the father which can have a damaging effect on their children; in *Agnes Grey* the mothers are also responsible. Nevertheless, Anne does extensively explore the dangers of corrupted notions of manliness, and how these are passed on to children from their fathers. In *Agnes Grey*, when Agnes reprimands Tom for torturing baby birds and demands he stop he exclaims:

'Oh, pooh! I shan't. Papa knows how I treat them, and he never blames me for it; he says it's just what *he* used to do when *he* was a boy. Last summer he gave me a nest full of young sparrows, and he saw me pulling off their legs and wings, and heads, and never said anything, except that they were nasty things, and I must not let them soil my trousers; and Uncle Robson was there too, and he laughed, and said I was a fine boy.'⁴²

⁴¹ Judith E. Pike, 'Breeching Boys: Milksoops, Men's Clubs and the Modelling of Masculinity in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Brontë Studies*, 37. 2 (2012), 112-124, (p. 113).

⁴² Anne Brontë, *AG*, p. 78.

Here it is apparent that Anne's depiction of Huntingdon and his friends was not a singular occurrence, but rather a commentary on the behaviour of men of the upper class and the impact it had on their families. In this extract she draws emphasis by italicising '*he*' when Tom refers to his father. This exhibits that these are the accepted actions of a young master and ones he has learnt from his father. Anne further enforces this point by also including Tom's uncle. This makes all the male characters complicit in this barbaric act. Elizabeth Langland observes how in *Agnes Grey*, 'Brontë recognises the extent to which manliness is associated with drinking, swearing and carousing, riding, hunting and killing.'⁴³ The baby birds act as a symbolic representation of the children of these men. Their innocence is tortured and mutilated by their fathers until they too become the agents of the barbaric deeds.

Anne critiques masculinity and the role it plays in the family. The scene is exclusively masculine as we see three men destroy what femininity brought to life. We see the active role Mr Bloomfield takes in the corruption of his son. When Tom explains that his father 'knows' and 'saw' it may make his father complicit, but they are also passive actions, he does not take part in the violence. However, Tom's revelation that his father 'gave me a nest' reveals the active step Bloomfield has taken in not just supporting, but encouraging this violence in his son. Tom's comment that 'he never blames me' implies a link to hereditary behaviour which Anne also explores with Arthur and Huntingdon. Not only does this method of parenting teach young boys to never accept responsibility – it is their right to do whatever they wish to others – the lack of reprimand from their fathers also suggests that violence is a biological characteristic which they cannot resist. With this negative biological tie, which is specifically masculine, Agnes is the outsider, and a

⁴³ Elizabeth Langland, *Women Writers: Anne Brontë – The Other One* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd, 1989), p. 137.

feminine influence, who tries to be an adoptive parent to Tom but, in this case, the damage is already done.

Pike argues that 'In both novels, however, Anne Brontë demonstrates that the influence of a governess or a mother's 'maternal care' is not as deleterious to the boy's acculturation as the father or other adult males' propagation of corrupted notions of manliness'.⁴⁴ Certainly, in *Agnes Grey*, the corruption is so progressed that Agnes is not able to overcome it. However, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen's role as the mother does offer her more power. Christine Colón proposes that 'While the power of this community seems, at first, to be insurmountable, Anne reveals that positive transformations may be enacted through the loving actions of one woman, emphasizing the power of Christian love to overcome evil.'⁴⁵ Helen is an integral member of the family and therefore has power over her community, and is able combat the corruption of manliness with her feminine influence – despite her husband and sons attempts to send 'mamma to the devil'. In the face of protestations from the masculine corruption Helen is able to overthrow them and take Arthur away from the influence of his father.

Anne highlights the important role a mother can play in protecting her son from the clutches of the masculine community of the father. However, the price for rebelling against the negative influence of a community is isolation. Helen subjects herself to a life of isolation and secrecy to save her son. Colón notes, 'Helen's interventions in the community around her lead to the reformation of various individuals; and, more importantly, they lead to strong families that will love and educate children effectively so that they will not be lured into the world of debauchery, greed, and foolishness that tempted their parents.'⁴⁶ By the end of the narrative, Helen has established a new family

⁴⁴ Pike, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Christine Colón, 'Beginning Where Charlotte Left off: Visions of Community in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Brontë Studies*, 33.1 (2008), 20-29, (p. 26).

⁴⁶ Colón, p. 27.

for herself and Arthur which remains safely removed from the negative influence of their original family. Anne advocates that isolation is a worthy price to pay to escape negative influence, and through this isolation one can learn to build stronger families.

In their depiction of dysfunctional families, the Brontës challenge the idyllic family perpetuated in Victorian society, literature and art. They present differing interpretations of the role of the parent and the myriad of problems poor parenting can cause. In the subsequent section, the Brontës dispute the importance of blood as frequently surrogate parents are introduced to restore equilibrium within the family. Furthermore, in their representation of orphans, the Brontës present an alternative interpretation of family for consideration as their orphan protagonists attempt to create families of their own.

4.4 ‘Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors’:⁴⁷ The role of the orphan, surrogacy and the birth of a new family

Agnes’s loving family is an anomaly in the Brontë novels as, aside from Caroline, all other Brontë protagonists are orphans. The role of the orphan is integral to the prose writing of the Brontës. The plight of the orphan was a common trope in Victorian fiction. Waters remarks that the role of the orphan ‘may have been a particular source of fascination for the Victorians because of its utility in representing their anxious relation to the past. The desire to recover a fixed origin is evident in the dominance of developmental narratives in varying discourses throughout the nineteenth century’.⁴⁸ Waters argues that the country itself was an orphan in search of a lost family, a time left behind as the world surged forward. In this period of immense scientific and technological development, which was plagued by religious doubt, the Victorians felt severed from the past they had emerged

⁴⁷ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Waters, p. 29.

from and wished to retrieve it to stabilise their sense of identity. The Brontës appear to be searching for the lost past as they frequently set their novels in the early years of the nineteenth century rather than the mid-century they inhabited when their novels were published.

More specifically, in a society so focused on the importance of family, the literary world drew attention to those forcibly ostracised from that world and their attempts to find the family they are deprived of. In the Brontës' oeuvre it is Emily's Heathcliff who most extensively exhibits the irreparable damage of the plight of orphans. All of the other orphan protagonists are aware and, to varying degrees, make the reader aware of their lost parents and families – Heathcliff is the exception. He stands alone, and neither he nor the narrative offers the reader any clarity with regard to his family. Therefore, whilst Lucy is arguably the most isolated of the protagonists, Heathcliff is the one who is completely devoid of family. It is because of this that he strives throughout the course of the narrative to manufacture his own family, but his results remain dysfunctional.

Heathcliff never experiences a functional family life; even his idealised observation of the Linton household is tainted with violence. Upon his arrival at the Heights, Heathcliff is met with disdain by all the inhabitants – even Cathy. The short-lived Mrs Earnshaw's reaction reveals the overall feelings of the family:

We crowded round, and, over Miss Cathy's head, I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk – indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's – yet, when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up – asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own

bairns to feed, and fend for? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad?⁴⁹

From the moment Heathcliff is introduced to the Earnshaws there is a response of animosity and a desire to cast the young boy out. On the one hand this shows the strength and close-knit connection of the family. Their biological connection makes them resistant to welcome another into their midst. Davies proposes the importance of blood relations in the novel: ‘blood-kin are the authentic objects of attachment and desire in *Wuthering Heights*.’⁵⁰ However, the presence of Nelly negates the notion that the Earnshaws cannot welcome outsiders into their community. Even so, Nelly is brought into the family as a servant whereas Heathcliff is presented as a new family member, which is a more extreme test of the family’s acceptance. Heathcliff’s inability to communicate only exacerbates his status as an outsider.

The language used by Nelly immediately establishes Heathcliff as an unwanted outcast. In this extract, she refers to Heathcliff as ‘It’ a total of six times even though she initially establishes that ‘It’ is a child. In addition, Nelly is describing this scene in retrospect so even if she were not aware of Heathcliff’s gender initially she subsequently became aware and thus could refer to him as ‘he’. Instead she strips Heathcliff of his humanity, a creature unfit for her employers. This is further enforced by her description of Heathcliff’s native language as ‘gibberish’. As Nelly does not attempt to translate this ‘gibberish’ to Lockwood we only have her interpretation of the language used. Thus, the gibberish could have been exaggerated in order to support her depiction of Heathcliff as inhuman and beast-like.

⁴⁹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁰ Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë – Key Women Writers*, ed. by Sue Roe (Hertfordshire: Harvester · Wheatsheaf, 1988), p. 52.

The narrative immediately establishes Heathcliff as a foil to the original members of the Earnshaw family. Laura Peters's study into the role of the orphan in Victorian literature suggests that the demise of the family stems from Heathcliff's position:

Victorian culture perceived the orphan as a scapegoat – a promise and a threat, a poison and a cure. As such, the orphan, as one who embodied the loss of the family, came to represent a dangerous threat; the family reaffirmed itself through the expulsion of this threatening difference.⁵¹

As an orphan, Heathcliff is the embodiment of threat to the family. Not only is Heathcliff the reason the two children, Hindley and Cathy, do not receive their gifts, his arrival also coincides with the death of Mrs Earnshaw. Heathcliff's arrival foreshadows the demise of the Earnshaws with the creation of Hindley's animosity towards his family, which results in his subsequent dismissal to school, in addition to the deaths of both Mr and Mrs Earnshaw. Heathcliff has come from no family to then watch as his adopted family falls apart around him. In a similar fashion to *Agnes Grey*, Mr Earnshaw's affection towards Heathcliff has negative connotations as it encourages the animosity from the other members of the family. In both texts, the prioritisation of one child within the family serves to undermine the family unit. Anne and Emily reveal the unbalanced affections which can exist within a family, and their subsequent damage. Inequality within a community will lead to its demise.

Nevertheless, Mr Earnshaw's belief that the rest of the family are 'persecuting' Heathcliff is not unfounded. Mrs Earnshaw's feelings are made clear in viewing Heathcliff

⁵¹ Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 2. Peters has noted the 'dearth of criticism on the orphan. Why this is so given the prevalence of this figure, is somewhat of a mystery.', p. 2. Since Peters's observation there has been further study into the role of the Victorian orphan. However, works such as: Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2006). David Floyd, *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates: Orphans of Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014). These studies focus on the later stages of the Victorian period. As such, the topic of orphans in the Brontës' novels offers scope for a more detailed investigation.

as a 'gipsy brat'. Nelly observes how, 'Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors' upon first seeing Heathcliff, and the only reason she does not is because she dies shortly after his arrival. Nor is Hindley's treatment of Heathcliff merely interpreted by Mr Earnshaw. Rather than Heathcliff in his role as an orphan, I believe it is Mr Earnshaw who is the catalyst of strife within his family as he brings in a new child and favours him over his other children. However, this sense of exclusivity within the family experienced by Mrs Earnshaw and her son is clearly not felt by Mr Earnshaw or Cathy. As such, Heathcliff's arrival uncovers an underlying divide within the priorities of the family which begin to tear it apart.

Due to being unaccustomed to family life, Heathcliff is only able to form a strong connection with one family member. His first source of affection is Mr Earnshaw which is subsequently eclipsed by his profound relationship with Cathy. However, Cathy's departure to the Linton family implies that a partnership is not enough, and one needs a family to thrive. Cathy brings about the demise of two generations of Lintons. It is her illness which leads to the deaths of Edgar and Isabella's parents, and her own death which shatters the second generation of Lintons. This begins Heathcliff's attempt to create his own version of a family. The failure of Cathy and Hindley to form their own families results in Heathcliff's final product. Throughout the novel Emily shatters any notions of an idyllic family. Consistently families are decimated, leaving the orphan Heathcliff to try and build from what is left. Emily's narrative may appear to critique the Victorian ideal, suggesting that it is unattainable and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the fact that Heathcliff still strives to create a family unit shows its unshakeable precedence.

Cathy's failure brings the young Catherine into Heathcliff's new family and it is Hindley's failings which brings Hareton to Heathcliff. Nelly shouts at Hindley: "You shall not meddle with him!" I continued, "He hates you – they all hate you – that's the truth! A

happy family you have'.⁵² As the heir of the family it is Hindley's role to continue the Earnshaw family line and yet, as Nelly draws to his attention, his actions result in nothing but hatred. Hindley fails his family due to his animosity towards Heathcliff, and his substance abuse, but there is also a link to the risks of partnership. As Agnes gives up her family when she marries Mr Weston, Hindley gives up his family upon the death of his wife.

Drawing from the influence of his adopted father, Heathcliff proves through his relationship with Hareton that it takes more than just a blood connection to be a member of a family. Though Heathcliff's treatment of Hareton is far from exemplary, the young man's devotion to his adopted father demonstrates the power of their connection:

Catherine was waxing cross at this; but he found means to make her hold her tongue, by asking, how she would like *him* to speak ill of her father? and then she comprehended that Earnshaw took the master's reputation home to himself: and was attached by ties stronger than reason could break – chains, forged by habit, which it would be cruel to attempt to loosen.⁵³

Certainly, there could be negative connotations behind these notions of chains – Hareton could easily be read as Heathcliff's slave bound to his master. The manner with which Heathcliff is portrayed as treating Hareton could be read in such a light. Heathcliff's aim is to enact revenge upon the son of his oppressor through forcing the servitude he experienced in his youth upon Hareton. The striking difference though is the opinion of the oppressed towards his oppressor. Heathcliff despises Hindley to the extent he makes it his life's goal to destroy him; Hareton shows true affection for Heathcliff and openly sobs

⁵² Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 76.

⁵³ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 321.

when he dies. This could mean Heathcliff is a much more cunning and manipulative oppressor than Hindley, but the bonds that tie Hareton are familial rather than tyrannical.

In the extract above, Hareton's love for Heathcliff as the paternal figure in his life is revealed and he will not hear a bad word against him, even from the woman he loves. Also, Nelly's belief that it would be 'cruel to attempt to loosen' the bond between Hareton and Heathcliff supports the notion of family ties. Nelly witnesses the violence and neglect Hareton suffers at the hands of his biological father so the love he feels for this surrogate father must be preserved, as it is the only family he has.

As a character completely devoid of a biological family Heathcliff fails at his attempts to create his own. The offspring from his marriage is weak, sickly, and soon dies. It is the adoptive child Hareton, who mirrors his own adopted status, who allows Heathcliff to achieve his family:

Well, I reflected, there was never a pleasanter, or more harmless sight; and it will be a burning shame to scold them. The red firelight glowed on their bonny heads, and revealed their faces, animated with the eager interest of children; for, though he was twenty-three, and she eighteen, each had so much of novelty to feel, and learn, that neither experienced, nor evinced the sentiments of sober disenchanted maturity.⁵⁴

There is a theme of fire, and heat throughout the scene: 'burning', 'scold', 'red firelight'. The threatening language, 'burning' and 'scold' stem from Nelly and make evident the intensity of her emotions and determination to protect her two wards. In a novel where extremes of emotion are common it is fitting that Nelly's language of protection should hold such connotations. It is also in-keeping with the physical violence which is common

⁵⁴ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 322.

to *Wuthering Heights*, and it is this violence that Nelly is trying to prevent and protect her adopted children from. In contrast to this the 'red firelight glowed on their bonny heads' portrays the warmth and protection of home. In this moment, Emily appears to present a conventional image of family life with the children sat round the fire, closely guarded by a reliable servant. She does critique notions of the family, but she still upholds the belief that a functioning family is achievable.

There is a preoccupation with the preservation of childhood within the extract. Nelly describes them learning with 'the eager interest of children'. Consistently in the novel, relationships show signs of strife once the characters reach adulthood; the Earnshaws, Heathcliff and the Lintons all see their childhood connections fester once they reach maturity. During her illness Cathy bewails no longer being a girl, and when she returns as a ghost it seems to imply the immortal form she has chosen is herself as a child. Hareton and Catherine may be young adults, but in order to fix their relationship they revert back to being children to try to regain the innocence of affection. Nelly observes how 'neither experienced, nor evinced the sentiments of sober disenchanted maturity.' Nelly has witnessed the demise of all the relationships in the novel, and is happy to note that, at this moment at least, she cannot see the disenchantment experienced by the first generation in their offspring.

This scene is reminiscent of the moment Cathy and Heathcliff peer in at the Linton family. Once again Heathcliff is faced with what is perceived to be an idyllic family moment. Nelly describes it as 'never a pleasanter, or more harmless sight', and once again Heathcliff can only observe; he understands at this point that he cannot be a part of this family he has created. It is notable that Nelly describes the scene as 'harmless' as so many depictions of family life in the novel are tainted with violence. In its conclusion, a family

has been created that can overcome the thread of violence which runs through the first generation.

Magdalen Wing-Chi Ki proposes that Heathcliff finds ‘pleasure in cancelling the traditional (nuclear) family, happy homes or even the idea of happiness.’⁵⁵ This is supported by Peters’s argument that the orphan posed a dangerous threat to the family. Heathcliff is certainly far removed from an ideal father. However, he creates his own family, one that consists solely of orphans. Through a combination of Cathy’s biological influence, and Heathcliff’s re-enactment of the role of Mr Earnshaw as the adoptive parent, the functioning family of Hareton and Catherine and their future offspring is created. Cathy may not appear to be present in the creation of this family, but her biological influence is tantamount to its success. Nelly comments, ‘They lifted their eyes together, to encounter Mr Heathcliff – perhaps, you have never remarked that their eyes are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw.’⁵⁶ It is this biological reminder of Cathy which encourages Heathcliff’s acceptance of this new family. Through Cathy’s blood and Heathcliff’s, at times questionable, care the Earnshaw family survives.

At this moment Emily appears to support the importance of a biological connection within a family, but at the same time she critiques and undermines it. Cathy’s biological gift is certainly an integral factor in the family, but it is not the only one. Cathy is never present to nurture her family and instead, upon the death of Edgar Linton and Hindley, their families are left in the care of Heathcliff and Nelly – neither of whom are related to Catherine and Hareton by blood. Therefore, the novel advocates that nurture from members outside of the family, as well as the biological legacy of the deceased members, enables the continuation of the family.

⁵⁵ Magdalen Wing-Chi Ki, ‘Family Complexes and Dwelling Plight in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Brontë Studies*, 39.3 (2014), 202-212, (p. 209).

⁵⁶ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 322.

The scene is also reminiscent of the family setting of the Rivers sisters observed by Jane. In both we see two children of the family sat by a fire, joined by an appreciation of learning and watched over by a maternal servant. Emily and Charlotte appear to share a similar view of what a realistic family idyll could look like. It does not require a biological parent so long as a guardian is present. Literature and learning appear as the consistent trope which binds together these familial partnerships. It is easy to see clear biographical parallels in this scene. However, in broader terms it suggests a response from both Emily and Charlotte to the reality of family life. In the novels of the Brontës consistently parents are dead. Therefore, their offspring strive to find an alternative idyll which must exist to accommodate this loss. As a result, a focus instead is given to sibling relationships and romantic partnerships. Happiness must be found in an individual when so often death undermines the family unit.

The loss of biological parents results in an emphasis on the role of the servant within the family, particularly as a surrogate parent. However, this is not inclusive of all servants as is made clear by Mrs Fairfax's comment in *Jane Eyre*: 'but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality; one must keep them at due distance for fear of losing one's authority.'⁵⁷ It is specifically the servants of higher rank who are allowed to enter into the family community and hold a significant place. The female servant is always present, and has usually been present since childhood, thus frequently fulfilling the role of a surrogate mother to the often orphaned female protagonists. Mrs Pryor acts as a maternal figure to both Shirley and Caroline, and Hannah is the protective guardian of Diana and Mary. Mrs Fairfax is the distant mothering figure in Rochester's life and Nelly, who fulfils the role of surrogate sister to Cathy, Hindley and Heathcliff, goes on to be the surrogate mother to her employers' orphaned children.

⁵⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 115.

In Branwell's "and the weary are at rest" and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* we see the longevity of the role of a servant within a family. These texts depict how two families, those of the employer and the employee, intertwine and become one large family community. Branwell's fictional servant Bob recalls the role he has played in the lives of Percy and his family members: 'Weel Aw hev been yaw're sarvent and the sarvent o' yaw're father – and knew him that wor th'owd maister all – and hav donced you on me knees and gein ye th' first pack of cairds you handled'.⁵⁸ Here Bob fulfils the role of a surrogate grandparent as he reveals that he has cared for not only Percy but also his father, and was originally the employee of Percy's grandfather. With so many generational ties Branwell establishes how intrinsic a servant can be to the community of a family. The manner with which Bob describes his relationship with Percy is not in terms of fulfilling a duty, but rather caring for and playing with a child he has affection for. This surpasses the role of employee and designates Bob as a caring member of the family unit.

Nelly is the most developed servant character within the Brontë novels, and the one who is gifted the most narrative power. Within the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*, it is Nelly who has all the control; the legacy of the families is left in her hands. Nelly's connection with the families of Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights* are extensive. 'Before I came to live here, [...] I was almost always at *Wuthering Heights*; because my mother had nursed Mr Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children – I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to.'⁵⁹ Through the nursing of Hindley we can see a biological link between the Earnshaws and Nelly; they may not be connected by blood but they are connected by milk. Due to her mother working for the Earnshaws

⁵⁸ Patrick Branwell Brontë, "and the weary are at rest", in *WPBB*, III, pp. 420-466, (p. 421).

⁵⁹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 35.

they become an extension of Nelly's own family, except this is a family she must work to be accepted into, rather than relying on a biological connection. Initially, Nelly fulfils the role of sister to the Earnshaw children and Heathcliff and is a confidant to all three. As with Bob, Nelly's role within the family is generational as she becomes the surrogate mother to Hareton, Hindley's child, and then to Catherine, Cathy's child. Nelly does not have to undergo childbirth; therefore, it is her biological separation from the families which allows her to survive and be the central nurturing figure to the second generation. The novel closes with her surrounded by her surrogate children and she the only remaining parental figure left to care for the next generation to come.

Bruce Robbins notes that 'At a time when the majority of servants changed positions every year or two, the literary prevalence of long-serving family retainers may have stemmed both from paternalist illusions and from their peculiar usefulness as figures of family continuity.'⁶⁰ The precedence Emily gives to Nelly is representative not necessarily of nineteenth century servants – though the Brontës' own servant Tabitha Ackroyd did remain with the family – but is rather an indication of the integral role Nelly plays in Emily's narrative. Nelly is the adopted figure who remains to purify the corrupting nature of the Earnshaw blood, and the actions of Heathcliff, to preserve the family.

Charlotte's depiction of family life in *Jane Eyre* differs considerably from her first novel. William and Jane are both deprived of their parents, and suffer at the hands of their remaining family, but Jane does not allow this cruelty experienced in childhood to be replayed on her own family. William does not pursue a replacement for his childhood relations, instead he is content in his isolation until he desires a wife, whereas Jane views the discovery of her new family members as the greatest joy of her life – at the time:

⁶⁰ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand – English Fiction From Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 92.

It seemed I had found a brother: one I could be proud of – one I could love; and two sisters, whose qualities were such, that, when I knew them but as mere strangers, they had inspired me with genuine affection and admiration. The two girls, on whom, kneeling down on the wet ground, and looking through the low, latticed window of Moor House kitchen, I had gazed with so bitter a mixture of interest and despair, were my near kinswomen; and the young and stately gentleman who had found me almost dying at his threshold was my blood relation. Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating; – not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight. I now clapped my hands in sudden joy – my pulse bounded, my veins thrilled.⁶¹

Bereft of Rochester, Jane finds consolation in the discovery of a family who have genuine affection for her. They may not biologically be her siblings, but Jane still specifies the importance of there being a ‘blood relation’; there is a biological link which Jane then elaborates by exaggerating their connection to her. As in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the family which succeeds is a combination of the biological and the adoptive, in order that the adoptive member can provide positive influence against the potential corruption of the blood.

Jane may be convinced of the biological connection between herself, Diana and Mary but there is a degree of uncertainty with regards to St John. She states ‘It seemed I had found a brother’ – the inclusion of ‘seemed’ shows her doubts. There is a mirroring here between the Reeds and the Rivers. Jane is able to come to peace with Eliza and

⁶¹ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 444.

Georgiana and find her place amongst them, thus enabling an easy transition as she joins Diana and Mary. However, John's premature death means Jane is not able to progress from the animosity she felt towards him as a child. Thus, she enters her relationship with St John still haunted by the memory of her other surrogate brother. However, the scene depicts Jane convincing herself, and she notes that St John is a brother 'I could be proud of – one I could love'. Charlotte highlights the connection between her two surrogate brothers by their names. Jane may believe that in St John she has found an alternative to John Reed whom she could love. However, as with John Reed, St John cannot understand Jane and would inflict misery upon her. Haunted by the demise of her partnership with Branwell, Charlotte is still unable to solve the complex figure of the brother and so instead she focuses on Rochester who can fulfil all masculine roles for Jane.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the orphan protagonist Heathcliff is enamoured by the material trappings of family life – the luxuries of the home. Charlotte's Jane, however, is keen to point out the superiority of familial love and affection over material wealth. Upon discovering her family connection to the Rivers she proclaims, 'This was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections.' Her language is reminiscent of receiving material possessions in her description of the event as 'wealth', yet she clarifies the difference with 'wealth to the heart'. Material wealth can only comfort the body whereas emotional wealth supports the soul. Emotional wealth is described as pure hence she clarifies its superiority; she continues to show the sheer breadth of feeling as it is described as a 'mine'. This family love is a source of limitless treasure. Jane even makes a direct comparison to a gift of gold – 'rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight.' This appears to refer to her promised family life at Thornfield. She does not deny the appeal but reveals the joy is quickly tarnished by the 'weight'. This shows the emotional burden of material wealth, reminiscent of Jane's reluctance to wear any of the

jewels or fine garments offered to her by Rochester. The pressure of wealth is too much and can easily be ‘sobering’ to affections. Instead, Jane celebrates the purity of family love in which they meet as equals and can bestow limitless gifts of affection upon each other.

Jane’s preoccupation with the importance of blood relation derives from her time with the Reeds. Jane’s role in the household is in a constant state of uncertainty as her only tie, her uncle, is deceased. At Thornfield, Jane creates a new family unit with herself, Mrs Fairfax and Adèle – which Rochester becomes a part of. However, as there is no legal tie between the group they are easily separated, such as when Rochester suggests sending Jane to Ireland. Jane is accepted by the Rivers family, but still her position is precarious and she is removed to a place of seclusion by St John. Upon discovering their blood connection, and her inheritance, Jane solidifies this family unit. Once she has established this much longed for family Jane proceeds to leave it to return to Rochester. Adams argues it is through her connection with the Rivers family that she is then able to return to Rochester:

Jane’s understanding that her alienation and lovelessness are the result of her economic, social and personal deprivation and dependencies; [...] the Marsh End integration of blood and kinship ties in which a familial resolution among the Rivers family prepares for the marital resolution with Rochester, in which affinity, monetary inheritance, social status and mutual interdependence are of a piece.⁶²

Adams proposes the integral role played by the Rivers family in Jane’s journey back to Rochester. Without the Rivers family, Jane is entirely dependent upon Rochester for everything – her money, her home and any form of affection she wishes to receive. By giving Jane a family, and inheritance, it allows her to return to Rochester in a stable and independent situation in which his rejection will no longer leave her destitute.

⁶² Adams, p. 169.

Jane's family, with her two adopted sisters and brother, is described as a 'blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating', but it is short-lived and is not deemed a sufficient conclusion for the heroine. It is only through reuniting with her partner and establishing their own family that Jane's progression is complete. Of her life with Rochester, Jane comments, 'My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married: alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them.'⁶³ As in *Agnes Grey*, marriage is the final blow which severs the family in order to create a new one. By quickly marrying off Diana and Mary, Jane's abandonment of her newly formed family is less severe. Patsy Stoneman notes this apparent shift, by Charlotte, away from her a focus on family, 'Charlotte Brontë did not write her life, she wrote her daydream [...] in Charlotte's daydream, Jane's sisters (Diana and Mary) stay at a distance...Charlotte Brontë dreams herself as an orphan.'⁶⁴ Though Jane strives throughout the narrative for a family she seems unable to resist her role as an orphan, or the pull of her now exclusive relationship with Rochester. The revelation that Jane only sees her adopted sisters once a year shows that the relationship, once so precious to her, quickly loses its influence.

Nevertheless, Adams argues, were it not for the Rivers family Jane may not have achieved her happy ending with Rochester. In *Jane Eyre*, as in Anne and Emily's novels, the family of youth must be sacrificed in order that a new family can be born. However, Charlotte proposes that it is through the love and support of a family that her heroine is able to strive for the idyllic ending she desires. Armstrong explains the importance of genealogy within the Victorian novel – 'Your genealogy 'belongs' to you and shows others where you belong. Without its guarantee of family history you have no identity or

⁶³ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 520.

⁶⁴ Patsy Stoneman, 'Jane Eyre in Later Lives: Intertextual Strategies in Women's Self-Definition', in *Fatal Attractions – Re-scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 38-50, (p. 46).

standing.’⁶⁵ The Rivers provide Jane with the stability of not only a home but with an identity and place of standing in society. These empower her to return to her past and reclaim it, safe in the knowledge that if she fails she will not be alone.

4.5 Conclusion

John-Steiner argues that ‘Collaboration thrives on diversity of perspectives and on constructive dialogues between individuals negotiating their differences while creating their shared voice and vision.’⁶⁶ Through the consideration of families in their novels the Brontës present a shared preoccupation from within their circle. Influenced by the dynamics of their own collaborative community, the siblings reveal the dysfunctional aspects of family groups. The gradual decline of their writing community, and the isolation experienced by each sibling at some period, informs the seclusion of their protagonists and the desire for acceptance within a family unit.

In their depiction of the Victorian family the Brontës can clearly be seen critiquing the social ideal. Frequently they reveal the harsh reality behind the glorified family, and it is a realm their own protagonists are excluded from. They consistently draw their reader’s attention to those outside this idyll, particularly the character of the orphan. With the exception of Agnes and Caroline, orphans dominate the Brontës’ portrayal of family to reveal both its failings – the isolation experienced by those without a family – but also its triumphs – all the orphaned protagonists, even Heathcliff, create a family they are previously deprived of.

Even so, the families presented are regularly sites of dysfunctionality: the precedence of widows and isolated women in *Villette*; the cruelty of the Reeds; the

⁶⁵ Armstrong, *Novel Politics – Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ John-Steiner, p. 6.

corruption and violence of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. The overarching theme in the Brontës' interpretation of family is sacrifice. Particularly in the case of the female protagonists, they are required to sacrifice their original family, their home, their friendships, their sanity in exchange for the prospect of creating their own family. In the novels, the family is frequently the goal and as such it is the romantic partnerships which enable the characters to achieve this. As a result, it is this which is given precedence in the narrative.

Within their community it is their collaborative partnerships, rather than the united family group, which were the most productive creative dynamic. Partnership progressively becomes the significant relationship within their fiction, mirroring the transition of their own writing community. In my final chapter, I shall go on to establish how the role of partnership dominates their work through homosocial relationships which, in turn, are abandoned in pursuit of the romantic partnership. Through an exploration of the iconic relationships of Jane and Rochester, Cathy and Heathcliff, and Anne's critique of these in the marriage of Helen and Huntingdon, I shall determine that it is the role of partnership, rather than family, which is given the most prominence by the Brontës.

Chapter Five: ‘If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be’:¹

Partnerships, fraternities, sororities and marriages

5.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated, through an analysis of their writing, the evolution of the writing community of the Brontës. I have shown how if we approach the Brontës’ work critically, rather than just biographically, we are better able to understand their collaborative group. Furthermore, we can see how they imaginatively address the issues of community, family, partnership, and isolation in their work. As the community developed it progressively became more exclusive; initially the four siblings wrote together but this rapidly evolved into the partnerships of Charlotte and Branwell, and Emily and Anne. Emily and Anne retained their partnership, whereas Branwell and Charlotte’s partnership fell into decline. It is this legacy of partnership which can be found as the central relationship within the Brontë novels. Farrell explains that:

Just as the dynamics of love are most likely to occur in couples, these more intimate dynamics of collaboration – escalating exchange, risk, and trust, along with mirroring and idealization – are most likely to unfold with pairs. Although it may be possible to achieve instrumental intimacy in larger face-to-face groups, it is more likely in pairs, where collaborators are better able to achieve the depth of exchange.²

Farrell makes a direct comparison between creative partnerships and romantic relationships with regard to their intensity. Through a consideration of the Brontës’ work the power of

¹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, p. 82.

² Farrell, p. 202.

their partnerships has been shown throughout the thesis. This chapter will reveal how the Brontës use the experience of their own partnerships to inform their portrayal of romantic pairings through their interaction with the marriage plot.

In her study of the marriage plot, Kathy Alexis Psomiades highlights how it puts ‘sex and its regulation at the origins of culture.’³ Nancy Armstrong further explains that ‘During the 1850s and 1860s, in other words, fiction made the selection of a husband into the most important thing a woman did.’⁴ In choosing to focus on the marriage plot the Brontës not only responded to societal demands, but also the literary market in which they participated. However, the safety of their community enabled them to depict controversial notions relating to marriage which shocked their first readers and reviewers so much. Charlotte’s first two published novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, are certainly involved in this literary tradition, and it was not until *Villette* that she moves away from it. Alternatively, Emily and Anne critique this expectation in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In these novels marriage may be the most important thing a woman does, but the sisters refuse to entirely fulfil the expectation. In their rebellion against the literary tradition, Emily and Anne reveal that marriage can lead to a woman’s destruction.

Emily was still concerned with the marriage plot but, as Davies notes, inspired by Byron, Emily does not shy away from notions of intense love shared between siblings:

She shares with Byron, however, a profound awareness of the sanctity and sanctuary of sister-brother love, and a perception of its retentive passion, disqualifying the lover from future adaptation to individuals beyond the family or

³ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, ‘The Marriage Plot in Theory’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 43.1 (2010), 53-59, (p. 53).

⁴ Nancy Armstrong, ‘Gender and the Victorian Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to The Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 97-124, (p. 113).

tribe. The loyalties of childhood, their longevity and their status as a test for the quality of other emotions are a major theme of her poetry and prose [.]⁵

Emily's fiction remains closely tied to notions of family. Emily, like her siblings, critiques the family ideal in favour of partnership, but she makes that partner a member of the family. Davies indicates an incestuous undertone to the relationship of Cathy and Heathcliff, through her comparison with Byron. Whether related by blood or not, Emily highlights her preoccupation with the importance of the sibling bond. To a certain extent, Charlotte also continues to interact with notions of the sibling relationship as she describes Jane and Rochester as 'twins'. In *Shirley*, Robert Moore may be Caroline's cousin but he also adopts the role of surrogate brother before he becomes her husband. Anne also interacts with the brother-sister romance plot in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Markham misconstrues Helen's relationship with her brother Lawrence as a love affair.

It is not solely romantic partnerships that the Brontës represent in their works. Throughout the course of this chapter, in addition to romantic partnerships I will also consider the Brontës' depictions of fraternal and sorority groupings. I will reveal how, due to the depiction of male communities as sites of corruption and violence, the marriage plot is subsequently favoured. However, this also results in the undermining of female friendships. Carolyn W. De La L. Oulton comments on the significance of friendship in Victorian society and literature: 'While marriage is generally upheld in Victorian writing as the ultimate source of human love, gender ideology necessarily assumed that the greatest sympathy attainable was between members of the same sex.'⁶ There are certainly some meaningful friendships between women depicted in Charlotte's novels: Shirley and

⁵ Davies, *Emily Brontë – Key Women Writers*, p. 104.

⁶ Carolyn W. De La L. Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p. 43.

Caroline, Jane and Helen, Lucy and Ginevra, and Lucy and Polly. Even so, all friendships are overpowered by the marriage plot. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these bonds shows an attempt on Charlotte's part to offer an alternative companion and existence for her heroines.

In the depiction of male friendships, particularly by Anne, there is a clear critique of masculinity. In Branwell's short piece "and the weary are at rest", and Anne's second novel we see the levels of corruption aristocratic men could be reduced to when in each other's company. In place of the emotional support shown in female friendships there is aggression, vice and competition in these depictions of fraternity. However, this interest in the corruption of fraternal groupings is not specific to the upper class. Christopher Lane observes similar features in Charlotte's interpretation of male communities: 'In *Shirley*, for instance, violence governs – indeed, characterizes – the novel's interest in group bonds.'⁷ In Charlotte's novel male friendship and community is destroyed, and the female characters are left to restore order.

5.2 'The word 'friend,' in his mouth makes me shudder':⁸ The danger of fraternal groups

Male friendship played an important role in middle-upper class Victorian society. However, in the work of the Brontës male friendship is also the catalyst for the encouragement of cruelty and debauchery. The corrupting influence takes precedence in Anne's work in which she vividly portrays the demise of numerous male characters due to the influence of their fraternal groups. Male friendship is depicted as the antithesis to

⁷ Christopher Lane, 'Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating', *ELH*, 69.1 (2002), 199-222, (p. 202).

⁸ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 227.

married contentment as it destroys romantic relationships and families. Matt Cook describes the setting for the formation of the fraternal groups:

For many upper and upper-middle class men the opportunities offered by the cosmopolitan West End were supplemented by a tradition of homosociality which often protected them in their exploits. The clubs and bachelor chambers in Pall Mall and St James' developed from the 1830s and formed a continuation of the homosocial worlds of public school and university.⁹

Immediately, there is a sense of the corruption present in the Brontës works as Cook alludes to the 'exploits' which these homosocial spaces encouraged. Furthermore, Cook explains how a fraternal group could protect their members from the ramifications of their deviancy. Established in boarding schools and universities, these homosocial spaces would then spill out into the men's clubs depicted in works by Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. The formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the legacy of Tennyson's *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850) reveal the significance male friendship holds in Victorian literature and art. The Brontës can also be seen interacting with notions of male friendship, but consistently these are sites of corruption and debauchery. In *Shirley*, the narrator comments 'All men, taken singly, are more or less selfish; and taken in bodies they are intensely so.'¹⁰ In a novel which focuses on the plight of women, the narrator clearly places the blame at the feet of men and their innate selfishness. Caroline Helstone is selfless to the point of self-destruction. However, her beloved Robert Moore is imbued with selfishness so deeply ingrained that only a near death experience can break the cycle.

⁹ Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 30.

¹⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, ed. by Jessica Cox [1849] (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 161.

This depiction shows that being part of a community can exacerbate the negative attributes of an individual.

Anne and Branwell focus specifically on the homosocial space of male aristocrats. In Branwell's short prose piece "and the weary are at rest" he describes the miserable lot of his group of characters:

Among the gentleman who formed this army against the 'Moors' who had a real home? Mr Montmorency had not – whose wife lay under the huge roof of Cologne Cathedral dead after a few years of sufferance under himself and a few months of the outbreak and indulgence of long felt and late enjoyed love of the man who 'left her alone to die' – That Man – Mr Percy had not – who besides such thorns in his flesh – such pinches as the old man Adam gave Christians – knew that cold earth embraced the little lady who never thought but for him – Nor had Mr O' Connor who felt bitterly that his rents as soon as due must be received not by his own itching fingers but by the widely expanding palm of Mr Jeremiah Simpson [.]¹¹

Initially this may appear as the bemoaning of this group of aristocratic men; in actuality it depicts the damage they have done. Mr Montmorency is widowed due to his neglectful treatment of his wife who he could not even acknowledge when she lay dying. Percy has also lost his wife who selflessly dedicated her life to him, and O'Connor is in serious debt. It is made clear that this series of tragedies is, in part, the result of their friendship. The predominant focus of the narrative is on the debauchery of the lives of Percy and his group of friends. However, the victims of their lifestyle are frequently their wives rather than themselves. This is a notion which Anne develops in more depth in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Indeed, Montmorency and Percy could easily be precursors to Hattersley and

¹¹ Patrick Branwell Brontë, "and the weary are at rest", in *WPBB*, III, p. 424.

Huntingdon. Of male friendship in Victorian England, Sharon Marcus observes that 'Friendship between boys was much more likely to be described as a phase that ended when one of the men married, and it was often understood in terms of rivalry, hierarchy, and sexual difference.'¹² There is a sense that the friendships depicted by Branwell and Anne should long since have been abandoned when the characters married. As a result the friendship group is decaying, which causes their corrupt behaviour and the neglect of their partners. In their refusal to accept the transition into maturity and accept the responsibilities of marriage the group remain as overgrown children. Therefore, rather than the progression into mature adults and symbolic rebirth through the creation of their children, they are left with the decaying bodies and minds of their youth.

Branwell appears to highlight the gendered injustice with regard to the plight of women. Once married, the woman sacrifices her previous life to dedicate herself to her new role as a wife, whereas the man still retains previous relationships. Branwell shows the damage this societal imbalance could cause. His female characters can depend only upon their husbands, who in turn are still dedicated to their male friends. As such, the women consistently suffer from neglect. He describes Percy's wife as 'the little lady who never thought but for him'. This overwhelming dedication is not matched by her husband thus, thinking only of him, there is no one to think for her and so she dies. Here, Branwell highlights the risks of such dependent partnerships. The isolation of his female characters shows a complication in the marriage plot. Female characters are encouraged to aspire to marriage as their central goal, but they are subsequently left alone as their partners have not been raised with the same notions. The importance of male friendship is to the

¹² Sharon Marcus, *Between Women – Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 86.

detriment of the marriage plot. The risk of leaving innocent women as the dependents of these overgrown boys who can barely care for themselves is clear.

There is also a critique of the role of women within marriage. Branwell supports the notion of the wife as the homemaker as he observes ‘who had a real home?’ Without their wives the heart of the home is gone, and they are all left homeless. However, it also highlights their own failings as their role as the head of the household has been neglected. Without the support of their husbands their wives perish under the strain. Branwell’s observation that Mr Montmorency’s wife is ‘dead after a few years of sufferance under himself’ implies the physical obligations of marriage. The use of ‘sufferance’ indicates not only unwanted sexual relations forced upon Mrs Montmorency, but also a violent aspect which resulted in pain and suffering. Her ‘sufferance’ could also refer to the demands of childbearing. The unhappiness of the marriage can be seen in Mrs Montmorency’s decision to have an affair with Percy which contributes to her death. A glorified concubine, Mrs Montmorency is used as a sexual favour by her husband and his friend until it results in her death, potentially from a sexually related cause such as childbirth or a venereal disease.

Karen Chase and Michael Levenson note that within the Victorian family: ‘Adultery, divorce, bigamy, the cruelty of husbands, the flight of wives – these sensational anomalies were stitched into the fabric of authority.’¹³ The ‘authority’ refers to the authority of the husband, and the level of control he could wield over his spouse. In his prose piece, Branwell depicts the less-than-idyllic reality of a number of families. Though Percy is his protagonist and hero he still portrays him as flawed, and surrounded by a community of flawed men. The similarity between the situations of the gentlemen within the group puts forward the notion that their community condones and perpetuates this

¹³ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy – A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 12.

destructive behaviour. In addition, Percy's seduction of his friend's wives shows a lack of loyalty within the group. Such is the level of corruption that the gentlemen even turn their cruel deeds upon each other.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne depicts the dangers of misleading friendship on an already corrupt mind. Helen makes it clear she holds her husband's friends largely responsible for his decline into drinking and debauchery: 'Those two detestable men Grimsby and Hattersley have destroyed all my labour against his love of wine. They encourage him daily to overstep the bounds of moderation, and, not unfrequently, to disgrace himself by positive excess.'¹⁴ This is partly Helen's early refusal to accept the levels of her husband's own responsibility in his disgrace, but the negative influence of his friends cannot be denied.

Anne makes this most apparent in her depiction of Lord Lowborough when he attempts to abstain from alcohol. Thomas L. Reed, Jr. notes the significant role of alcohol for men in upper class Victorian society: 'Men of refinement not only valued the company and the free-flowing hospitality of other "judges of good wine," they also expected to engage with them in the traditional social rites of drink.'¹⁵ Excessive drinking was an intrinsic part of socialising for Victorian men in the upper class. To get drunk with your friends, and to provide the means to enable this, was part of being a gentleman. Therefore, Lowborough rebels against long held traditions with his abstention. In the narrative, Lowborough proceeds to ostracise himself from his group of friends as he understands that his desire to reform will be made impossible if he retains their company. "No," exclaimed he, with harsh and startling emphasis; 'I will NOT go back to them! And I will never stay with them one moment longer than I think right, for you or any other tempter! But you

¹⁴ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 270.

¹⁵ Thomas L. Reed, Jr., *The Transforming Draught – Jekyll and Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Victorian Alcohol Debate* (London & North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p. 50.

needn't mind that – I shall never trouble you again, by intruding my company upon you so unseasonably.’¹⁶ This shows the inevitable isolation when the will of the community is betrayed. In this extract, Lowborough removes himself from his friends but as a result he is also ostracised by his wife, who has been seduced by Huntingdon.

Simply removing oneself from the negative influence of a community is not enough. Anne portrays a community that actively tries to corrupt Lowborough to retain him: ““By heaven and earth, you shall resemble us all!” cried Hattersley, starting up and rudely seizing him by the arm. “Hallo Huntingdon!” he shouted – “I’ve got him! Come, man, and help me! And d–n me body and soul if I don’t make him blind drunk before I let him go! He shall make up for all past delinquencies as sure as I’m a living soul!””¹⁷ The violence and abuse exhibited in this act is a stark warning of the dangers of the male homosocial space. Lowborough is seized and dragged back to his fraternity. Oulton observes that ‘the insistence on some kind of renunciation of friendship after marriage that is prevalent a theme in essays and advice manuals of the time itself suggests the potential for conflict if friends were not prepared to give each other up.’¹⁸ Recalling the characters in Branwell’s piece, Huntingdon and his friends refuse to relinquish their friendship after their marriages and as a result their group begins to rot. We see their refusal to accept the responsibilities of marriage through their desperation to retain Lowborough. The language of the scene shows the importance of allies in corruption. As with Branwell’s characters, if all your community is corrupt and debauched it appears to alleviate any sense of responsibility or remorse. To let Lowborough escape and redeem himself creates a stark example of their own failings. Beth E. Torgerson explains:

¹⁶ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 271.

¹⁷ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 276.

¹⁸ Oulton, p. 29.

As a symbol of social disease, alcoholism can articulate the resultant self-centeredness as individuals who are caught up within the hierarchies of power withdraw from being in healthy, reciprocal relationships with others and become increasingly self-alienated as they begin to lose touch with themselves. Alcoholism becomes Brontë's focus since it is the one illness best suited to symbolize the isolation and alienation that are experienced by all members living in society based on hierarchies of power.¹⁹

Here, Torgerson appears to suggest that alcoholism results in the isolation of the individual. However, alcohol is consistently the uniting factor which draws Huntingdon and his friends together. It is during his moments of sobriety with Helen that Huntingdon feels the most isolated. Furthermore, in the case of Lowborough it is his refusal to drink which results in seclusion. Lowborough pays the price for his resistance and is frequently depicted as sitting alone, even in separate rooms from the other guests. Here, Anne seems to propose that the price of rebelling against the shared ideals of a community is isolation, but isolation is the sacrifice worth paying to be free of corruption. However, Torgerson's argument suggests that Huntingdon and his friends are equally isolated. Their alcoholism segregates them from their wives and families. Their group is so diminished that they violently try to drag back anyone who attempts to leave. I would like to take Torgerson's point further and argue that in the friendship circle of their youth alcohol was the source of their connection. Alcohol ties the men to their youth; it does not allow them to progress to maturity and form stable relationships with their wives and children. The fraternal group and the married partnership cannot co-exist, and alcohol is the deciding factor.

¹⁹ Beth E. Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body – Disease, Desire, and the Constraints of Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 23.

Lowborough's decision to give up alcohol may initially isolate him whilst still in the company of his friends, but it enables him to build a stronger relationship with his children.

Male characters in Charlotte's novels are frequently found in the company of women rather than men, except for the erratic friendship between William and Hunsden. Rochester's main interactions are with Jane and at times Blanche; Paul Emanuel's are with Lucy or Madame Beck and his pupils; and Graham Bretton with Lucy, his mother and Polly. Charlotte's focus is on interactions between the genders, and the marriage plot. However, in *Shirley*, Charlotte's social commentary novel, she explores the homosocial spaces of both men and women. The novel opens with the meeting of the curates: 'While they sipped, they argued; not on politics, nor on philosophy, nor on literature – these topics were now as ever totally without interest for them – not even on theology, practical or doctrinal; but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves.'²⁰ There is a clear tone of judgement in the narrator's description of this fraternal gathering. 'They sipped, they argued' establishes the central connection of this male group – alcohol and hostility. The narrator critiques the quality of their conversation proposing more intellectual alternatives which should be adopted but are not. There is also an indication of undeserved self-importance in the observation: 'frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves.' Their group enables them to see significance in their community when really there is nothing but failure. There is a clear anticipation of what is expected of a community of educated men. All these expectations fail to be met by the curates' 'empty' interactions in Charlotte's unfavourable depiction of male friendship.

Aggression, as seen in Anne's work, also plays a crucial role in Charlotte's portrayal of male friendship:

²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 9.

But they were accustomed to such demonstrations; they well knew that the curates never dined or took tea together without a little exercise of the sort, and were quite easy as to consequences; knowing that these clerical quarrels were as harmless as they were noisy; that they resulted in nothing; and that, on whatever terms the curates might part to-night, they would be sure to meet the best friends in the world to-morrow morning.²¹

In this scene we see the class differences in the depiction of male friendship. Anne and Branwell's characters are upper class and, due to their wealth and social status, their drinking and debauchery are far more extreme. They have no work or responsibilities to hinder their interactions. The middle class do not have the means to emulate the debauchery of the rich. Charlotte depicts of the curates' antics as singled out and observed as 'demonstrations' by the local community, implying that the curates are acting in a farce. The curates try to replicate the antics of aristocratic men in their drinking and arguing but they are still not part of that class. They are observed as their role sets them apart within the local community. The isolation of the homosocial group of curates further depicts their unusual place within society. They are not equal to the mill owners or the mill workers; instead they stand apart, separate from the community around them. This in turn reinforces their connection with each other. It is unsurprising that the curates are each other's 'best friends in the world' as, without each other, they would be isolated. However, this in turn results in a group which is self-centred and subsequently dysfunctional. A curate's role requires an individual who is integral to the community, and spends his time working for the betterment of others. However, the curates in *Shirley* have isolated themselves to the extent that they are judged and ostracised by the community they are employed to help.

²¹ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 10.

Throughout the course of the narrative, exclusive communities result in misunderstanding and strife which can only be remedied when class boundaries are ignored, and the local community is embraced.

In their consideration of fraternal communities Branwell, Anne and Charlotte are united in their interpretation of them as problematic and damaging groups. Homosocial spaces are recurrently depicted as corrupt, and in a state of decline. Happiness in marriage cannot be achieved whilst the bonds of youth remain. However, in Charlotte's continued consideration of the marriage plot, she puts forward another alternative partnership: female partnership. The next section will explore Charlotte's representation of the significance of female friendship, and how it enables her female characters to develop emotionally. Furthermore, it also offers alternatives for women outside of the expectation of marriage.

5.3 'The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony, often chimed very sweetly together':²² Charlotte's consideration of sororities

In Charlotte's three novels which feature a female protagonist she explores and develops the notion of an exclusive space for women. Romance may consistently be the central theme in Charlotte's narratives, but she proposes that a community of women can assist in achieving happiness in marriage. Marcus draws attention to this overlooked and misunderstood aspect of the Victorian novel. She argues that:

The insistence that relationships between women must heroically oppose the marriage plot has led scholars to define any novel that ends in marriage as hostile to female friendship, rather than attend to the remarkably overlooked fact that almost

²² Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 212.

every Victorian novel that ends in marriage has first supplied its heroine with an intimate female friend.²³

Charlotte's novels do consistently follow the marriage plot, yet all her heroines also experience female friendship. Through her friendship with Helen Burns, Jane is emotionally awakened. Jane's first companion prepares her for the intense love and loss she experiences in her relationship with Rochester. Caroline and Shirley offer each other an alternative world devoid of men, yet still filled with affection and activity. Even the isolated Lucy is offered female friendship. However, in *Villette* Charlotte resists the literary trope of the marriage plot, and she also resists idealised notions of female friendship.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte uses the female community of Lowood as Jane's first opportunity to create her own relationships:

Helen Burns was not here; nothing sustained me; left to myself I abandoned myself, and my tears watered the boards. I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood: to make so many friends, to earn respect, and win affection [...] I was well received by my fellow-pupils; treated as an equal by those of my own age, and not molested by any; now, here I lay again crushed and trodden on; and could I ever rise more?²⁴

Jane's relationship with Helen Burns foreshadows her relationship with Rochester. We see Jane's tendency to attach all her affection to one individual, and the sheer impact that individual has on her. In this extract, Jane reveals that 'Helen Burns was not here; nothing

²³ Marcus, p. 76.

²⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 81.

sustained me' – Helen is Jane's only method of survival. It exhibits the intensity of female friendship and how it could easily replicate the emotions of lovers. To Jane, Helen is more than just a companion. She is how she survives, she 'sustained' her. The relationship also acts as a warning to Jane of her tendency to overly depend on others. Jane confides that 'left to myself I abandoned myself'. This inability to sustain oneself is dangerous and unhealthy. Jane must lose Helen in order to learn to depend on herself, rather than others. Were it not for Jane's early lessons in loss she may not have left Rochester, or she may not have survived the separation. Jane is more informed in her relationship with Rochester due to her practice relationship with Helen.

Charlotte portrays the importance of female friendship through placing it, alongside education, as Jane's central aim during her time at Lowood. Jane confides her desire to make 'so many friends'; like a starved child before a feast, Jane wishes to try as much as she can. Jane does make another friend in Mary Ann Wilson. Jane comments 'we got on swimmingly together, deriving much entertainment, if not much improvement, from our mutual intercourse.'²⁵ Charlotte shows the varying degrees of female friendship in the character of Mary Ann. Certainly Mary Ann brings Jane happiness and companionship, but she also confides 'Surely the Mary Ann Wilson I have mentioned was inferior to my first acquaintance'.²⁶ Precedence is given to Helen: she is the first friend Jane ever makes and that role thus glorifies her for the rest of the text, just as Rochester, as Jane's first love, is glorified. Mary Ann Wilson clearly foreshadows Jane's relationship with St John, both act as a substitute to provide for Jane's emotional needs when her first companion of choice is indisposed. As a child, Jane is made aware of the loneliness which can ensue without a caring companion due to the loss of her parents and uncle. As such, in her subsequent

²⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 93.

²⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 93.

relationships Jane can be seen trying to avoid this level of loss again. However, Jane's desperation for a companion results in the intense relationships she forms with Helen and Rochester. The legacy of Lowood can be seen throughout the narrative: upon leaving Lowood Jane creates further female communities with Adèle and Mrs Fairfax, then later with Diana and Mary – the surrogate versions of Helen and Mary Ann. Even after her marriage to Rochester, Jane does not forget her first companion and reveals that once she is a woman of wealth she provides a tomb stone for Helen's grave.

However, Jane's comment about not being 'molested' by the other girls exposes a negative aspect of this community. Jane may not be physically attacked by her fellow students, but this shows that the possibility is there. Jane also confides how girls steal food from each other, and thus makes evident the source of aggression within this female community – Brocklehurst. Charlotte notes the damage male influence can have on a community of women as Brocklehurst is the one who attempts to ostracise Jane from her fellow pupils. He creates aggression and competition between the young girls by withholding food, and Miss Temple stands alone as she tries to pacify the community. The influence of Brocklehurst foreshadows the inevitable failure of the Lowood community. Brocklehurst's control harnesses the relationships of the girls and women; his rules and limitations strive to create animosity rather than unanimity.

The relationship between Caroline and Shirley is Charlotte's most extensive exploration of female friendship. Shirley Foster notes that 'Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar look critically at their society's ideologies about marriage, and challenge the notion that singlehood inevitably means a wasted life for a woman.'²⁷ Foster proposes that together the two women pursue an alternative life without men or marriage. However, such

²⁷ Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 78.

a prospect for Caroline only becomes bearable with the introduction of Shirley. Before Caroline meets Shirley, she attempts to come to terms with an alternative life without marriage and is struck by grief. It is only through Caroline's friendship with Shirley that she is able to see this alternative as a satisfying option. Therefore, for Caroline it is not solely the prospect of female friendship which placates her, it is specifically Shirley and their relationship. Shirley steps in as a replacement lover for Caroline.

Anne Longmuir notes that 'Charlotte Brontë suggests for much of *Shirley* that male-female relationships are unsuccessful and doomed to failure. The book contains repeated warnings and diatribes against marriage.'²⁸ Charlotte complicates the marriage plot by offering the relationship of her two heroines as an alternative. In this relationship Shirley takes on the role of the lover, pursuing Caroline:

Shirley showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline's society, by frequently seeking it: and, indeed, if she had not sought it, she would not have had it; for Miss Helstone was slow to make fresh acquaintance. She was always held back by the idea that people could not want her, – that she could not amuse them; and a brilliant, happy, youthful creature, like the heiress of Fieldhead, seemed to her too completely independent of society so uninteresting as hers, ever to find it really welcome.²⁹

From the start of their relationship Shirley establishes how different she is to Robert in her pursuit of Caroline. The language used is active; she doesn't just express a desire to be Caroline's friend, but 'showed' it. She is described as 'frequently seeking' Caroline's company; this exhibits the power of Shirley's affection and her determination to achieve

²⁸ Anne Longmuir, 'Anne Lister and Lesbian Desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Brontë Studies*, 31.2 (2006), 145-155, (p. 149).

²⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 197.

her goal. Unlike Robert, whose visits are so rare, Shirley's visits are frequent and instigated by herself. Shirley offers the isolated Caroline the opportunity to feel wanted.

The narrator states the importance of Shirley's active pursuit of their friendship as 'Miss Helstone was slow to make fresh acquaintance'. Caroline's expectation of rejection is so high she resists new connections in order to protect herself. Caroline is haunted by the fear that 'people could not want her', an idea perpetuated by all her close relationships. Charlotte portrays the extent of Caroline's desolation in order to emphasise how important and necessary Shirley's friendship is. It also singles Shirley out as different; she is the only one to pursue a relationship with Caroline and to truly value her.

In the chapter entitled 'Shirley and Caroline', Charlotte quickly establishes their relationship and the alternative life it could offer. Shirley proposes that "We will go – you and I alone, Caroline – to that wood, early some fine summer morning, and spend a long day there. We can take pencils and sketch-books, and any interesting reading-book we like; and of course we shall take something to eat."³⁰ The language used immediately presents the two women as partners; in the two sentences Shirley uses 'we' four times. Every aspect involves their partnership: they will go to the wood, they will read books that they both like – Shirley immediately places Caroline's wishes alongside her own. The scene once again shows how Shirley pursues Caroline; she wants Caroline to be involved in her life. The inclusion of 'alone' also shows the importance of Caroline. Shirley is not just inviting Caroline because she wants company; if so others such as Mrs Pryor could also attend. Instead, Shirley makes sure to specify that it is only Caroline she wants, and their partnership is what she desires.

Oulton notes that: 'Caroline and Shirley initially seem to elevate their feeling for each other over the claims of male society, fantasising about a female community where

³⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 201.

there would be no distracting male presence.’³¹ Hidden away in the woods they can imagine and enact these fantasies. As the chapter progresses, Shirley takes on the role of a lover and makes her declaration of love to Caroline: ‘Caroline Helstone – if you really are what at present to me you seem – you and I will suit. I have never in my whole life been able to talk to a young lady as I have talked to you this morning. Kiss me – and good-bye.’³² Shirley calls Caroline by her full name, as one would in a ceremony, and she seals her vows with a kiss. Shirley’s condition that ‘if you really are what at present to me you seem’ may indicate a limit to her affections, but it also discloses Shirley’s attempt to restore Caroline’s sense of self-worth. Previously, Caroline is described as considering herself ‘uninteresting’, yet Shirley loves her and would not love her if she were anything but herself. Their love is also based on shared interests and intellect, their relationship develops through ‘talk’ rather than physical attraction or monetary value. Shirley is able to see in a day what eludes Robert for the majority of the narrative.

Shirley offers Caroline an alternative view of partnership where the love and friendship of two female friends can negate the need for a romantic male partner. Sally Shuttleworth notes the importance of the partnership between Shirley and Caroline. She proposes that:

Shirley shifts between female and masculine lover of Caroline. In her jealousy and anger at Robert’s greater hold on Caroline she invokes her masculine role [...]
Caroline and Shirley weave a fantasy of female communion focused on the feminized landscape of Nunnwood, where, in a deep dell, lie the ruins of a nunnery. In this Edenic world of female love, the fall, initiation into heterosexual love, would constitute a *loss* of knowledge [...]³³

³¹ Oulton, p. 75.

³² Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 207.

³³ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 212-213.

This ‘loss of knowledge’ Shuttleworth suggests appears to be Shirley and Caroline’s knowledge of each other. Once Louis Moore returns and both heroines pursue their heterosexual relationships their interaction with each other diminishes. It is only within the ‘Edenic’ Nunnwood they are able to enact this love affair with each other. However, in the use of Nunnwood, which includes the ruins of a nunnery, we see a warning from Charlotte regarding this relationship. The embodiment of a place dedicated to women, without the influence of men, lies in ruins. Charlotte seems to indicate that the relationship between the two women is destined to fail.

In her isolated world, Shirley offers Caroline an alternative community – a community of women. Community, however, is not necessarily what Caroline requires. Within the narrative, Caroline has her, albeit distant, uncle, her friendship with Shirley, as well as various friendships within the wider community and yet her life is still solitary. It is the revelation that Mrs Pryor is her mother which enables Caroline to turn back from the brink of death, yet even that is not enough. Caroline’s misery commences when her feelings for her cousin Robert are not reciprocated. Her mental health deteriorates as he continues to move further and further away from her. Mary-Catherine Harrison observes that ‘if a woman was not part of the marriage plot, she was viewed as superfluous.’³⁴ In order for Caroline to fulfil her role within the narrative she cannot be content with maternal and sisterly affection. Charlotte’s decision to adhere to the requirements of the marriage plot ultimately undermines the friendship of her heroines. As such, it is not a community of women which conquers isolation but a partner, specifically a romantic partner.

³⁴ Mary-Catherine Harrison, ‘Reading the Marriage Plot’, *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 6 (2014), 112-131, (p. 117).

Yet, Shirley is equally at fault as she abandons her partnership with Caroline for her own Moore brother, Louis.³⁵ Shuttleworth notes that ‘Both women are quick to imprison each other in the straitjacket of male expectation.’³⁶ Prior to Shirley’s wedding, Caroline confides to Robert: ‘What Louis will make of her, I cannot tell: for my part, if I were a gentleman, I think I would not dare undertake her.’³⁷ This can easily be read as betrayal, unfair judgement, and lack of understanding from Caroline. However, at this point of the narrative, Caroline is unaware that Robert is about to propose and thus Caroline once again faces being alone if her female partner marries. She conjectures that she could not ‘undertake her’ if she were a ‘gentleman’. But Caroline is not a gentleman. Rather, she implies that no man can handle Shirley, because it is only their partnership as two women which allows Shirley to thrive. By offering this negative image of Shirley to Louis’s brother she subtly attempts to hinder the marriage which has made her friend ‘melancholy or nonchalant’.³⁸ However, upon receiving a proposal herself Caroline is offered an alternative in which she and Shirley’s friendship can evolve into sisterhood. Mary-Jean Corbett notes the frequency of women ‘remaining within known or knowable first-family structures that may include sustained and sustaining relations with other women.’³⁹ Through her connection to Robert, her cousin and subsequent husband, Caroline ensures her relationship with Shirley. As such, through marriage Shirley and Caroline can still, to a degree, retain their sorority and assist each other through their respective marriages.

³⁵ For an extensive analysis of the failings of Shirley and Caroline’s friendship see Carolyn W. De La L. Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

³⁶ Shuttleworth, p. 214.

³⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 601.

³⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *SH*, p. 601

³⁹ Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. vii.

In her final novel, Charlotte continues to explore the estrangement of her heroines. Lucy is the most isolated of all Charlotte's protagonists. The isolation experienced by a single, working woman in the nineteenth century is one of the central themes of the novel. However, Lucy certainly is not alone for the entire narrative, and has numerous occasions to form friendships. Once again, we see Charlotte explore notions of female friendship, but her heroine cannot function within any form of partnership, even the sorority of female friendship.

Her begrudging friendship with Ginevra Fanshawe spans the majority of the narrative, yet Lucy is persistently abrasive to her friend and rejects their relationship. Early in their friendship Ginevra confides: 'I am far more at my ease with you, old lady – you, you dear crosspatch – who take me at my lowest, and know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character.'⁴⁰ In this moment Ginevra reveals how integral Lucy's friendship is to her life. Lucy is the only character who sees Ginevra for who she really is and in turn offers some redemption for her. Lucy's brutal honesty towards Ginevra is the only example of perspective offered to the young girl; Lucy is the only grounding influence in her life. Anna Krugovoy Silver observes that: 'Ginevra rejects Graham's tendency to idealise her, on the one hand, and restrain her, on the other. Though no rebel against Victorian gender discourse, she nevertheless finds those gender codes stifling.'⁴¹ There is a heartfelt appreciation in Ginevra's words as she explains that Lucy is the one to 'take me at my lowest, and know me'. Ginevra's other relationships are based on adoration and admiration of her, yet it is Lucy's ability to see the worst of Ginevra, to really 'know' her, which draws them together. Lucy offers Ginevra the opportunity to be

⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 100.

⁴¹ Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 115.

herself. Ginevra further portrays the significance of her relationship with Lucy by revealing that 'you and I' have decided on her character. Ginevra allows Lucy to perform a role in defining her identity, even if the aspects Lucy proposes are critical.

Undoubtedly, Ginevra is a flawed character and her friendship with Lucy is partly a result of her selfishness. Their interactions are consistently focused on Ginevra and how Lucy can help her, but her loyalty to Lucy should not be dismissed. Lucy instantly abandons her friendship with Ginevra to side with her spurned love Dr John/Graham who in turn spurns Lucy once Polly returns. All the while Ginevra seeks out Lucy as a confidante. Lucy is continually surprised at her continued relationship with Ginevra:

And then the bride sent him back to Madame Beck, and she took me to herself, and proceeded literally to suffocate me with her unrestrained spirits, her girlish, giddy, wild nonsense [...] I gave her only the crust and rind of my nature [...] I thought she would forget me now, but she did not. For many years, she kept up a capricious, fitful sort of correspondence.⁴²

Even when married Ginevra is still in need of Lucy. Lucy specifies how Ginevra specifically sent others away so she could have time alone with her. The use of 'suffocate' exhibits the overpowering nature of Ginevra and shows her excitement at being reunited with her friend. It also reveals Lucy's inability to cope with an affectionate friendship. Lucy is accustomed to her isolation, so any form of affection is unbearable for her. Lucy's cold reservation regarding Ginevra is not solely due to Ginevra's flaws but also to do with Lucy's fear. Similar to Caroline's reluctance to make friends, Lucy too endures repeated loss in her life, and thus resists forming new relationships to spare herself the pain. Her revelation that 'I gave her only the crust and rind of my nature' shows how Lucy will not

⁴² Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 526.

allow herself to care for Ginevra. The crust and rind is Lucy's hard outer exterior which keeps the threat of loss away, and thus this is where Ginevra will stay, never able to break through to Lucy's heart.

Despite Lucy's resistance, her relationship with Ginevra is one of her most enduring connections. Lucy's own feelings of inferiority are exposed when she says, 'I thought she would forget me now'. This shows the temporary nature with which Lucy views all relationships, and yet Ginevra continues to prove her wrong and to retain their friendship for 'many years'. The significance of this should not be overlooked; these 'many years' show that when Lucy fades into the background for Dr John, and Paul Emanuel does not return, the one who does remain is Ginevra. Pauline Nestor explains that 'At its simplest, singleness was seen as the state of something lacking, and female friendships were an appropriate solution for those who were losers in the demographic lottery... Thus, in the absence of men, it was agreed that women had each other, even if this meant second best'.⁴³ Ginevra allows Lucy to share in her life as a wife and mother, roles Lucy never fulfil herself and so, though partly from a place of selfishness, Ginevra shares her experiences with her friend. Nevertheless, Ginevra's friendship continues to be met by 'my natural cruel insensibility'.⁴⁴ Charlotte does not represent singleness as 'something lacking', and thus to have Lucy glory in Ginevra's happiness would be to propose that she has something Lucy lacks. As in her previous novels, Charlotte cannot equate female partnership with satisfaction, and thus Lucy disregards the affection of a lifelong friend in favour of distant men.

Ginevra is not the only female friend available to Lucy; the less flawed Paulina also attempts to be Lucy's friend and companion. Once they are reunited as adults Paulina

⁴³ Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities – Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 527.

enquires: “Do you care for me, Lucy?” “Yes, I do, Paulina.” “And I love you. I had an odd content in being with you even when I was a little troublesome, disobedient girl; it was charming to me then to lavish on you my naughtiness and whims. Now you are acceptable to me, and I like to talk with and trust you. So listen, Lucy.”⁴⁵ Paulina shows an awareness of Lucy’s character through the difference in the terms of affection. Paulina declares that she loves Lucy but knows such an intense expression of affection is not to be reciprocated. Thus, she alters the term of endearment to ‘care’ to receive the confirmation she desires.

Similarly to Ginevra, Paulina also finds comfort in the presence of Lucy and is able to be herself and ‘content’. However, there is a degree of judgement from Paulina in her revelation that ‘Now you are acceptable to me’. Once Paulina is a woman, and Graham can become a lover and husband rather than a friend, she can now accept the female friendship of Lucy. However, as marriage consistently undermines female friendships, the friendship between Lucy and Paulina can only be fleeting. Tayler explains that ‘The difference between Polly and Lucy – and it is all the difference in the world, by the time the two young women are grown – is that Polly actually does have a loving and protective father who may be counted on to reclaim, cherish, and guard her. Their very name is “Home.” Lucy, by contrast, has none of this’.⁴⁶ Paulina’s life is driven by the two central men who inhabit it – her father and Graham – and thus Lucy offers an alternative relationship, and it is only as an adult that Paulina becomes aware of this. As with Caroline and Shirley, a female friendship’s strength comes from the ability to ‘talk’ with each other, the ability to confide. However, this also reveals the selfish aspect behind Paulina’s pursuit of Lucy. As with Ginevra, Paulina desires a confidant and Lucy is available to fill the role, her reserved nature and isolated status makes her the ideal candidate.

⁴⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 413.

⁴⁶ Tayler, p. 231.

Lucy acknowledges her own flaws when it comes to her friendships:

While wandering in solitude, I would sometimes picture the present probable position of others, my acquaintance. [...] I almost wished to be covered in with earth and turf, deep out of their influence; for I could not live in their light, nor make them comrades, nor yield them affection.⁴⁷

The use of 'acquaintance', rather than friend or employer, emphasises the distance Lucy retains from those around her. Acquaintance implies only a slight knowledge of someone with no form of close connection, and this is how Lucy views all around her. Lucy's desire to be covered with 'earth and turf' to ensure she remains far away from the influence of those around her demonstrates not only a desire to hide but seems to indicate suicidal tendencies. Lucy appears to suggest she would rather be dead than risk being influenced by others.

Lucy may exhibit more affection for Paulina than she does for Ginevra, but she once again abandons the friendship due to her rejected romantic interest in Dr John/Graham. Marcus observes that 'Nothing may seem more natural to us than female rivalry over men, but nothing seemed more odd to Victorian readers'.⁴⁸ This may appear to be an unusual claim by Marcus as there are so many rivalries between women in Victorian fiction. However, what Marcus implies would seem odd to a Victorian reader is an active rivalry. Consistently, in the pursuit of love, the heroine steps back and resignedly allows the other to pursue her love. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane does not attempt to compete with Blanche even when she thinks Rochester intends to marry her. In *Shirley*, Caroline meekly steps aside when she thinks Robert is in love with her friend. As such, Lucy removes herself from all relationships as she cannot be in any without feeling a sense of inferiority and

⁴⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 175.

⁴⁸ Marcus, p. 106.

rejection. She would be surrounded by the man who could not love her, and the women who achieved what she could not.

The female friendships in Charlotte's novels offer her heroines an alternate reality without the influence of men. Furthermore, their relationship with their friends allows them to emotionally develop in preparation for their subsequent marriages. Even so, all the female friendships of Charlotte's heroines are undermined. Nina Auerbach observes that 'a female community threatens the integrity of power of the solitary woman'.⁴⁹ Consistently, it is the friendship of women which Lucy rejects, whereas in her relationship with men she is the one rejected. In Charlotte's attempt to represent the power of the solitary woman, she not only compromises the marriage plot but also the female community for her heroine to validate her independence and strength. However, it is only in Charlotte's final novel that she is able to overcome the marriage plot and allow her heroine to conclude the narrative alone. All the Brontë siblings may challenge the concepts of romantic love, but all were influenced by them. Romantic partnerships are so integral to the Brontës' novels that all other relationships are undermined by them. To conclude this chapter, I will show how each of the Brontë siblings use romantic relationships to demonstrate the dynamic power of partnerships as a more fluid alternative to the stricter family unit.

5.4 "I ask you to pass through life at my side – to be my second self, and best earthly companion":⁵⁰ Marriage and romantic partnerships

Throughout their novels the Brontës may appear to endorse the marriage plot and their narratives consistently focus on romantic partnerships, but this does not mean that their novels do not also frequently critique notions regarding marriage. Romantic partnerships

⁴⁹ Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women – An Idea in Fiction* (Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press & Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 19.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 293.

are explored by the siblings as early as their juvenilia, but the relationships they present are consistently problematic. Both Charlotte and Branwell's protagonists have multiple wives and mistresses, and Emily and Anne's Gondal poetry depict lovers who are consistently separated. As they matured as writers, the Brontës continued to challenge the marriage plot and idealised notions of romantic love as they did the idyllic depiction of family.

The preoccupation with romantic love and marriage was a central part of the Victorian's fixation with the family. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall explain: 'Family may have started at the biological core of parents and children, but the social concept of marriage was its heart and this strengthened over the period.'⁵¹ Therefore, the Brontës' portrayal of family inevitably becomes linked with marriages. Even the most isolated of the Brontë protagonists, Lucy, forms a romantic partnership throughout the course of the narrative. There is an overarching theme running through all the Brontë siblings' prose works of the intensity of a romantic partnership. Mintz explains, 'All looked to love as an answer to problems of moral weakness, religious perplexities, and an intense sense of personal isolation and despair.'⁵² However, this intensity also shows an element of dysfunctionality and damage.

We see the emotional damage Lucy receives at the hands of Dr John/Graham as he toys with her emotions as he transitions his affection from Ginevra to Paulina. He even blames her gender for the barrier in their relationship, confirming it is not a romantic connection he sees in her, "I believe if you had been a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl – my mother's god-son instead of her god-daughter – we should have been good friends: our opinions would have melted into each other."⁵³ This offering of desired brotherhood is insufficient for Lucy; unlike Jane in her relationship with St John, she is looking for more

⁵¹ Davidoff & Hall, p. 321.

⁵² Mintz, p. 125.

⁵³ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 349.

than a brother. She wants a partner and is left, 'Trying then to keep down the unreasonable pain which thrilled my heart, on thus being made to feel that while Graham could devote to others the most grave and earnest, the manliest interest, he had no more than light raillery for Lucy'.⁵⁴ In Charlotte's depiction of Lucy we can clearly see her critiquing the marriage plot. Referring to the end of *Villette*, Timothy L. Carens puts forward that 'evidence suggests that this unusual plot twist functions to punish the central character and readers as well for idolizing love and romance.'⁵⁵ Rather than 'punish', I believe Charlotte challenges her protagonist's, and her reader's, expectations. Marriage is portrayed as the final outcome of a romantic narrative strand, but in her final novel Charlotte questions this inevitability. Not only does Charlotte depict a romantic relationship which does not end in marriage, but the relationship is improved through separation. Charlotte questions the role of women within the novel by refusing to conclude with marriage.

The platonic sibling relationship proposed by Graham recalls the offer Rochester makes to Jane. It is not sufficient for Jane, and it is not sufficient for Lucy. Jane is eventually able to overcome the prospect of a platonic companion for Rochester, whereas Lucy has to find another who offers her love. Paul Emmanuel declares 'my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth.'⁵⁶ What Paul Emmanuel offers to Lucy is found in all the central Brontë partnerships – a relationship that comes before all others, to be each other's 'first on earth'; a relationship that eclipses even family ties. Lucy is never given the opportunity to give up her family for her husband, as she has no family to exchange for marital bliss. Jane, on the other hand, willingly sacrifices her new family to return to Rochester:

⁵⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 349.

⁵⁵ Timothy L. Carens, 'Breaking the idol of the marriage plot in *Yeast* and *Villette*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38 (2010), 337-353, (p. 339).

⁵⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *VL*, p. 541.

I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth [...] I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh [...] we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result.⁵⁷

There is so much emphasis on perfection in Jane's depiction of her marriage in the conclusion of the novel: 'entirely', 'best', 'fully', 'absolutely', 'perfect'. There is not just a desire to show their happiness but to show that they are the happiest. Jane and Rochester's union is what Mintz refers to as a 'True marriage': 'True marriage was to be found in mutual dependence and transcendence of self'.⁵⁸ It is not enough to show a contented marriage. Theirs must be the greatest love affair; no other relationship in the narrative can compete with Jane and Rochester. Such is the intensity and absolute completion of their relationship that there is not room for anyone else. Certainly, Jane mentions that they have had children, but they are notably absent in the portrait of her life with Rochester. It is Jane and Rochester's partnership, not their family, which is given emphasis at the end of the narrative. Charlotte continues to challenge the idealised notion of the family in her glorification of partnership. Rochester's need for Jane is so absolute, and her desire to be with him so unshakeable that the rest of the world is left outside the doors of Ferndean. As with Caroline, it is not a family that is required, but a partner.

⁵⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 519.

⁵⁸ Mintz, p. 126.

Jane's sacrifice is validated through the depiction of them not just as a loving couple but as the most perfect couple. Throughout the narrative Jane longs for a family, for love, to belong. As a child she informs Helen Burns that 'to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken'.⁵⁹ The reader is aware of the desperate extent Jane will go to for love. The narrative demonstrates her character progression by showing that she does have limits in her refusals of both Rochester and St John. Nevertheless, once Bertha Mason is removed the reader is once more aware of the degrees of suffering Jane will endure for love. In order that her life with the maimed Rochester is not seen as a representation of Jane breaking her arm, their happiness is given dramatic emphasis to show its worth. Colón observes that the isolated life Jane leads with Rochester reveals a positive progression in her characterisation:

This decision to have Jane choose a more isolated life as a way to be true to her desire for liberty shows an important shift in the theme. Community and love, which were so important to Jane at the beginning of the novel that she was willing to suffer physical pain to achieve them, have now become secondary to developing her soul and maintaining her own integrity.⁶⁰

Colón's suggestion that Jane's decision to sacrifice her family is not solely for Rochester and her subservience to him is problematic. Colón argues that it shows that Jane is finally able to place herself and her own desires above those of others. During her time with the Rivers family we see Jane compromise herself by accepting the role of teacher at St John's school, even though it means leading a lonely and isolated life. In addition, Jane seriously

⁵⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Colón, p. 22.

considers the life of a missionary with St John. Were it not for his determination that they could only fulfil these roles as husband and wife, Jane may have gone to India with him. Therefore, through her decision to return to Rochester and lead an idyllic life with him Jane finally makes herself the priority.

Alternatively, I believe Jane's claim that she is 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh' suggests that she may, symbolically, have broken herself for Rochester. Rochester's hand is amputated, and his flesh is burnt so for Jane to be his bone and flesh infers that she too is broken, and she has fulfilled her childhood claim. If Jane had stated that Rochester were bone of her bone then this would imply that Jane's body fixes his, but to be connected with Rochester's body is to be broken. Nevertheless, by breaking herself for Rochester her sacrifice allows them to bind together closer than ever. Jane reveals 'perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand.'⁶¹ Jane may have broken herself for love but in exchange she gains all the power in their relationship. Ben Griffin explains that in the nineteenth century 'The idea of unity referred not to a partnership of equals but to a couple united under one will – that of the husband.'⁶² Charlotte inverts this notion, and therefore in Jane and Rochester, through Rochester's broken body, they are able to create a new version of unity in which they unite under one will – Jane's will.

The notion of one flesh also implies a familial connection. To be of one bone and one flesh is to be family. This is reminiscent of the theme explored in chapter four regarding the need for an adoptive relationship to temper corruption in the blood. Jane mixes the purity of her blood with Rochester's to cleanse him of his sins. Jane gives up her family with her Rivers relations, but it is sacrificed for her true family with Rochester.

⁶¹ Charlotte Brontë, *JE*, p. 519.

⁶² Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain – Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 46.

Rochester encompasses a whole family in one body for Jane and, even with children, all they need to complete their family is each other. Charlotte hearkens back to Genesis by drawing emphasis to the notion of the couple as one flesh. She casts Jane and Rochester as the first couple, and Ferndean as their Eden. However, Charlotte performs a gendered reversal of the biblical narrative, as Rochester is the one to fall for corruption, whereas Jane is able to resist. Furthermore, the fall occurs outside of their Eden and so instead of being cast out they are allowed to retreat and recover.

Charlotte's portrait of marriage suggests that happiness is achieved through a family of partnership; Jane and Rochester find complete fulfilment in their role as partners. However, in Anne's second novel she chooses to challenge this kind of relationship and reveal the danger of such a restricted life. Anne opposes the idealised romance displayed in her sister's work and presents a realist alternative. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* explores the further implications of a life which revolves solely around one's spouse. Fully consumed in the world of her husband Helen Huntingdon is frequently isolated. With few friends of her own, she is either surrounded by her husband's friends or alone in the country while he is away in town:

Oh! when I think how fondly, how foolishly I have loved him, how madly I have trusted him, how constantly I have laboured, and studied, and prayed, and struggled for his advantage; and how cruelly he has trampled on my love, betrayed my trust, scorned my prayers and tears, and efforts for his preservation – crushed my hopes, destroyed my youth's best feelings, and doomed me to a life of hopeless misery – as far as man can do it – it is not enough to say that I no longer love my husband – I HATE him!⁶³

⁶³ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 308.

This is a stark contrast to Charlotte's presentation of the joys of married union. All of Helen's language concerning her love for Arthur – 'foolishly, 'madly' – derives from a mental failure on her part. She acknowledges how she was naïve and unknowledgeable when she married, as Jane was at her first wedding. The existence of Bertha prevents Jane from marrying until she matures and becomes aware of the reality of her situation. The law prevents Jane but there is no dramatic warning for Helen, only the reservations of her elderly guardian. Reminiscent of Rochester, Helen is fooled by her innocence when she marries, and she is punished, like Rochester, for the error of her youth.

Jane proclaims her marriage is 'free' and 'gay', whereas Helen confesses how she 'laboured' and 'struggled'. There is a theme of physicality in the language Helen uses to describe her marriage: 'trampled', 'crushed', 'destroyed'. Not only does this portray the extreme nature of Helen's feelings, but it also infers a physicality regarding the abuse she experiences in her marriage. Helen states it is her 'love', 'hope' and 'youth's best feelings' which receive this violent treatment, but they could also represent Helen's own body, which is the source of her hope and love, that is crushed and trampled by her husband.

In her study of familiar marriages, Talia Schaffer presents a challenge to the romanticised reading of marriage in nineteenth century fiction.⁶⁴ Schaffer argues that 'Familiar marriage shines a spotlight onto romantic marriage, revealing its shadows and dark spaces, the gaps that familiar marriage stretched to fill.'⁶⁵ Not all the marriages depicted in the Brontës' novels can be classified as familiar; Agnes and Mr Weston are the closest example, and Schaffer argues that Jane and Rochester's marriage is familiar due to

⁶⁴ Schaffer puts forward that '*Desire and Domestic Fiction* uses "the history of sexuality" to mean "the history of marriage," but these were actually profoundly different fields. Unsticking desire from marriage allows us to see a gap in which different kinds of reading can occur.' Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival – Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 22. Referring to Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction – A Political History of the Novel* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁶⁵ Schaffer, p. 3.

Rochester's disability.⁶⁶ However, in their consideration of first marriages they all question the reliability of romantic love. The first marriages of Cathy, Heathcliff, Helen and Rochester all end in misery. Even Jane faces the risk of a destructive first marriage. The Brontës critique the pressure to marry young when most are too naïve and inexperienced to choose well. This links back to Anne's criticism of society's treatment of women and their lack of knowledge. In both of Anne's novels, she exhibits the dangers of naïve girls marrying for uninformed reasons such as wealth and physical attraction. In addition, we see husbands immersed in corrupt masculinity which encourages violence and debauchery. With the combination of poorly-advised young men and women it is hardly surprising that in the Brontës' novels first marriages are consistently disastrous. Certainly, the Brontës do not appear to condone or celebrate divorce, conveniently killing off the undesired spouses of their protagonists. Even so, for their second marriages the Brontës promote the familiar marriage, a marriage which, as Schaffer explains, 'stresses trust, comradeship, [and] practical needs'.⁶⁷

The marriages which conclude *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* offer further similarities, and each sister seems to achieve happiness for their heroines through sacrifices within the final partnerships. The narrative punishes Rochester, and he is forced to sacrifice his physicality and his estate to pay for his sins. Jane in turn sacrifices her family to return and live her secluded life with Rochester. Gilbert is certainly a flawed character, though not to the extent of Huntingdon, but the reason his marriage to Helen succeeds, where Arthur's does not, is his willingness to make sacrifices for the partnership. Jill Matus argues that:

⁶⁶ Schaffer, pp. 32-35.

⁶⁷ Schaffer, p. 3.

The union of Helen and Gilbert resists the familiar romantic scenario of the rich and masterful hero, who is the means of raising the heroine to a social station her beauty deserves. Rather, Helen is superior to Gilbert in almost all respects. Indeed, she raises him, not only in rank, but in moral and spiritual status as well.⁶⁸

Gilbert gains so much from his partnership with Helen that the narrative presents his sacrifices as a price worth paying. It also shows Anne offering an alternative society in which the woman is able to offer wealth and rank to a partner. In addition, Helen is worldlier, in a reversal of Jane and Rochester's relationship. It is Helen who can inform and educate Gilbert.

Gilbert continues to make sacrifices for Helen as, in a similar fashion to Jane, he leaves his family to move far away with Helen. 'It took the whole eight months, and all Helen's kindness and goodness to boot, to overcome my mother's prejudices against my bride elect, and to reconcile her to the idea of my leaving Linden-Car and living so far away.'⁶⁹ Reminiscent of Jane's limited contact with Diana and Mary, Gilbert too refers to looking forward to his sisters' 'annual' visit. As is apparent in *Agnes Grey*, in order for a partnership to thrive it frequently requires the loss of the original family. However, Gilbert is one of the few male protagonists to willingly make the sacrifice for the partnership. In a radical step, Anne empowers her readers through the presentation of an alternative reality in which the woman has power and is no longer expected to relinquish her previous life and identity in order to get a husband.

Pike also offers another reason for Gilbert's redemption in the eyes of the reader: 'While critics debate the issue of Gilbert's reformation and whether he becomes a suitable

⁶⁸ Jill Matus, "Strong family likeness': *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*", in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. by Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 99-121, (p. 109).

⁶⁹ Anne Brontë, *TOWH*, p. 488.

mate for Helen, they omit one critical factor that makes Gilbert appealing to Helen – his paternal affection for her son.⁷⁰ Gilbert gives up his own family due to his devotion to Helen's. Gilbert steps away from his role as the pampered son to become a father. For Huntingdon, fatherhood was an inconvenience and also a catalyst to reveal the worst traits of his character, whereas it is the redemption of Gilbert. Helen shows that she has learnt from her previous mistakes in her decision to choose her second husband based on his capabilities as a father. With an extensive courtship and a decision based on more than naïve physical attraction, Anne offers the possibility for a successful marriage for Helen and Gilbert.

Emily was just as preoccupied with the impact of partnerships as her sisters. However, in her novel the focus is on the results of a partnership destroyed through death. At the conclusion of *Wuthering Heights*, nearly twenty years after the death of Cathy, Emily still portrays Heathcliff as grief stricken, if not more so, as the day she died:

what is not connected with her to me? and what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree – filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men, and women – my own features – mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!⁷¹

Cathy and Heathcliff's partnership is certainly the most dysfunctional – it is never consummated, they never marry – yet it has the most longevity. Heathcliff's devotion to

⁷⁰ Pike, p. 120.

⁷¹ Emily Brontë, *WH*, pp. 323-324.

Cathy almost spans his entire life. There may be a limited number of occasions in the narrative where the pair are together, but the legacy of their relationship is always present.

Cathy and Heathcliff stand as a warning to the reclusive marriage of Jane and Rochester, as Heathcliff represents the damaging results of losing a companion. When a whole world is built around a partnership it then becomes an enemy when the partner is gone. It is a relentless source of remembrance and grief, as Heathcliff states the world is a constant reminder 'that I have lost her!' Their relationship also presents a critique of the isolating nature of such an intense connection. Cathy's death occurs early in Vol. II, which means over half the narrative involves Heathcliff, though physically surrounded by characters, alone. The novel describes the extreme lengths Heathcliff goes to because of his grief: dashing his head against a tree until he bleeds, digging up Cathy's grave, and finally starving himself to death. Williams surmises:

Heathcliff, near the end, is still trying to live where the reality had been, but now in a terrible isolation because of the denial [...] What he feels is so ordinary that we need no special terms for it. It is that finding of reality in the being of another which is the necessary human identity: the identity of the human beyond the creature; the identity of relationship out of which all life comes.⁷²

Williams explains the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff as a desire in another, rather than a desire for another. A desire *in* another is 'A necessary relationship, in which a self, a world, is at once found and confirmed'.⁷³ Williams proposes that Heathcliff's entire identity is formed and exists through his relationship with Cathy. This reading of Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship is also supported by Emma Mason in her consideration of

⁷² Raymond Williams, *The English Novel – From Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 68.

⁷³ Williams, p. 71.

Wuthering Heights alongside Methodism. In her exploration of the intense emotions associated with Wesleyan Methodism, Mason describes ‘an overdose of divine inspiration wherein the individual was overcome by spiritual feeling and seen to be ‘in God.’⁷⁴ For Heathcliff, the figure of worship is Cathy. As Williams states ‘all life comes’ from his relationship with Cathy, and so without her he is no longer living, merely existing. His life from the moment of her death is an extended episode in limbo in which the world tortures Heathcliff and he tortures the world. In the case of Cathy and Heathcliff, to be without your partner is to cease to be – to live life as a ghost.

Throughout the Brontës’ portrayal of partnerships there is a theme of sacrifice; the sacrifice of one’s family for the sake of a partner. However, Cathy sacrifices her family for her marriage to Linton, not for Heathcliff. Cathy sees no way to save the Earnshaw family, due to the intense animosity between Heathcliff and Hindley, so she intends to sacrifice herself for Heathcliff. However, she inadvertently sacrifices Heathcliff instead. Certainly, Cathy’s decision to marry Edgar can be seen as a selfish one, stemming from a desire for luxury whilst still attempting to retain her relationship with Heathcliff. However, the narrative undermines this notion through the manner in which Cathy’s revelation develops. Edgar’s wealth is given as one of her earliest reasons and is quickly dismissed. If Heathcliff’s lack of wealth was the real reason Cathy chooses not to marry him then Heathcliff leaving at this revelation would lose its dramatic effect. It is what Heathcliff does not hear – her desire to help him, her love for him – which is the true reason for her choice, the sacrifice he remains tragically unaware of.

Upon Heathcliff’s return it is Cathy’s inability to sacrifice her Linton family, due to her pregnancy, which prevents her reunion with Heathcliff and eventually her demise. By

⁷⁴ Emma Mason, ‘The Key to the Brontës?: Methodism and *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Biblical Religion and the Novel, 1700-2000*, ed. by Mark Knight and Thomas Woodman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 69-77, (p. 72). See also: Emma Mason, ‘“Some god of wild enthusiast’s dreams”: Emily Brontë’s Religious Enthusiasm’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.1 (2003), 263-277.

the end of the narrative, Heathcliff could arguably find happiness with his adopted family, the reborn Earnshaw family, with himself in the role of Mr Earnshaw. Yet, as Davies notes ‘the novel with profound artfulness never denies that either the dead may walk with us or we sleep with them, in the fullest reunion.’⁷⁵ Therefore, in keeping with the Brontës’ trope, Heathcliff sacrifices the family, and his life, for the sake of his partnership with Cathy.

5.5 Conclusion

The Brontës’ decision to focus on the role of partnership throughout their novels shows the integral nature the dynamic had in their own community. In their creative imaginings of partnerships, the Brontës show how they used their writing to interrogate issues from within their community. It also indicates their awareness of the literary market, and the society they were a part of. Nevertheless, each chooses to explore and critique the role of marriage. In *Wuthering Heights* Emily certainly develops an intense romantic partnership, but by marrying Cathy and Heathcliff to other characters she raises the issue of faults within the expectations of marriage. Cathy’s lack of education, and the precedence given to money, result in her permanent separation from Heathcliff. In her novel, Emily returns to her preoccupation with transcendence which she explores in her poetry. Unable to consider divorce, Emily suggests that the only time true love is allowed to exist is in death.

Similarly to her sister, Anne also critiques marriage, particularly through the treatment of young women. Through Helen, Anne establishes the risks of marriage, and how frequently naïve girls make uninformed decisions which result in lives overshadowed by misery. Anne’s work still supports the institution of marriage, but she exhibits the importance of consideration with regard to partners. She chooses not to glorify the

⁷⁵ Davies, *Emily Brontë – Key Women Writers*, p. 64.

romance of marriage, and instead advocates the happiness that can be found when character is taken into consideration.

Branwell responds to the toxic masculinity also explored by Anne. In his depiction of a fraternal community, he exhibits the damage and corruption which emerge when men refuse to mature and progress and remain locked in an outgrown adolescence. In Branwell's prose piece, fraternal love results in the demise of marital bliss as the two relationships are unable to co-exist. In his poetry, Branwell bewails the loss of innocence and the relationships of youth, but here he considers the implications of the refusal to relinquish old bonds for the sake of future relationships. In Branwell's work, to remain bound to childhood communities is to sacrifice your future.

Throughout the course of her novels Charlotte develops her critique of marriage. Certainly, the relationship of Jane and Rochester is glorified, but this is only after Rochester has gained experience from his first marriage. The marriages in *The Professor* and *Shirley* are problematic, and in *Villette* Charlotte rebels against the marriage plot leaving her heroine unmarried. Significantly, Charlotte offers an alternative to marriage in her depiction of female friendships yet, in the failure of these friendships she reveals her reservations. Unable to achieve resolution in her consideration of relationships, Charlotte subsequently promotes the importance of the individual in her final novel.

Conclusions

In 1857 Gaskell first portrayed the scene of the three Brontë sisters pacing around their dining room table as they shared their work. Over one hundred and fifty years later biographers are still intrigued by this tableau. Despite Charlotte's protestations to Gaskell that she rarely heeded her sisters' advice, the image became firmly imbedded in the mythology of the Brontë family. That the Brontë siblings did write together is irrefutable but the complexity of this family of writers has, hitherto, not received enough critical consideration. This thesis has shown that by treating the Brontës' juvenilia, diaries, correspondence and essays, as well as their poetry and novels, analytically, rather than solely biographically, we are able to broaden our understanding of the Brontës as a writing family. Through approaching these sources critically, I have shown how the Brontës used their writing to address their shifting attitudes towards community, family, partnership and isolation.

This study encourages us to rethink the role of biography. When Revd Patrick Brontë initially approached Gaskell to write a biography of Charlotte he requested, 'If, therefore, you will be so kind, as to publish a long or short account of her life and works'.¹ Immediately, there was a request to consider Charlotte's works alongside her life which Gaskell does not do. This thesis re-addresses the balance between biography and literary analysis in our consideration of the Brontës. It reveals that it is in creative expression that we find similarities and differences are given nuance that does not occlude individual creative journeys through viewing the Brontës as a collective. Through a combination of analytical and biographical research we are better able to access and comprehend our subjects. By critically exploring the Brontës' juvenilia and life writing I was able to

¹ Reverend Patrick Brontë to Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, '16 June 1855', in *The Letters of the Reverend Patrick Brontë*, pp. 232-233, (p.232).

identify the significance of partnership, and their conflicted attitudes towards family and community which they imaginatively confront in their poetry and novels.

Consistently in studies of collaborative relationships a biographical, rather than analytical, approach is adopted, as can be seen in the works of Farrell, John-Steiner and in the collection of essays in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron's *Significant Others – Creative & Intimate Partnership*.² It is not enough to acknowledge that these groups existed and theorise how they functioned; collaborative theory needs to be taken further to understand the full effect of communal work. This study has displayed how critical exploration of the output produced by members of a community allow us to advance our understanding of how collaboration informs their work. It reveals how collaboration can inform multiple aspects of the subject's life and act as a stimulus for reflection in their group and independent projects.

The Brontës' consideration of family and partnership challenge interpretations of the nineteenth century family. Charlotte's work may propagate the importance of biological ties within a family unit, identified by Williams, but Emily, Anne and Branwell's works bring the significance of blood relations into question as we have seen in chapter four. Rather than the nuclear family, precedence is given to the role of surrogate parents, adopted children and second marriages. Through the deliberation of the portrayal of the family in Victorian literature this thesis contributes to the dialogue of Graver and West in their investigations into Eliot and Dickens. These studies complicate the idyll propagated by the Victorians and highlights the dysfunctionalities which were present in families during the period.

² *Significant Others – Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1993).

This thesis joins with the research of Taylor and Mercer to address the absence of textual analysis regarding creative families during the nineteenth century. The three studies each approach different forms of relationships varying from siblings, married couples and offspring. They unite in propagating the need for further critical study of these works through the construct of collaboration. It is through the analysis of the writing which emerges from within these families that we are able to gain a more detailed understanding of the contributors' position within a creative family. Through a consideration of the Brontës, Shelleys, Coleridges, and their literary output, we are offered a more complex presentation of collaborative families.

In chapters one, two and five we have seen the significance of the Brontës' partnerships. My research encourages subsequent scholarship to acknowledge the frequently overlooked work of Anne and Branwell. Through my consideration of their community this thesis has analysed numerous pieces of writing from Anne and Branwell which have not been explored critically. This thesis has highlighted the individuality of each Brontë sibling as they emerge forth from their community. An acceptance of this is essential to our further understanding of the literary output of Anne and Branwell. By acknowledging that their work differs from that of their siblings enables us to appreciate it for its own merits.

The critical legacy of the Brontës, particularly Charlotte and Emily, is vast. However, predominantly this criticism focuses on their novels to the detriment of their other literary output. The early chapters of this thesis drew attention to the literary value of materials such as their diaries, letters, essays and juvenilia and how they can assist in aiding our understanding of the Brontës as a family of writers. This work joins with recent contributions from Marsden, Butcher and Harty in highlighting this absence in Brontë scholarship. The Brontës approached all aspects of writing from a creative perspective. As

such, these sources perform a valuable role in enhancing our understanding of the siblings' literary apprenticeship. Furthermore, these texts speak to a wider consideration of re-evaluating the value of epistolary, diaristic, and juvenile writing in aiding our understanding of successful writers. This study has shown that these resources are not only valuable for biographical excavation, but also offer many examples of the Brontës' imaginative exploration of issues which appear in their later works.

London has raised the gendered issues which problematise the consideration of female collaboration. London explains that 'Even in writing partnerships where both the man and the woman have an authorial identity, the imputation of collaboration turns out to be more compromising for women.'³ I have moved beyond these issues and shown that, even in the mixed collaborative partnership of Charlotte and Branwell, the work of all contributors can be considered equally. In my investigation into the Brontës' writing community I have shown how it is not necessary to consider the Brontës separately in order to promote their individuality. Throughout the thesis, I have highlighted the role of collaboration whilst simultaneously drawing attention to each sibling's pursuit of independence from their group. It is not necessary to undervalue the role of collaboration, as can be seen in the work of Ratchford and Bock, in order to promote the success of the individual. Through a direct comparison of the Brontës' writing their independent voices are apparent. To consider their writing community is not to deny their uniqueness but to identify it and, through critical analysis, understand it in relation to the collaborative group as a whole.

³ London, p. 20.

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