THE CHANGING PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE BRONTË, CHARLOTTE BRONTË, GEORGE ELIOT AND D.H. LAWRENCE

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ABSTRACT

THE CHANGING PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE BRONTË, CHARLOTTE BRONTË, GEORGE ELIOT AND D.H. LAWRENCE

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This thesis analyses the women characters in four novels, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Shirley, The Mill on the Floss* and *Sons and Lovers*. The first chapter gives information on the historical background of the Victorian period and early 20th century in England in which the novels were written, on the biography of the authors of the novels and clarifies the aim and methodology of the study. The following chapters analyse the women charaters - Helen Huntingdon, Shirley Keeldar, Maggie Tulliver and Clara Dawes - selected for study according to how far they went against social norms, perceptions about women and society's morals, and provide a general evaluation of each character. The conclusion presents a comparison of the four women characters' attitudes, and asserts that each of them display a controversial attitude in at least one of these areas, considering the period in which the novels were written.

Keywords: women, character, Victorian, society, controversial

ÖZ

ANNE BRONTË, CHARLOTTE BRONTË, GEORGE ELIOT VE D.H. LAWRENCE'IN ROMANLARINDA KADINLARIN DEĞİŞEN GÖRÜNÜMÜ

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Bu tez *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Shirley, The Mill on the Floss* ve *Sons and Lovers* romanlarındaki kadın karakterleri incelemektedir. İlk bölüm romanların yazıldığı İngiltere'deki Viktorya dönemi ve 20. yüzyıl başlangıcının tarihsel arkaplanı ve romanların biyografileri konusunda bilgi vermekte ve tezin amacını ve metodunu belitrmektedir. Bunu takip eden bölümler bu çalışma için seçilen kadın karakterleri – Helen Huntingdon, Shirley Keeldar, Maggie Tulliver and Clara Dawes'u – toplumun standartlarına, kadınlar hakkındaki genel görüşlere ve toplumun ahlak kurallarına ne derece karşı geldiklerini temel alarak inceler ve her karakterin genel bir değerlendirmesini verir. Sonuç bölümü ise bu dört karakterin tavırlarının genel bir karşılaştırmasını sunar ve romanların yazıldıkları dönem de göz önüne alınırsa her birinin bu alanlardan en az birinde aykırı bir tutum sergilediğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: kadın, karakter, Viktorya dönemi, toplum, aykırı

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Through the ages, many original and remarkable female characters have figured in English literature, in works written by men and women alike: from the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's medieval *Canterbury Tales,* Shakespeare's Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Daniel Defoe's adventuress Moll Flanders and Eliza Haywood's *Idalia* to Jane Austen's heroines – Emma Woodhouse, the Bennett sisters to name a few. This was the case in the 19th century as well. Indeed, it can be said that the number of novels in which women were the main characters and their troubles and concerns a major part of the plot increased significantly in the Victorian era.

The aim of this thesis is to track the changes in the portrayal of women and the attitudes of women characters through the 19th into the 20th century by evaluating and comparing the depictions of four women characters - Helen Huntingdon, Shirley Keeldar, Maggie Tulliver and Clara Dawes - in four different novels from this period - *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë, *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë, *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence – according to the degree to which they went against existing social norms, perceptions about women and morals.

These four particular novels were chosen for this study because every one of them features a woman character that is controversial in one way or another in her thoughts, actions or both. Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Clara Dawes in *Sons and Lovers behave* in a way that goes against all established beliefs in society regarding how a married woman should act – they leave their husbands. Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and Shirley Keeldar in *Shirley* also display an independence of thought and behaviour that does not conform to the norms of the age they live in. Thus these novels are set apart from other novels of the Victorian age which dealt with more conventional women and did not specifically treat women's status in society as an important issue. Accordingly, these

four works provide a greater wealth of material for investigating how the attitudes and outlook on life of women characters in novels varied over a period of time. To adequately represent this period covered, the first two novels were chosen from the first half of the 19th century, the third from the second half, and the last was selected from the beginning of the 20th century. Also, one reason why *Sons and Lovers* was included was to prevent any possible one-sidedness or bias that might have arisen if all the works chosen had been authored exclusively by women.

In order to put these novels in a social and historical context, a full understanding of the cultural and social background which formed their authors' intellectual make-up is necessary. So the traits of Victorian English society and women's place in it must be examined for a grounded and more informed analysis of the novels in question.

The Victorian age, beginning in 1837 and lasting until 1901, was a period of massive changes for England, both socially and economically. During this period, the economy grew at a great rate due to the onset of industrialisation; more and more people migrated to the cities for employment and population also increased considerably. Women, as well as men of the working class were employed in factories as workforce, but under miserable conditions and for too little pay. Class distinctions also became more pronounced, and were dependent on the level of a person's income and her/his degree of nobility, if any. The middle class, which consisted mainly of merchants and businesspeople and their families, earned well and gained ascendancy in society. The prosperity of business ventures, which was the reason for the economic growth in the country, also led to a distinction in social spheres of influence. As it was men who dealt with monetary matters and anything to do with work, the public sphere was considered as their sphere of influence. The women, meanwhile, were expected to reign supreme in the house and in all domestic matters, so theirs was the private sphere.

Women had been and continued to be second-class citizens during this period. Even though Mary Wollstonecraft had written the groundbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, stating that women were unable to gain a prominent position in society because their upbringing did not allow them, nothing much had changed. Women did not have the right to vote, and married women virtually did not

exist in legal terms. Under British Common Law, they could not own property, have custody of their own children, make a will or seek for legal separation from their husbands except through some male relative like a brother or father. Before law married women were considered only an extension of their husbands. This comment of Sir William Blackstone in 1760 summarizes their legal condition and the precept known as *coverture*:

> By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is the very being or legal existence of the women is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything: and is therefore called in our law-french a feme covert. (qtd in Ingham, *Brontës* 54)

Women's position in the family and in the home was delineated by the ideas mentioned above, that she had authority over only domestic matters and doing household duties was what was expected of her. The notion of the "womanly woman" prevalent at this time indicated a woman who excelled at all tasks to be performed in the household such as cooking, sewing, baking, cleaning etc. She was expected to be a sort of "angel in the house", supply all the domestic needs of the men in the family and also not to protest or assert herself but always be self-effacing and mild-mannered. Any woman not fitting this description and code of behaviour, nor necessarily depending on whether she did anything morally objectionable or not, would at best be considered "unwomanly" or "unladylike", at worst, depending on how grave her mistake was, "tainted" or "fallen". What were termed as "conduct books", expounding at length on how women should conduct themselves in society, and how to be the perfect housewife - cook the best meals, manage the household with the highest efficiency and so on – became widely circulated. One woman writer of such manuals was Sarah Stickney Ellis and some of the titles of her numerous books were: *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits, The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations, The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility.*

This limiting view of women that was all but universally adopted, not only by men but by the large majority of women as well -as is shown by the authorship of

the conduct books listed above - in time led to certain developments. Activism on the part of women was only in its beginning stages during most of the Victorian era - Marian Reid's work *A Plea For Women* written in 1843 and the formation of a Female Political Union were only the beginnings of a trend to take action to have better rights. Men also took initiative about the issue, for example John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women* and supported a women's petition which he submitted to the British parliament. It was only in 1882 that married women truly acquired the right to own their own property during marriage with the Married Women's Property Act. Feminism as an ideology was as yet unnamed but gaining momentum throughout the century. This being the case, realistic representations of women's underprivileged situation in society and their response to it began to appear in novels, mostly written by women albeit sometimes under pseudonyms. Some of these works also formed a platform for the voicing of ideas about the ideal equality of men and women and the existing inequality in society. After the turn of the century, the suffragette movement –demanding women's right to vote- made itself felt, and women became much more active in the political arena, organizing themselves, launching protests and trying to make their voice heard in general. Women were finally given the right to vote in1918 with the Representation of the People Act.

As authors are naturally affected by the circumstances and the era in which they live, and often draw from their own experiences while writing and creating characters, the brief biographies of the four novelists is also pertinent information for this study.

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 and her youngest sister Anne Brontë was born in 1820 in Thornton, Yorkshire. They were the children of Maria Branwell Brontë and Patrick Brontë, a clergyman with Irish roots. They spent most of their life in Haworth, of which their father was curate. They lost their mother and two eldest sisters at an early age. Left to their own devices in a solitary environment, the children were inspired by the books they read and the tin soldiers given to Branwell, the only son of the family. They created fantasy worlds, which formed the starting-point of their future ventures into fiction. Anne teamed up with Emily and developed the idea of a country called Gondal. Charlotte and Branwell's imaginary country was

called Angria. After attending boarding school, both Charlotte and Anne worked as governesses at different times, an experience they later drew on in their novels. Branwell joined Anne as tutor while she was working for the Robinson family, but his stay there lasted only two years as he was accused of having an affair with the wife of his employer and scandal forced him to leave. From then until his death in 1848 he drank heavily and took opium, becoming an addict.

With the intentions of acquiring enough qualifications to start a school of their own, in 1843 Charlotte and her sister Emily went to Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. However, when they returned, their attempts to find pupils for their own school in the Parsonage failed. In 1846, after Charlotte's discovery of her sisters' poems, a volume consisting of poems by the three sisters was published under pseudonyms which they continued to use later on, Anne's was Acton Bell and Charlotte's Currer Bell. *Agnes Grey*, Anne's first novel,was published in 1847. She wrote another novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which was published in June 1848. Charlotte's first novel on the other hand, *The Professor*, was rejected by the publishers. Her next novel *Jane Eyre* was better received and became a success. A confusion, caused by her sister Anne's publisher claiming that her next novel – *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* - was written by the author of all the 'Bell' novels, forced both to reveal their identity. Charlotte went to London with Anne to prove that they were two separate persons, and the publisher was astonished to find that the 'Bells', who he thought to be a single person and a man at that, were in fact two demure country ladies.

By the end of 1848 Anne's brother and her sister Emily had both died of tuberculosis and she herself had contracted the disease. She died in May 1849 in Scarborough. Charlotte started writing her third novel, *Shirley,* in 1847, but during its writing she lost her brother and her sisters, one after the other. The novel was finally published in 1849. Her last novel, published in 1853, was *Vilette*. Having refused three offers of marriage earlier, in 1854 she consented to marry her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls; but the marriage did not last long as she died in 1855 from complications caused by pregnancy. (Ingham *Brontës*)

Marian Evans, who later took the pen name George Eliot, was born in 1819 in Warwickshire, near Nuneaton. She grew up on a farm, in companionship with her brother Isaac, towards whom she formed a strong attachment. She went to various

boarding schools and acquired a good educational grounding in literature and religion. On her father's retirement, she moved with him to Coventry, where she met Charles and Caroline Bray, both progressive intellectuals. She also educated herself by reading widely and studying Italian and German.

When her father died in 1849, she moved to London, where she met a number of intellectuals, among them Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, and G. H. Lewes, novelist, drama critic and scientist. Lewes was married but estranged from his wife, who already had a relationship with another man. They fell in love and decided to set up home together, as they could not marry. This incited wide public outrage and estranged her from her brother Isaac, who never saw her again. Their relationship lasted until Lewes died in 1878. She wrote her first stories in 1858, collected under the title *Scenes of Clerical Life*. *Adam Bede* was published in 1859, and *The Mill on The Floss* in 1860. She married an old friend, John Cross, a few moths before her death in December1880. (Bellringer *George Eliot*)

The author of *Sons and Lovers*, David Herbert Lawrence, was born in 1885 in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. He was the son of a miner and the fourth of five children. He studied at Beauvale Board School and Nottingham High School. He then received training at Nottingham University College to become an elementary schoolteacher. He started working in Croydon as a teacher in 1908, where he witnessed protests by suffragettes first hand. Due to serious illness, he had to give up the profession in 1911. He published his first novel, *The White Peacock*, in 1911. The next year, he eloped with Frieda Weekley to Germany. His second novel, *Sons and Lovers*, was published in 1913. He married Frieda Weekley in 1914. Of the two novels he wrote next, *The Rainbow* was suppressed, and *Women in Love* had to wait three years for a publisher. In the period following the First World War, he and Frieda

mainly lived abroad, in Mexico, Australia, Sri Lanka and Sicily. They came back to Europe in 1925. The last novel he wrote, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was published in 1928. This novel was banned in England and America. He died in France in 1930. (Dix *D. H. Lawrence and Women*)

In this thesis, three specific factors will be taken into consideration in each chapter to evaluate how controversial or radical the women characters' attitudes

are. The first is the social norms -the unwritten but universally accepted conventions about behaviour and speech, as well as the actual laws – regarding women. For this study, these will be taken as the conventions that define society's opinions as to what a woman should or should not do, how she ought to speak and act in certain public situations. Second is the existing perceptions about women in society which colour people's expectations about what they are capable of, the way they think, their tendencies – about how they are conceived of in general. The final factor is morals, taken here as the religious and ethical rules that are considered by society to be binding for individuals.

The basis of what is considered appropriate or acceptable in terms of the society's perceptions about women, morals and social norms will be established through direct quotes from the characters in the novels, conclusions drawn from their words and actions or where necessary with reference to the existing laws of the period. It is safe to assume that as members of the society depicted in the novels, the behaviour of the characters deemed respectable or decent, regardless of their class, are reflective of the general public, as are the laws governing their lives. Each chapter will end with an evaluation of the woman character in general, which will include a comparison between her and the other women portrayed in the novel.

CHAPTER II

HELEN HUNTINGDON

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Anne Brontë's second and last novel, deals with the subject of a young woman running away from her abusive husband. The novel starts with the arrival of a mysterious and reclusive widow, Mrs. Graham, as a tenant at Wildfell Hall. The story is told by Gilbert Markham, a young farmer who lives nearby with his family. The neighbourhood is intrigued by this young woman about whom they know nothing and who has chosen to live in such a remote house with only a woman servant and her little son. Through occasional meetings in social gatherings which she does not usually attend and visits to her home, Gilbert falls in love with her. However, before long rumours start circulating in the small community. They are to the effect that Mr. Lawrence, a local gentleman and the owner of Wildfell Hall, is her lover, as he has been seen on the road to the Hall a few times and is thought to be paying visits there. When Gilbert sees and hears the two of them together one evening, he believes the rumours. He eventually confronts Helen with what he has seen. In answer to his accusations, she gives him a diary, asking him to tell no one about the contents.

The diary forms the bulk of the rest of the novel and throws light on Helen's recent history from her own perspective. Starting six years earlier, it tells the story of her falling in love with Arthur Huntingdon, a roguish young man who is older than herself, her marriage with him and the eventual disintegration of that marriage. Having been infatuated by his good looks and charming manners, and believing she can put right any wrongs that might exist in his nature, she only finds out Arthur Huntingdon's true character after marrying him. He is a dissipated, abusive and reckless man. Even the birth of their son, also named Arthur, fails to bring about any

change in his character. He shocks her by his lack of morals, mistreats her, begins to corrupt the little boy and even invites his mistress into their house as governess. Afraid of his permanently corrupting young Arthur, and unable to bear the insult of living under the same roof with her husband's mistress, she runs away from home. She fails on her first attempt, but succeeds the second time and with her brother Frederick Lawrence's help takes up residence in Wildfell Hall- an old, unused house that belongs to her family.

On reading all this, Gilbert is pleased to see that the rumours are totally false and that Mr. Lawrence is in fact her brother. But when they meet again it is only to part, Helen tells him that she is moving away and that they cannot see each other again, as she is still married. Later, Gilbert learns that she has returned to her husband because he is seriously ill. Eventually Huntingdon dies, largely due to alcoholism. After a few months, Gilbert goes to visit Helen at her aunt's home, which has been left to her as well as Glassdale Manor. Gilbert is hesitant in this encounter because of Helen's new status, but Helen takes the first step and they finally get married.

It is worth noting that the character of Arthur Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was probably inspired by Anne Brontë's brother Branwell, who caused a scandal in the household where he worked as a private tutor when he was accused of conducting an affair with his employer's wife, and afterwards became increasingly addicted to alcohol and opium.

II. I SOCIAL NORMS

The conduct and utterances of the people in the small community Helen lives in after her escape, as well as that of the individuals belonging to a higher class, whom she is acquainted with before that, supply plenty of information about what they believe women should or should not do. In Helen's case, the existing laws of England are also relevant on this subject.

The subject of what is thought proper for a woman to consider before deciding to get married, and the accepted correct behaviour for women as regards romance and suitors is one of the topics the novel touches upon. The main reference points

for this issue are Helen's conversations with her aunt and the attitude of the elderly gentleman who proposes to her. According to Mrs. Maxwell, principle, good sense, respectability and moderate wealth (111) are the necessary attributes of a good husband. And in her opinion a girl should not wish to marry before she is asked, she tells her niece that “a girl's affections should never be won unsought” (110). Before Mr. Boarham makes his proposal to Helen, he first discusses the matter with and obtains permission from her uncle, who is her legal guardian. When she refuses him, he has difficulty accepting her answer because her aunt approves of him, and also because he clearly thinks that so long as a man is content with his choice of a wife, the woman should not have any objections, he asks her: “Since I am satisfied, why should you object- on my account, at least?” (118).

Helen's behaviour and words show that she is far from accepting of these notions of what is proper. She falls in love with Arthur Huntingdon and defends him to her aunt before he ever seeks her affections. Her chief consideration in choosing a husband – the first time at least - is if she can love him, not if he has the attributes listed by her aunt. This is evidenced by the fact that in rejecting Mr Boarham she tells him she cannot love him. Also, when she learns that he first asked her aunt and uncle for her hand in marriage she reacts with anger. Her words clearly indicate her conviction that her opinion comes before that of her family in this matter: “I hope my uncle and you told him it was not in your power to give it. What right had he to ask anyone before me?”(115). This is again contrary to the established views of society which indicate that she should follow the wishes of the man who is her legal guardian. Her behaviour with Gilbert at the end of the novel is completely against those views, as she is the one who proposes, albeit indirectly.

Gilbert seems almost determined not to understand the meaning underlying Helen's action and words. The thought that he is socially inferior to her, because of all the property she has inherited from her first husband and uncle, makes him extremely diffident and lacking in initiative. Gilbert's inaction forces Helen to take matters into her own hands and become assertive. Thus there is a shift in the roles of the man and woman, that is to say from what would happen in a conventional marriage proposal situation. Elizabeth Langland points to this exchange in the parts played by each party:

> (Helen and Gilbert's) fortuitous encounter leaves him silent and forces upon her the role of suitor. She must propose to him and so transgress the boundaries of the masculine and feminine. ...The paradoxism of a winter rose, the transgression of customary antithesis, prepares for the paradoxism of the assertive woman expressing feminine desire. ....Her wishes dominate; he is subject to her desire, and he is the object of her desire. ....(Helen) has been defined, and now predefines herself – as the paragon, an exemplar among women. Whereas the angel could only fall in the previous narrative controlled by Victorian ideology, here only Gilbert can fall. (Langland 45)

The novel provides an insight into society's standards regarding marriage and widows as well. Believing her to be a widow, Mrs. Markham tells Helen on their first meeting that she will almost certainly remarry and disregards Helen's decided denial of her statement. This is an indication of a conviction in society that a woman who has been widowed at a young age should remarry as she needs either the support and protection a husband provides or the social respectability that the married status and the husband's social standing lends, and possibly both. Helen does marry again, but it is out of no need for financial support or status. Indeed, in terms of both she is in a better position than Gilbert Markham. She has also learned through experience that making a decision to marry on inadequate grounds can lead to disaster. Thus, she only accepts a man who she is convinced will not cause a disillusionment for her, and not somebody like the persistent Mr. Hargrave.

That a woman's living by herself is also viewed as being against the social norms can also be understood from the novel. Even when people in the neighbourhood are unaware of Helen's real history and take her to be the widow Mrs. Graham, they disapprove of her because of her lifestyle. She is not a 'proper person', (82) and is considered 'scarcely respectable' (70), in Rose Markham's and Miss Wilson's words. The reason for her being judged in this way is her living with only an elderly woman servant and her child. According to these neighbours' way of thinking, because she cannot produce a husband or get a man to vouch for her history, she must necessarily have been lying. Because she has only herself to answer to for her conduct, she must necessarily be taking every opportunity to flirt with gentlemen in secret. In a way, every possibility is turned into a certainty to generate

rumours. The disapproval is also intimated or shown in other ways which are much more subtle. For example, when she is a guest in the Markhams' home rumours about her are whispered around, even while she is in the same room. Likewise, she is treated coldly – on the same occasion Miss Wilson refuses to sit by her at dinner and she is left on her own with little Arthur afterwards. However, Helen does not take notice of such behaviour, and says that she little values the opinions of such people (88). So it is clear that leading a solitary life is another subject on which Helen disregards social conventions and that she is prepared to live with the consequences of her choice without complaint.

As the novel illustrates with the example of Milicent Hargrave, Helen's friend, the above-mentioned needs in terms of economic motivations apply not only to widows but also to many middle-class young women. Milicent marries a wealthy man, because her mother is anxious that she should better her economic prospects by doing so, as can be understood from a letter she writes to Helen. It was not only "the received wisdom" in society but also a social reality of the period, given the laws and the structure of the society, that they needed to consider the fortune and financial prospects of their prospective husbands before other factors. As sons normally inherited the bulk of a father's fortune, daughters would usually have little left to them, and their mothers, being married women could leave them nothing, as they could not own property. Middle-class girls could earn very little money on their own as there were almost no professions open to them, thus they would be in a very disadvantaged position economically. The critic Carol Senf discusses the example of Milicent and how she is a representative of many other women in a similar situation in the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> For example, the Hargrave sisters and their mercenary mother reveal the degree to which middle class women in the early nineteenth century depended on men for economic support. Milicent Hargrave reveals that her reasons for marrying a man she does not love are purely economic: "Mr. Hattersley .. . is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes and Walter very little, our dear mamma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners-it is not my idea of being well married, but she means it all for the best." The desire for economic security rather than for love or respect thus clearly motivates many

> women's choice of husband, though Milicent Hattersley discovers that economic security is no protection from physical abuse. (Senf 452-453)

For her part, Helen Huntingdon is not a woman who, given the choice, prefers to be economically dependent on a man. On her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, she has a fortune settled on her by her father, so she is not financially in a very disadvantageous position at the beginning. But having the right to do with it as he will after marriage, Arthur largely squanders this money away on his debts. On her first attempt at running away, he even confiscates her money and destroys her painting equipment, with which she had planned to make enough money to start a new life. This clearly shows Helen that in legal terms being married is a distinct handicap for her individual economic prospects. Therefore, after running away, she starts earning her own living by painting professionally, as she has three people to support. The only man from whom she accepts some monetary support is her brother, and that is not very much, only the cost of the repairs to Wildfell Hall that are necessary to make it habitable. She does not, in her widow persona, look for a wealthy husband, although in fact she would not be able to actually marry.

In short, even though she is in a much more difficult position than unmarried young women of her day, she does not act as society would expect her to. On the contrary, her choices indicate that in this matter as well, she rejects social norms and follows her own counsel. Russell Poole considers this in the context of women's place in the world of art in the Victorian period:

> The radicalism of Brontë's economics, professionalizing a woman as painter, comes at a period when significant numbers of women were painting semiprofessionally and some had even begun to contest male privilege in the Royal Academy and other institutions. A still greater radicalism would appropriate pictorial art as a means for an ideal, emancipated, female gaze to reach visibility, and Brontë makes a gesture in this direction. (Poole 869)

Helen's biggest transgression of social norms, and one that shocked many critics of the novel when it was published, is her running away from her husband with her child. In order to understand this radical decision, it is necessary to look into the circumstances leading up to it, namely the disintegration of the marriage. After

she marries Arthur Huntingdon, it does not take long before Helen starts thinking that doing so was not a wise decision. The marriage falls apart rapidly. In only eight weeks, Helen confesses in her diary that she would not have married him if she had known him as well as she does now. In less than four months they have their first quarrel. Arthur leaves Helen alone at Grassdale Manor for many months while he enjoys himself in London with his dissipated friends. When he is home he emotionally torments her with tales of his past liaisons with women. Later, she learns of his adulterous affair with a married woman, Lady Lowborough, and that he is conducting it under her own roof. She does not want to believe this is so when her servant Rachel warns her about Lady Lowborough, but later she witnesses them together with her own eyes. At first she is shocked and feels great anguish, thinks herself a fool not to have seen what was happening before her very eyes, but she soon finds strength in her faith to face the repercussions of the situation.

Thus, before three years are up, the marriage is effectively at an end and exists only in name. Helen is forced to stay because Mr. Huntingdon will not let her leave when she confronts him with his crime - neither with her son nor by herself - but she states that she is only his housekeeper and the mother of his child from then on. This is important because even though she is not allowed her freedom and it is small comfort; she manages to make Arthur accept her living by her own principles, which are widely different from his.

Afterwards, she finds out that the woman Huntingdon has brought into the house as governess for little Arthur, Miss Myers, is her husband's mistress and makes her final decision to run away. Her first attempt is foiled by Arthur but the second time she is successful. Consequently, she breaks up her marriage in fact by physically separating from her husband, although she is not allowed to do so by law. For that to happen she would have had to apply to the ecclesiastical courts for a decree of divorce, which was very hard to get, making legal separation next to impossible. In short, although her history clearly demonstrates that she has every cause imaginable for a divorce by present day standards – she is even offered by her husband to one of his friends, Lord Lowborough – she cannot hope for one. Society and the law expect her to put up with the indignities and abuses inflicted on her by her husband and watch her son be corrupted by him. Pushed to the point where she

can do neither, she prefers to take a risk with the law rather than with her son's future. She flouts all convention and taking her child along with her, steals out of the house one morning, with the intention of starting a new life elsewhere under an alias.

The important thing to note in this instance of her rejecting social norms is that from the beginning she never objects to the precept that husband and wife should stay together and married once they are united, and that a wife cannot leave her husband of her own will. Rather, the rigidity of this expectation, its failure to take into account the misery being experienced in many households because of unhappy or abusive marriages, forces her to disregard it.

There is another point on which Helen goes against legal statutes and that is the matter of custody. At the time in which the novel is set, in the 1820's, a mother had no right to the custody of her children. No matter how young the children were, or how little suited the father might be to the role of guardian, the custody of all children was given to the father. This means that Helen might have been denied any access to her son by Arthur if he so chose. The only way she can be sure of continued access to her son on leaving Arthur Huntingdon is to take the child with her, which she does, even if it means breaking the law. Ian Ward explains what her situation would have been after subsequent changes to the law, if hers had been a real-life scenario:

> The effect of the 1839 act was to allow mothers to petition in Chancery for custody of children under seven, and for periodic rights of access thereafter... Therefore, Helen would have been able to petition in Chancery for custody of her son, but she would have needed to show that his father was an inappropriate guardian, and she would have needed the money to mount the action in the first place. And then a couple of years later she would have had to surrender custody anyway. (Ward 162)

Helen's manner of speech and the subjects she chooses to discuss are also unconventional for the society she lives in. For instance, when charged with making things too easy for her son by making his choices for him, Helen holds forth her views about how best to keep a child from vice:

> "I will lead him by the hand, Mr. Markham, till he has strength to go alone; and I will clear as many stones from his path as I can, and teach him to avoid the rest - or walk firmly

> over them, as you say; - for when I have done my utmost, in the way of clearance, there will still be plenty left to exercise all the agility, steadiness, and circumspection he will ever have. - It is all very well to talk about noble resistance, and trials of virtue; but for fifty - or five hundred men that have yielded to temptation, show me one that has had virtue to resist. And why should I take it for granted that my son will be one in a thousand? - and not rather prepare for the worst, and suppose he will be like his - like the rest of mankind, unless I take care to prevent it?" (32-33)

Her arguments on this point, as on the other points discussed earlier about education, are logically sound and cogent. The fact that she endorses them fervently in a social setting is proof that she disdains the existing belief in society - mentioned in the Introduction - that women do not belong in the public sphere. The subject she is discussing is an important social issue, and she defends her premises, with self-assurance, against both a man – Gilbert - and a woman, Mrs. Markham. Thus her arguments, both in content and in who they are addressed to, definitely relate to the public sphere, not the private sphere that a woman is not supposed to venture out of. Literary critic Rachel Carnell also emphasizes this in her article entitled "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall"* and even remarks that her discourse could be considered masculine:

> (Anne Brontë) allows her heroine, Helen Huntingdon, to speak out in the manner of the exceptional eighteenth-century woman writer and to make broad claims about nature, culture, and education: Helen thus emblemizes the rationality of the public sphere. (Carnell 10)

> In her impassioned and articulate speeches against drinking, against boarding-school education, and against the irrational differences in the education of girls and boys, Helen Huntingdon enacts the sort of 'talking on a large scale' that Victorian conduct books such as Sarah Ellis's *The Wives of England* would prohibit. Helen's voice is rational, confident, and self-sufficient at this point in the narrative – and by the norms of the day, her discourse would certainly be deemed masculine. (Carnell, 10)

II.II PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN

Throughout the novel, Helen Huntingdon encounters many unfair or illogical notions about women to which she makes her objections known. For example, the differences in the upbringing of men and women and the beliefs which underlie those differences are subjects which come up in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* during a discussion on education. While discoursing on the errors in the education of boys and girls Helen also decries their each being held up to different standards. By a pointed question about whether Gilbert would say the same thing about girls' education as he has said about the education of boys - namely that they should be exposed to temptation to a degree - she draws attention to the illogical inequality, in both practice and way of thinking, so far as the two sexes are concerned. She then quite logically and using potent language questions the perception that women are by default more fallible than men. Her words show her keen awareness of a process by which, through what is called protection but what is in effect an act of smothering – 'hothouse plant' is her simile - women are rendered helpless and completely ineffective. This clearly indicates that she strongly objects to these widely held opinions, again placing her at odds with society:

> "Granted; - but would you use the same argument with regard to a girl? ...No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant - taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil. But will you be so good as to inform me why you make this distinction? Is it that you think she has no virtue?.....Well, but you affirm that virtue is only elicited by temptation; - and you think that a woman cannot be too little exposed to temptation, or too little acquainted with vice, or anything connected therewith. It must be either that you think she is essentially so vicious, or so feeble-minded, that she cannot withstand temptation, - and though she may be pure and innocent as long as she is kept in ignorance and restraint, yet, being destitute of real virtue, to teach her how to sin is at once to make her a sinner, and the greater her knowledge, the wider her liberty, the deeper will be her depravity, - whereas, in the nobler sex, there is a natural tendency to goodness, guarded by a superior fortitude, which, the more it is exercised by trials and dangers, is only the further developed- " (34-35)

Continuing with these ideas, she further exposes the negative aspects of another practice. That practice is what can be termed the over-encouragement of boys and the under-encouragement of girls owing to the same perceptions mentioned earlier. Her opinion - again contrary to those ideas – is that both extremes should be avoided. The effectiveness of her exposition shows that she is deeply conscious of the negative consequences of doing otherwise:

> "Well, then, it must be that you think they are both weak and prone to err, and the slightest error, the merest shadow of pollution, will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished - his education properly finished by a little practical acquaintance with forbidden things. Such experience, to him (to use a trite simile), will be like the storm to the oak, which, though it may scatter the leaves, and snap the smaller branches, serves but to rivet the roots, and to harden and condense the fibres of the tree. You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others. Now I would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good, and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power or the will to watch and guard herself." (35)

The prevailing notions in society regarding the duties of wife and husband, which place the woman in an inferior position, are voiced by a few characters in the novel. According to Mrs. Markham, for example, the husband is the only party who should get any pleasure out of the relationship and his duty consists of doing his business and doing justice to his wife's cooking. These are her words to her son Gilbert on marriage:

> “Then you must fall each into your proper place. You'll do your business, and she, if she's worthy of you, will do hers; but it's your business to please yourself, and hers to please you. I'm sure your poor, dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after the first six months or so were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out

> of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his - bless him! - he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay - and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man." (53)

The reader is also provided with Arthur Huntingdon's views on what a wife should be and what her responsibilities consist of. Helen summarizes in her diary what she has come to believe these views are, based on his behaviour:

> Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly, and to stay at home to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, while he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return, no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime. (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 192)

The similarity between Arthur's ideas as summarized here and Mrs. Markham's is very interesting and telling. It seems as if both have been indoctrinated by the same source into set opinions. Whether that source is society in general, or if men have been instructing women or vice versa, is unclear however. It is clear, though, that one would expect more empathy from a woman for her own sex than Mrs. Markham shows. On one occasion when Arthur and Helen argue, he also expresses his opinions for himself, basing them on the promises made during the marriage service :

> 'You are breaking your marriage vows yourself,' said he, indignantly rising and pacing to and fro. 'You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me, and call me worse than a highwayman. If it were not for your situation, Helen, I would not submit to it so tamely. I won't be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife.' (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 189)

So according to him a woman should do as the husband wishes, should not upbraid or criticize him and should not try to direct his actions. Carol Senf puts his interests in this situation into perspective in terms of the existing laws of the period and suggests that his behaviour in the argument mentioned earlier indicates contempt for women, shared by other male characters in the novel:

> Legally, of course, Arthur is entitled to all of Helen's property; prior to the passage of the Married Women's Property Acts of the 1870s and 1880s, married women had no control over their own property. And Brontë shows that Arthur, having squandered his fortune, has good reason for not wanting to relinquish power over Helen and her fortune. Indeed his desire to silence her is rooted in his contempt for women and in his awareness that his power over her is sanctioned by both law and custom: "You are breaking your marriage vows yourself," said he ..... Although Arthur Huntingdon's contempt for women is revealed as more severe than that of other men, Grimsby, Hattersley, and Hargrave seem to share it; Markham, Lawrence, and Halford, on the other hand, seem more inclined to treat women with respect. Such inconsistent treatment of women is typical of the nineteenth-century view that tended to separate women into two categories, angel and demon, the one to serve as inspiration, the other to be destroyed. Moreover, *Tenant* reveals that men could also be divided into two categories according to their treatment of women-those who use the law to oppress and silence women and those who use the law to protect them. (Senf 451)

The fact that Arthur holds Milicent Hattersley up as an example to Helen while they are discussing the relations between her and her husband also indicates how he expects a wife to behave. Milicent meekly puts up with the harsh treatment and physical violence of her husband – Mr. Hattersley even beats her before their friends while they are staying as guests at Glassdale Manor. So, apparently Arthur expects a wife, like her, to condone her husband's behaviour under any circumstances,without objection.

Helen's behaviour toward Arthur – her protesting whenever he goes away for months to enjoy himself with his friends, her refusal to pander to his wishes or amuse him when she is displeased with his behaviour, as well as her ceasing to show any affection once she learns of his infidelity – makes it evident that she does not agree with general opinion on this subject. So does the somewhat sarcastic tone of her journal entry, which intimates that she does not approve of Arthur's views.

The issue of fidelity in men and women also reveals some preconceived notions in society about women. The predominant idea, voiced in the novel by

Arthur, is that women are more loyal and that men should be permitted more freedom because of their nature:

> 'The cases are different,' he replied. 'It is a woman's nature to be constant - to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever - bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all; but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more licence, for, as Shakespeare has it -
>
> However we do praise ourselves,
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
> Than women's are.
>
> (189)

While they are discussing his openly flirting (in reality having an affair) with Annabella Lowborough, Arthur makes it clear that he subscribes to the judgment that man's infidelity cannot be considered in the same light as woman's. When Helen asks: "What would Lord Lowborough, your friend, think, if he knew all? or what would you yourself think, if he or any other had acted the same part to me, throughout, as you have to Annabella?" (189), his answer is that he would blow the man's brains out. Plainly, this answer is completely against equality between the sexes in terms of sexual conduct. On the other hand, Helen's question, and the ones she asks subsequently - "Just imagine yourself in my place: would you think I loved you, if I did so? Would you believe my protestations, and honour and trust me under such circumstances?" (189) – show that she holds men and women equal in this matter and that she supports a principle of reciprocity, when it comes to what each party should be forbidden or allowed to do.

Helen's voicing her opinions also brings up the issue of another notion about women – that what they say need not be taken seriously. Helen herself is subjected to this treatment many times. Arthur never listens to her when she tells him that his behaviour is wrong or when she says she will cease to love him if he continues to act as he does. She is laughed at by Mrs. Markham when they discuss discouraging boys from drinking, Mr. Hargrave never listens to her refusals and persists in trying to win her affections – there are many more similar examples. Meghan Bullock comments on how her words are disregarded:

> (Helen) is herself a victim of silencing through being ignored – her protestations being ignored by Hargrave and Gilbert, her ideas being ignored by the society surrounding Wildfell Hall, and so on. Anne's women, even those who do speak, are consistently ignored. (Bullock 137)

Helen's actually having her own profession, painting, and the ability to create is also against the traditional view in society that women are first and foremost housewives, and that their main duty is to do housework, such as cooking, sewing, cleaning etc. The fact that her painting style is recognizable – she has to use a false signature on her paintings – proves that she is a professional artist. Losano points to this fact: ‘As a painter, Helen Graham is a creative producer in her own right, rather than an aesthetic object; this is where the real "heat" of the novel is-in Helen's painting and the ideological arguments arising from it.’ (Losano 22)

II.III MORALS

Helen has a sense of morality which is largely defined by her belief in Christianity. One of the reasons she gives her aunt for marrying Arthur Huntingdon is to save him from making mistakes and guide him to the right path. She even quotes from the Bible to prove to her aunt that if he has sinned, he need not be damned forever. In this, she is acting in accordance with the notion in Victorian society, which stresses the positive moral effect of the angelic woman figure on men. She intends to help him to salvation by making him repent his earlier sins and reforming his character. Yet it is quite another method that proves effective, as Tess O'Toole points out:

> Helen displays the ironic naivete of a young woman who, subscribing to the ideas about woman's moral influence articulated by Sarah Ellis and others, ardently believes that as her husband's 'angel monitress' she can redeem him. .....The futility of her efforts are underscored by Annabella; while Arthur finds his wife's moralizing tedious, he can be kept in line by his mistress's strategy, which depends on his physical desire for her. Annabella's brand of sexual management, ironically, has more pragmatic reach than domestic authority. In this way, Brontë's novel exposes rather than reproduces the

> myth of power embedded in cultural constructions of the domestic woman. (O'Toole 717)

Brontë's account of the marriage, from beginning to end, of a woman who purposely starts out with the intention to redeem her husband shows step by step how those intentions are brought to naught. Even on his deathbed, Arthur is unwilling to repent, in spite of Helen's pleas,which shows how little his life with her has changed him. The history of their marriage also demonstrates that faced with a husband who will neither listen nor try to understand, the woman has no such moral power as society claims. Elizabeth Langland asserts the same idea: *"Tenant* explodes the myth of woman's redemptive spirituality and insight" (Langland 41) Instead, the woman is powerless even to stop him from corrupting other innocent people, namely their children.

Helen also defends her own morals against the vicar, Mr. Millward. Acting on the rumours about Helen and Mr. Lawrence circulating in the neighbourhood, he comes to reprimand Helen for her behaviour and advise her to reform. However, as Helen believes the real immorality is believing in groundless gossip without proof and casting aspersions on a person's character, and not in the vicar's version, she rebukes him and as good as turns him out of her house:

> 'Hardened, I fear - hardened!' he replied, with a despondent shake of the head; 'and, at the same time, there was a strong display of unchastened, misdirected passions. She turned white in the face, and drew her breath through her teeth in a savage sort of way; - but she offered no extenuation or defence; and with a kind of shameless calmness - shocking indeed to witness in one so young - as good as told me that my remonstrance was unavailing, and my pastoral advice quite thrown away upon her - nay, that my very presence was displeasing while I spoke such things. And I withdrew at length, too plainly seeing that nothing could be done - and sadly grieved to find her case so hopeless. But I am fully determined, Mrs. Markham, that my daughters - shall - not - consort with her. Do you adopt the same resolution with regard to yours!" (84-85)

Seeing her as a 'fallen woman', he does not want her to associate with other women and believes that she might corrupt their morals.

Anne Brontë's heroine follows her own sense of right and wrong when faced with immorality as well. For instance, she does not accept Mr. Hargrave, who asks her to become his lover. He does so after she learns of Arthur's adultery, stating that she owes him no more allegiance. Helen answers that she has her own conscience to answer to. When he is too persistent, she even wards him off with a palette-knife. So she does not have the lax morals of some members of the upper class such as Mr. Hargrave and Arthur, who offers Lord Lowborough his wife. She does not consent to Gilbert either, so long as her husband is alive. Instead she tells him they are not to see each other again and moves away, after he learns the truth about her situation.

II.IV EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER IN GENERAL

Besides the characteristics that her going against social norms, her defying perceptions about women, and her having her own ideas about morality indicates, there are other aspects to Helen's character. To better evaluate her character and actions - in terms of how exceptional or radical they are for the society she is living in - a comparison with other women characters in the novel is necessary. On consideration, it can be said that there are three types of women characters in *Tenant*: those who subscribe completely to social norms without question, those who are aware of the injustices of some social norms but do not do anything about it, and those who actively go against the norms they think to be unfair. One critic makes this observation about the other women characters:

> Almost all of the other female characters in the novel prove that Helen's experience is not necessarily being touted as a universal model for women. Rose Markham, Eliza and Mary Millward, Milicent Hattersley, and Frederick's own mother are all described as pleasant and faithful but unable to speak rationally in philosophical terms. They are not denigrated for their adherence to traditional female roles, but it is clear that they will never transcend them. (Carnell, 12)

Mrs. Markham, Mrs. Maxwell, Eliza and Mary Millward, Jane Wilson and Mrs Hargrave fall into the first category. Mrs. Hargrave's conformation to society's

standards can be seen in her motivations for marrying her daughters, as told by Helen in her diary:

> Mrs. Hargrave's anxiety to make good matches for her daughters is partly the cause, and partly the result, of these errors: by making a figure in the world, and showing them off to advantage, she hopes to obtain better chances for them; and by thus living beyond her legitimate means, and lavishing so much on their brother, she renders them portionless, and makes them burdens on her hands. Poor Milicent, I fear, has already fallen a sacrifice to the manoeuvrings of this mistaken mother, who congratulates herself on having so satisfactorily discharged her maternal duty, and hopes to do as well for Esther. (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 186)

Rose Markham and Milicent Hattersley fall into the second category. The fact that Rose, for example, is aware of the double standard of social norms with regard to men and women can be seen from her remarks to her family circle, where she comments on her mother's preferential treatment towards Gilbert:

> "Well! - if it had been me now, I should have had no tea at all - if it had been Fergus, even, he would have to put up with such as there was, and been told to be thankful, for it was far too good for him; but you - we can't do too much for you. It's always so - if there's anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, "Don't eat so much of that, Rose; Gilbert will like it for his supper." - I'm nothing at all. In the parlour, it's "Come, Rose, put away your things, and let's have the room nice and tidy against they come in; and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire." In the kitchen - "Make that pie a large one, Rose; I daresay the boys'll be hungry; and don't put so much pepper in, they'll not like it, I'm sure" - or, "Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain," - or, "Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus liked plenty." If I say, "Well, mamma, I don't," I'm told I ought not to think of myself. "You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done; and, secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house - anything will do for the ladies." (52)

In the third category are only Helen and her servant Rachel, who aids her mistress in her escape and reports Arthur's misconducts to her.

These other characters, though they might not take action to do something about their situation, do raise some questions about gender roles, even by what they do not do or what they do not say. Carol Senf draws attention to this:

> Helen Huntingdon, the character around whom the novel is organized, reinforces many of the questions of gender raised by the other women characters. Supporting herself and her son after escaping from her husband of course raises the question of employment for women, while her observations on equal education for girls result from her own painful experiences. (Senf 454)

Helen is also an intellectual, sensitive and perceptive woman. The fact that she can evaluate her own psychology in marriage and perceive that because of the differences between her character and that of her husband, a piece of her still lacks its true counterpart and is out of the marriage is proof of this:

> "How little real sympathy there exists between us; how many of my thoughts and feelings are gloomily cloistered within my own mind; how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried - doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil!" (192)

This passage from her diary attests to how disillusioned she is with her marriage, on the level of thoughts as well as in terms of her husband's reprehensible behaviour. The spiritual and intellectual sharing she had hoped for before she got married is totally lacking from her relationship with Arthur.

Helen has a view to the forming of solidarity between women. She establishes such a bond with her servant Rachel, who is her only help in the solitary life she is compelled to lead after she runs away, and the only other person she can entrust with her son. She is also taken into confidence regarding all Helen's secrets. Carnell mentions this as well when listing Helen's actions:

> Helen represents a woman who, within the confines of her inner narrative, refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture, insists on her status as a professional painter, pursues an affective and humanistic bond between herself and her loyal servant Rachel, and challenges the economic subjection of wives. (Carnell 23)

This enumeration of her actions, and the actual verbs used – refuse, insist on, challenge – to define them makes it clear, as well, that Helen's behaviour amounts to rebelling against society.

Helen is an artist as well, and has an artist's sensibilities and priorities. For instance, she does not like her unfinished sketches to be viewed by anyone else. She is incensed, therefore, when before their marriage, Arthur snatches her portfolio of sketches, so incensed as to burn the sketch she has drawn of him. She is also angered on Gilbert's looking at a picture she has turned to the wall. As for her priorities, the fire is kept going not in the sitting-room but in her studio, while she is painting, and so she has no choice but to show her unexpected visitors - Gilbert and Rose Markham - into the studio, so that they may avoid the cold (Ch. 5). Antonia Losano analyses this scene:

> Brontë represents Helen not in the feminine role of hostess but in the decidedly unfeminine role of preoccupied and grumpy genius, toiling away at a painting, with no time for society. The entire chapter in which this scene with Gilbert takes place-a chapter called simply and pointedly "The Studio" -forges a radical professional female identity for Helen: she paints for money, has a studio of her own and a recognizable style, and evinces a commitment to art rather than to the self. Yet the scene also articulates-through the shadowy presence of the "someone" who comes to take Helen's pictures to market-the problems of female professionalism. (Losano 30 -31)

Finally, compared with the other women characters considered in this study, Helen is in the most difficult position, after she runs away. Not only is she separated from her husband, but her taking her son with him is illegal, so there is always a chance she might lose him. She has to support her son and Rachel, besides herself, by earning her own living. So both financially and legally, she faces a tougher situation than Shirley, Maggie or Clara.

CHAPTER III

SHIRLEY KEELDAR

Before analyzing the character of Shirley in detail, a synopsis of the events in *Shirley* is necessary. Caroline Helstone, the niece of the rector of Briarfield, Mr. Helstone, is in love with her cousin Robert Moore, whose mother is Belgian and who has lately come to settle in England with his sister. He, however, does not fully reciprocate her feelings and is beset by troubles at his mill. He has been forced to fire many workers because of a law -necessitated by England's war with the forces of Napoleon - prohibiting the export of goods to Europe, which has brought him close to bankruptcy. The workers, left without the means to provide for their families, riot and break the new machinery Moore is expecting.

Meanwhile, Shirley Keeldar, a rich heiress who owns an old mansion in the neighbourhood called Fieldhead and Moore's mill, comes to live in her family home. She becomes friends with Caroline and tries to help the community by doing charity work. Rioters attack the mill in their hundreds, but are finally warded off by Moore and some gentlemen of the neighbourhood with gunfire. Backed into a tight corner financially, and thinking she has feelings for him, Robert Moore proposes marriage to Shirley, and is vehemently rejected by her. He goes away to effect the arrest of the ringleaders of the riot. Feeling cut off from Robert and losing hope, Caroline falls dangerously ill. She regains some hope when she finds out that Shirley's governess, Mrs. Pryor, is in fact her mother, and is nursed back to health by her.

On his return to Yorkshire, Robert is shot and grievously wounded. Meanwhile, Shirley's uncle, Mr. Sympson, comes to stay at Fieldhead with his family and with his son's tutor, Louis Moore, Robert's brother. He wants her to make an advantageous match, but she and Louis Moore have secretly been in love for some time. Finally, Shirley has a big quarrel with her uncle on the subject of marriage, where she tells him that she has chosen Louis Moore, and her uncle leaves with his

family subsequently. Afterwards, Shirley and Louis declare their love for one another and decide to get married. Robert, having found time to contemplate his mistakes while recuperating, and freed from his financial difficulties with the repeal of the law preventing trade, also proposes to Caroline. The two couples marry on the same day.

Many critics are of the opinion that the character of Shirley Keeldar was probably based on Emily Brontë. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also voice the same suggestion: "...in *Shirley* [Charlotte Brontë] is presumably depicting an Emily Brontë born under happier circumstances."(Gilbert & Gubar 374)

The reasons for the adoption of a pseudonym also need some consideration. Given the male-dominated condition of the literary sphere and the world of publication in that period, this method can be seen as a means to an end. A means to be taken seriously, to be evaluated without bias and to put forward her own thoughts through the medium of the written word. One critic makes a similar claim:

> Sharon Marcus stresses ..."The name Currer Bell enabled Brontë to materialize her professional self in abstract form, to put herself forward while simultaneously receding from view, a paradoxical strategy of self-promotion through self-effacement" ...As if emulating Brontë's own painful self-effacement, her fictional heroines ...are characteristically reserved...The character's secretive interiority parallels Brontë's own interiority that the alias Currer Bell helps to disguise. Through this interiority, as Marcus suggests, Brontë effectively asserts her presence as a writer. (Cho 101-102)

Brontë herself states her own strong views on the matter and on the reception of *Shirley* in a letter to the critic G. H. Lewes:

> I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. All mouths will be open against that first chapter; and that first chapter is true as the Bible, nor is it exceptionable. Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. (*Brontë* 305)

III.I SOCIAL NORMS

The characters' interactions and their conversations are the main reference points for understanding what is considered the social norm in the world of *Shirley,* and to this can be added the narrator's comments, which sometimes amount to social critique.

The narrator in *Shirley* at one point makes some general observations about English country ladies, stating that beyond merely conforming to social norms, they themselves are the norm, the representation of all that should be considered proper:

> In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. Whether young or old, pretty or plain, dull or sprightly, they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, 'I know - I do not boast of it, but I know that I am the standard of what is proper; let every one therefore whom I approach, or who approaches me, keep a sharp lookout, for wherein they differ from me - be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice - therein they are wrong.' (111)

Shirley Keeldar is in a number of respects the complete opposite of what these ladies are, and rejects society's norms on many issues, as will be shown here, therefore making her automatically 'wrong' from their points of view.

The generally accepted view in society that clergymen should always be treated with respect, as figures of authority in the community, is flaunted by Shirley on one occasion, in the chapter entitled 'Mr. Donne's Exodus'. When the curate Mr. Donne, who is not described in he novel as having a very amiable character, comes to Fieldhead for a visit and begins to openly denigrate Yorkshire and its people in her company, Shirley becomes incensed. As she has been born and bred in Yorkshire, like generations of her ancestors, she feels very strongly on the subject and turns the curate Mr. Donne out of her house, actually telling him to go away. This, besides going against established behaviour to be shown to clergyman, would be deemed unladylike by normal standards.

The social norms according to which a young woman is expected to make her preferences about who to marry are the same in *Shirley* as they were in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* As in the projected case of Hannah Sykes, a prospective husband's

financial situation should apparently be the first consideration, before his age or his nature. The fact that she would be miserable in such a marriage, as the narrator predicts, would matter little to her parents, whose decisions she would have to abide by:

> It is probable [Hannah Sykes] would have married [Helstone] if he had asked her; her parents would have quite approved the match. To them his fifty-five years, his bend-leather heart, could have presented no obstacles; and as he was a rector, held an excellent living, occupied a good house, and was supposed even to have private property (though in that the world was mistaken; every penny of the £5,000 inherited by him from his father had been devoted to the building and endowing of a new church at his native village in Lancashire - for he could show a lordly munificence when he pleased, and if the end was to his liking, never hesitated about making a grand sacrifice to attain it) - her parents, I say, would have delivered Hannah over to his loving kindness and his tender mercies without one scruple; and the second Mrs. Helstone, inverting the natural order of insect existence, would have fluttered through the honeymoon a bright, admired butterfly, and crawled the rest of her days a sordid, trampled worm. (119)

Shirley also obviously goes against social standards when she refers to herself as a man. Mrs. Pryor rebukes her for doing so, intimating that affecting masculine manners is considered wrong and is something to be avoided:

> If she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. This declaration she made to Mrs. Pryor, who received it very quietly, as she did most of her pupil's off-hand speeches, responding - 'My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed: it is a strange one. Those who do not know you, hearing you speak thus, would think you affected masculine manners.' (211)

The remarks of Joe Scott, one of Robert Moore's workers, to Caroline and Shirley, prove that the working class adopts the same social norms as others regarding women. According to him, they have not the right to form their own opinions, but even in thought should be led by men, as if they have no capacity to

think for themselves: 'Women may exercise [private judgment] as well as men?' 'Nay: women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them.' (338). After he makes his views known, both Shirley and Caroline react indignantly, saying he should be ashamed. Clearly, they are against such norms as he is advocating.

In similarity with the situation in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Shirley is also expected to refer to her uncle and have his approval when choosing a husband, although legally she is under no constraints to do so, as she has come of age. The same norms apply to her as to Helen. Shirley's uncle, Mr. Sympson, comes to Fieldhead with his family, determined to marry her off to advantage – that is to someone of high financial status and good social standing. When she talks of marrying for love, and belittles her suitor Mr. Wynne, whom she has refused, he calls her language 'unladylike' and herself 'unwomanly' (481), thereby indicating what he -and society in general – considers ladylike and womanly – to accept someone he sees fit, without further consideration about her happiness.

The majority of the chapter called 'Uncle and Niece' consists of their conversation on the subject of marriage. He keeps insisting on learning whom she intends to marry, if she intends to marry at all, because he suspects that she has rejected a fifth proposal, from Sir Philip Nunnely, a baronet. Shirley, however, is determined to choose for herself in terms of marriage and to claim her right to decide what to do with her own life:

> 'What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?'
> 'In what respect?'
> 'In respect of matrimony.'
> 'To be quiet - and to do just as I please.'
> 'Just as you please! The words are to the last degree indecorous.' (Shirley 563)

When he asks about the sort of man she would choose for a husband, she makes her preference clear, she cannot live with a man who would dictate to her: 'A tyrant would not hold me for a day - not for an hour. I would rebel - break from him - defy him.' (565)

She jests with him for quite a while, telling him she was once in love with Socrates and other ancient philosophers, and that she is currently in love with Lord Wellington. She also tells him plain and simple 'I disdain your dictatorship.' (569)

During this conversation, she uses phrases men use to belittle women, in a kind of retaliation, and her manner of speech finally makes him ask if she's a lady:

> 'What do you mean? There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil - improper influence! What old woman's cackle is that?'
> 'Are you a young lady?'
> 'I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated.' (Shirley 569)

Her words here show her demand for respect, as an independent and 'honest' woman, and a person who can form her own opinions and act on them. The fact that her uncle says she acknowledges 'no rules – no limitations' affirms that she is going against social norms, which can be defined as the rules ad limitations imposed on her by society. And because she is doing so, at the end of their conversation Mr. Sympson says to Shirley's face, referring to her in third person "She's not proper."(572).

In the scene where she and Louis confess their love for each other, she also breaks with convention by being the first one to put into words a marriage proposal, as one critic argues:

> Shirley herself, in a display of female power, expresses the traditional, directly declared marriage proposal, which Louis had skirted by simply calling her his wife, and she sets the rules for Louis's and her marriage. While she does not ask that he take all of the 'cares and duties of property' from her, which she had escaped briefly once before, she does ask him to 'share the burden' and be her 'companion through life', 'guide' where ignorant, 'master' where faulty, and 'friend always' (p. 580). Louis must, therefore, answer her and agrees to Shirley's proposal of marriage. Shirley's ability to declare the marriage proposal and define the rules of their marriage displays female power but, at the same time, Shirley does not demand that Louis act submissively to her. (Mc Laughlin 221)

III.II PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN

Shirley provides several illustrations about the way society perceives women, both by the characters' behaviour and reactions and by their openly stated views.

The rector, Mr. Helstone, for instance, provides the reader with some idea as to men's perceptions in particular. He sees women as inferior to men, as painted dolls to admire. He does not like them to be sensible, because then they would have to be taken seriously, treated as reasoning beings and equals. The narrator of the novel describes his ideas:

> At heart [Helstone] could not abide sense in women. He liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible, because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be - inferior, toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour, and to be thrown away. (118)

His low opinion of women is proved by the way he treats his wife, Mary Cave: He marries her, then completely ignores her – 'throws her away' - disregarding her needs and feelings, and watches as she pines away in despair then dies. He does not even understand why she dies. Shirley's actions and words are of course opposed to such a perception, as she does talk sensibly and logically, and does not stand in a corner like a doll but does as she pleases.

The image of the mermaid, a mythical, mysterious and dangerous female figure of fable, is the subject of a conversation between Caroline and Shirley, where Shirley displays her knowledge of false perceptions in society about women. She states that some men see all women, without exception, as temptresses, terrors and monsters, like the mermaid:

> 'But, Shirley, she is not like us: we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters.'
> 'Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to 'woman,' in general, such attributes.' (250)

The words she chooses, such as 'it is said', show that Shirley herself is opposed to this idea and thinks it false. The perception is linked to the notion of the fallen woman mentioned in the Introduction. Because of those notions the society forces on

men, they see woman as either an angelic figure or a demon, with no middle ground between the two.

Shirley, as an intelligent woman, observes men's treatment of women and recognizes the perceptions that underlie it. When Robert Moore does not inform her of the attack on the mill, even though she owns it, she remarks that men tell women nothing and keeping them completely in the dark about subjects which involve danger. She comes to the conclusion that they perceive women to have as much capacity for thought as children, and clearly states that she thinks this wrong:

> And this is the way men deal with women; still concealing danger from them: thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were to-night: we know they little conjectured where we were. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake...(360).

Her sarcastic language suggests that she also resents this situation. By being kept in the dark, she is kept from knowledge of danger like any other woman, as one critic states:

> Although Shirley's wealth gives her an extraordinary degree of autonomy over her own life, it does not lend her any political power to intervene in public events. Mill owner or not, Shirley is treated like a woman and expected to behave like a woman... The local elites even keep the impending confrontation at Hollow's End mill a secret from her, though if anyone had a right to that information it is Shirley, who owns the mill property. (Zlotnick 293)

In the same speech, she goes on to point out the angel – demon distinction in men's minds mentioned earlier, and criticizes the 'ideal' heroines created by male authors, the false results of their false perceptions:

> If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem - novel - drama, thinking it fine - divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial - false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think

> on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half-an-hour. (360)

As she claims that she would be stoned to death if she criticized those heroines, she knows that in this case men's perceptions are in fact the perceptions of society in general, as they could move a whole crowd and not just men to punish her for having such opinions.

Françoise Basch makes this comment about Charlotte Brontë's heroines in general, of which Shirley is one, affirming the view that there is a large difference between her and traditional perceptions about what a woman is supposed to be: “By their authenticity, inner independence and originality Charlotte Brontë's heroines are distinctly removed from the traditional idea of woman and the contemporary conception of 'the female sphere'. (Basch 164)

III.III MORALS

On the subject of morals, Shirley has her own 'brand' of morality which, it can be argued, has distinctly feminine elements. This is also detectable in her unorthodox religious views, which are a mixture of Christianity and the paganism of Greek mythology. These views concerning creation and woman form a basis for her moral values. She has a unique conception of the first woman, different from the one that is often used to disparage women, which shows Eve as the cause of Adam's damnation, as the first one to be deceived and as the one who leads him to sin as well. And she has a feeling of sisterhood with other women, which keeps her from doing anything that she would consider an injustice or insult to them.

Shirley reveals her own version of Eve or nature in a conversation with Caroline. She begins by criticizing Milton's characterization of Eve – she claims he made him too ordinary and simple a woman, based on the women around him. According to her, the first woman to be created is a more potent and extraordinary being than Milton would have one believe, a Titan:

> 'Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not.'
>
> 'You are bold to say so, Shirley.'

'Not more bold than faithful. It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the rectors, - preserves, and 'dulcet creams' - puzzled 'what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes, not well-joined, inelegant; but bring taste after taste, upheld with kindliest change." 'All very well too, Shirley.'

'I would beg to remind him that the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother: from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus' ---- 'Pagan that you are! what does that signify?'

'I say, there were giants on the earth in those days: giants that strove to scale heaven. The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, - the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, - the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which, after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation.'

'She coveted an apple, and was cheated by a snake: but you have got such a hash of Scripture and mythology into your head that there is no making any sense of you. You have not yet told me what you saw kneeling on those hills.'

'I saw - I now see - a woman-Titan: her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath, where yonder flock is grazing; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet, and arabesques of lightning flame on its borders. Under her breast I see her zone, purple like that horizon: through its blush shines the star of evening. Her steady eyes I cannot picture; they are clear - they are deep as lakes - they are lifted and full of worship - they tremble with the softness of love and the lustre of prayer. Her forehead has the expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the early moon, risen long before dark gathers: she reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro' Moor; her mighty hands are joined beneath it. So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was His son.'

'She is very vague and visionary! Come, Shirley, we ought to go into church.'

> 'Caroline, I will not: I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature. I love her, undying, mighty being!"(328-329)

What Shirley is essentially doing int this conversation with Caroline is essentially rewriting the book of Genesis according to her own vision. The Eve she describes here, considering her statements that she gave birth to Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus and Prometheus, corresponds to the Titan Gaia in Greek mythology. Gaia is one of the very first Titans, and is a sort of earth-mother figure, who gives birth to the various elements of nature, like the oceans and the sun. Shirley's Eve appears to be Gaia in everything but name. She is a life-giving, immortal force, not a mortal woman prone to deception, whose existence is secondary to that of the man's, being made out of his rib. Her existence precedes all other life and nourishes it. At the end of her speech Shirley identifies this Eve with Mother Nature. Critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point to the departure from the ancient myths and orthodox religion she represents:

> [Shirley and Caroline] are involved in a militant rejection of the old myths and the degrading roles they provide. But unlike Jane Eyre, *Shirley* is very consciously an attack on the religion of the patriarchs. (Gilbert&Gubar 392)

Lawson argues that this particular conception of Eve represents a 'feminist dissent', by giving such potency to the trinity-like female figure:

> Thus, Mother/Eve/Nature come together in the narrative as a kind of pagan trinity; they are at the heart of a feminist dissent which nurtures "unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence," not just for women but for all humanity. And the life it supports is most definitely of this world, not of the next. (Lawson 737)

Shirley's feeling of sisterhood with women and the moral obligations it places her under become apparent when she refuses Robert Moore. She knows that if one woman were to purposefully try to ensnare a husband by using her charms and devious maneuvers, she and all her sex would be denigrated by men as artful and conniving. Thus, out of that feeling of sisterhood, she refrains from any action that would wrong other women in this way by degrading them.

> 'You conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman's feelings,' was her answer: 'you have announced it in a fashion revolting to a woman's soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manoeuvre to ensnare a husband: you imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand, because I have courted you. (548)
>
> That is to say, that I am a traitor to all my sisters: that I have acted as no woman can act, without degrading herself and her sex: that I have sought where the incorrupt of my kind naturally scorn and abhor to seek.' (549)

During their quarrel about marriage, Shirley also compares her religious views and morals with her uncle's. It is obvious that they clash. Using scathing language, she emphasizes her uncle's worldliness and mercenary attitude– she states that he has made the world his God. As evidenced by his opinions about her suitors and her matrimony, he views marriage as a sort of financial contract, or business venture. There is no consideration for love in the way he conceives marriage, only for personal interests and worldly values like wealth. She, however, rejects his morals - she is true to her conscience, herself not to interests, appearances or financial power:

> 'Mr. Sympson . . . I am sick at heart with all this weak trash: I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. Let us part.'
> 'It is not,' she resumed, much excited - 'It is not that I hate you; you are a good sort of man: perhaps you mean well in your way; but we cannot suit: we are ever at variance. You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny; you exasperate my temper, and make and keep me passionate. As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off: Mr. Sympson - go, offer them a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them: I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope than you.'
> 'Another creed! I believe she is an infidel.'
> 'An infidel to your religion; an atheist to your god.'
> 'An - atheist!!!'
> 'Your god, sir, is the World. In my eyes, you too, if not an infidel, are an idolater. I conceive that you ignorantly

> worship: in all things you appear to me too superstitious. Sir, your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You, and such as you, have raised him to a throne, put on him a crown, given him a sceptre. Behold how hideously he governs! See him busied at the work he likes best - making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. He stretches out the arm of Mezentius and fetters the dead to the living. In his realm there is hatred - secret hatred: there is disgust - unspoken disgust: there is treachery - family treachery: there is vice - deep, deadly, domestic vice. In his dominions, children grow unloving between parents who have never loved: infants are nursed on deception from their very birth; they are reared in an atmosphere corrupt with lies. (571)

After this conversation, her uncle decides she must not associate with his daughters lest she infect them with what from his point of view are her “loose” morals. She has become a fallen or “tainted” woman in his eyes.

As the scene with her uncle shows, Shirley is guided by her own convictions about morality, and refers to no one else as the expert who can inform her about what is moral and what is not. Françoise Basch states this is a general trend in Charlotte Brontë's heroines:

> [Charlotte Brontë's heroines'] morality has the same air of autonomy. Charlotte's heroines go their own way, uncorrupted and incorruptible, recognizing no outside authority. (Basch 164)

III.IV EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER IN GENERAL

For the purposes of evaluating Shirley's character as a whole, the novel provides indications as to many other characteristics that Shirley possesses, which possibly influence the unconventional attitudes mentioned above. The first important characteristic that should be mentioned is that she has a man's name, because her parents had wanted a son but only had one daughter. At the time, Shirley was a common masculine name, after the publication and circulation of the book, it became a popular name for women (“Shirley” Wikipedia). This is the explanation in the novel when she first makes her appearance:

> Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed) - Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress: she was agreeable to the eye. (204-205)

Partly influenced by this fact and partly by being the owner of her own estate, she affects masculine manners. For example, the fact that she whistles, owns pistols and knows how to use them are some aspects of her lifestyle that can be termed masculine. Because she owns a mill, she also has an interest in commercial matters, which are generally deemed to be a man's realm, and conducts business. She herself states, while talking to Mr. Helstone, that this makes her feel 'gentleman-like':

> Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire! Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position: it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood, and when I see such people as that stately Anglo-Belgian - that Gérard Moore before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentleman-like. You must choose me for your churchwarden, Mr. Helstone, the next time you elect new ones: they ought to make me a magistrate and a captain of yeomanry - Tony Lumpkin's mother was a colonel, and his aunt a justice of the peace - why shouldn't I be?' (207)

Overall, the effect of her actions and words is to confound the roles society has defined between genders, and to raise questions about whether it is possible for a woman to do the things men are expected to do with equal success. This confusion is of course against the ideologies of the period, which placed the woman completely outside the public sphere and the world of business. Rebecca Mc Laughlin asserts the same opinion:

> While Caroline only questions her conventional role in her uncle's household, Shirley Keeldar, Brontë's second heroine, represents a clear challenge to a Victorian ideology that deems 'the female brain [...] not equal to the demands of commerce or the professions', having 'no business mingling with men in a man's world'. Shirley, as an independent, wealthy land and mill owner, does more than simply mingle with men in her business dealings; she is their superior. Those

> critics, therefore, who read *Shirley* as a “proto-feminist" novel find Shirley representative of the possibility 'that a woman can find a satisfactory role for herself [...] and that women have the potential not only to survive in society but also to rule over it'. (Mc Laughlin 217)

Shirley has a self-confident, independent character which causes her to see herself as men's equal. Her statement that she sees herself as their social peer demonstrates this fact: “I consider myself not unworthy to be the associate of the best of them - of gentlemen, I mean: though that is saying a great deal.” (*Shirley* 217). Also, she believes that a woman and not just any man but what she calls ‘a great, good man' are equally indispensable, and for that reason not to be submitted to comparison:

> 'I would scorn to contend for empire with him, - I would scorn it. Shall my left hand dispute for precedence with my right? - shall my heart quarrel with my pulse? - shall my veins be jealous of the blood which fills them?' (221)

Shirley has her own ideas about marriage as well. Her telling Caroline that she would not marry if she thought she was going to be disappointed in her husband in particular and in men in general is proof that she approaches the idea of marriage with a certain discernment and even apprehension. She also shows in the same conversation that she is aware of the limitations marriage would bring – that she cannot walk away from it if it makes her unhappy. Apparently, the thought of being trapped in a miserable, boring union is frightful for her to contemplate. Overall, it is obvious that she does not think of marriage as the idyllic ending to a true romance and that she would not go into it blindly. Besides, she decidedly is not a young woman who waits for a husband and 'dreams' of getting married, as evidenced by her refusing the proposals of five respectable gentlemen. Instead, she has her own terms and conditions which would have to be met before she chose to marry a man:

> 'But, to tell you a secret, if I were convinced that [men] are necessarily and universally different from us - fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathising - I would never marry. I should not like to find out that what I loved did not love me, that it was weary of me, and that whatever effort I might make to please would hereafter be worse than useless, since it was inevitably in its nature to change and become indifferent.

> That discovery once made, what should I long for? To go away - to remove from a presence where my society gave no pleasure.'
> 'But you could not, if you were married.'
> 'No, I could not, - there it is. I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! - it suffocates me! Nothing irks me like the idea of being a burden and a bore, - an inevitable burden, - a ceaseless bore! Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be.' (218-219)

At this point, it might be appropriate to consider feminist critics' objections to free-spirited, self-reliant women characters marrying and putting themselves in an inferior or even subservient position:

> Those feminist critics who object to the marriages of Dorothea, Emma, and Shirley wish literature to provide better models for women. The feminist critic maintains that literature has indeed always provided those models and that up until now they have been mostly either very bad ones or very limited ones. Hence the quantity of articles dealing with female stereotypes in Greek mythology, American fiction, and Victorian literature: the mother, the harpy, the virtuous woman, the sensuous woman, the sentimental heroine, the bitch. The feminist critic calls for a literature that will show women active rather than docile, aggressive and ambitious rather than retiring and submissive, successful in forging their way through the world as heroes are, rather than content to be chosen by successful men. They desire to see other alternatives open to women than the extreme poles of courtship, marriage, and children on the one hand or disgrace, suffering, and death on the other. (Austen 551)

However, it cannot be said that Shirley's courtship and marriage with Louis Moore exactly depicts women in the light asserted by feminist critics and that all their reasons for objecting to marriage are valid in this case. For example, she can hardly be called docile in the scene where they declare their love for one another, her final acceptance of Louis' declaration is more like a challenge than acquiescence: 'Die without me if you will. Live for me if you dare.' (641) She also counters the similes or epithets he uses for her with her own: he calls her leopardess, she calls him Tartar, which is the name of her pet dog, he calls her his pupil, she calls him master –

meaning teacher. Neither is she chosen, she rejects the offers of several men who are of higher social and financial status than Louis, who think that *they* have chosen her. Instead, she chooses for herself, and her choice should also be given significance – it is a man who sees her duties as a husband as not only protecting, watching over but also *serving* her (645). Besides, she is active after her marriage in using her influence in the community to get Louis elected magistrate. Gisela Argyle also comments on how her fortune is used to do good:

> The crisis for [Shirley and Caroline] is resolved by a blurring of gender distinctions in the love matches, which is exemplified by the fact that the money belonging to the androgynous Captain Keeldar empowers all four protagonists finally to live profitably for self and community. In Robert's daydream with Caroline, the realization of which is later witnessed by the narrator, "the houseless, the starving, the unemployed, shall come to Hollow's mill from far and near" (p. 598) to prosper under the care of the millowner Robert, the squire Shirley, the magistrate Louis, and the teacher Caroline. (Argyle 747)

One critic even claims that the ending with two marriages should be read parodically. The facts that the final chapter is humorously called 'The Winding Up' and mostly continues in that vein, that the narrator, at the beginning of the novel tells the reader *not* to expect a romance, and that romances usually end with weddings and the lovers living 'happily ever after', can be seen as supporting this theory:

> The narrator, in effect, tells us that the conclusion is a varnish, put on to feed her narratee's love of “the pretty and pleasing”. And Charlotte Brontë subverts our expectations that marriage can resolve the conflicts and fulfill our own narrative desires. The marriages, too, are a varnish “put on very nicely”.Thus, although the novel concludes with a pair of marriages, that ending should be read parodically. (Langland 27-28)

Shirley is a fearless woman as well, an attribute which is generally assigned to men. According to Caroline, this is even confirmed by Mr. Helstone, who does not think highly of women, and Shirley admits it herself:

> 'My uncle, who is not given to speak well of women, says there are not ten thousand men in England as genuinely fearless as you.'

> 'I am fearless, physically: I am never nervous about danger. I was not startled from self-possession when Mr. Wynne's great red bull rose with a bellow before my face, as I was crossing the cowslip-lea alone, stooped his begrimed, sullen head, and made a run at me"(270)

Her actions during the attack on Hollow's Mill are a testimony to her fearlessness. She is perfectly prepared to defend herself and Caroline when the rioters pass by the Rectory gates and she stands ready with a pistol in her hand. She then goes to Hollow's Mill with Caroline, shortly after the rioters, to watch what happens.

Another aspect of Shirley's character is that she is determined once she makes a decision and not easily intimidated. This is shown by her uncompromising attitude toward any rioters who may harm her property or the people on it:

> At present I am no patrician, nor do I regard the poor around me as plebeians; but if once they violently wrong me or mine, and then presume to dictate to us, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness and respect for their poverty, in scorn of their ignorance and wrath at their insolence.' (272)

Shirley is also intelligent and perceptive. She sees the negative outcomes of the set gender roles society has determined for women. She is aware, for example, of the futility that women's lives are degraded into while they live according to those roles and of the waste of their potential. In the French composition she writes, entitled *Le Premiere Femme Savante*, the young woman who is the main character thinks thus:

> She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, never seen, never needed, - a star in an else starless firmament, - which nor shepherd, nor wanderer, nor sage, nor priest, tracked as a guide, or read as a prophecy? Could this be, she demanded, when the flame of her intelligence burned so vivid; when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred disquieted, and restlessly asserted a God-given strength, for which it insisted she should find exercise? (496-497)

All these attributes make Shirley an exceptional and intriguing woman. Society, and in particular men, with the possible exception of Louis Moore, are unable to understand or make sense of her behaviour and words, as Tim Dolin suggests:

> Shirley, whether her talk is interpreted by men as “the chattering of a pie” or “a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue” is incomprehensible, a being of another kind; as obscure to them as her obverse, “the monstrous likeness of ourselves”, the mermaid, is to herself. .....Between the blue-stocking and the lovelorn maiden, between the chatter of women and the silence of nuns, Shirley and Caroline place themselves at the periphery of “their kind”, and at the Celtic periphery of the metropolitan men of politics. (Dolin 28-29)

The categorization used in the first chapter of the thesis can also be applied to the women characters in *Shirley*, in order to determine how they compare to the novel's heroine. Hortense Moore, Miss Ainley, Miss Mann and Mrs. Yorke belong in the first category of those who conform. Miss Moore, for example, spends hours sewing - a proper womanly activity - as she has been thought at a young age, and quarrels with the maid over domestic matters as she likes the Belgian way of doing things.

Caroline Helstone, the rector's niece belongs to the second category. She has spent only one year at school and been deprived of a satisfactory education. When she is treated coldly by Robert Moore, whom she loves, she thinks she will never marry and delves into philosophical reflections on the purpose of her life, what she is to do with the rest of it, and on being an old maid:

> 'I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health: half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave?'
> She reflected.
> 'I shall not be married, it appears,' she continued. 'I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence. I considered, somehow, as a matter of course, that I was growing up to the ordinary destiny, and never troubled myself to seek any other; but now, I perceive plainly, I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. I shall live to see Robert married to some one else, some rich lady: I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?' (179)

Her thoughts clearly show that she is mindful of the emptiness of a woman's life if she does not marry, and that this emptiness is caused by her having nothing to do, by

society providing her no options to occupy her time meaningfully. Yet she feels powerless to do anything to change this, and in the end she does marry and conform to standards.

As a woman who flees from her abusive husband to earn her own living, Mrs Pryor falls into the third category. The fact that she abandons her child just because the child looks like her husband gives an idea as to how abusive that husband must have been. She also prefers a hard life working as a governess under an assumed name to living with her husband, because she has no legal way out. She openly criticizes the inadequacy of existing laws with strong words: This world's laws never came near us - never! They were powerless as a rotten bulrush to protect me! - impotent as idiot babblings to restrain him!' (442).

Rose Yorke also belongs to the third category of those who do act. Even at a young age, she has come to the understanding that women are forced to lead a cloistered life and decided that that is not what she wants for herself. She says as much to Caroline, whose life she sees as a 'slow death': I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory.' (409). By using a pun on words, she also expresses her opinion that women's talents and potential should not be wasted:

> And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will not deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will not commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will not prison it in the linen press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all, mother' - (she got up from the floor) - 'least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder.' (410-411)

Critics Gilbert and Gubar also draw attention to this speech of hers, and the imagery she uses:

> Using language that exploits all the imagery of imprisonment in a context that illustrates how the woman's domestic lot enlists her as a jailor of herself, Rose proclaims her refusal to

> live 'a black trance like the toad's buried in marble' .” (Gilbert&Gubar 389)

In a look into the future, the narrator shows that Rose actually fulfills her intentions, she is shown as dying in a foreign country. She has apparently lived a real life, acted on her opinions and traveled abroad.

Mrs. Horsfall the nurse is a character who apparently falls into none of these categories. She is what can be called a most 'unwomanly' woman in appearance and behaviour: she is like a giantess in size, her behaviour is rough and she drinks. In a way she puts Robert Moore in the place of the damsel in distress: he is placed in an unassailable place at the top of the house, guarded by a wicked woman and in need of 'rescue'. Mrs. Horsfall is also likened to a dragon: “In other respects, she was no woman, but a dragon.”(579)

It is necessary as well to compare Shirley to the other women characters who are the subject of this study. One important point to note is that she is not as tried as the other three women. She does not have an abusive husband like Helen, she is not pressured by society to make a marriage that is against her conscience, like Maggie. Neither does she live separated from her husband, trying to earn her own living, and striving for women's rights, like Clara. One cannot judge, therefore, how she would have reacted to such trials. But there is no evidence to suggest that she would not have run away from her husband, or finally resigned herself to death rather than marry against her conscience, or become a suffragette. It is probable that, had her limits been tried like theirs, she would have reacted in the same way under similar circumstances.

CHAPTER IV

MAGGIE TULLIVER

The Mill on The Floss is mainly the tale of Maggie and Tom Tulliver's lives. The two are brother and sister, the children of Mr. Tulliver, who owns Dorlcote Mill, and his wife, Mrs. Tulliver. As a miller, Mr. Tulliver wants Tom to have a good start in life and eventually assume an advantageous position in society, so he sends him to a private tutor. Maggie, meanwhile, stays at home. Mr. Tulliver, as he is in the habit of doing, opens a lawsuit against one of his neighbours, claiming that the neighbour's irrigation is causing loss of waterpower to his mill. When he loses the lawsuit, and learns that the mill has become the property of a man he hates - the opposing side's lawyer, Mr. Wakem - he suffers an attack and becomes incapacitated for a while. He is finally forced to accept operating the mill for Mr. Wakem in return for a salary, but declares his undying enmity for the man, and even has this recorded in the family Bible. Tom, who finds a job with the help of his uncle, also works to help his father reclaim the mill.

Meanwhile, Maggie decides to follow the path of self-denial after the misfortunes that befell their family. However she secretly furthers her friendship with Philip Wakem, Mr. Wakem's hunchback son whom she had first met as Tom's fellow-student. Tom learns of their meetings and forbids Maggie to see him again, because of the enmity between their families, also making her promise to stay away from him. Later, Mr. Tulliver attacks Mr. Wakem in a fit of anger and causes him to fall from his horse. He has a stroke immediately afterwards and dies within a few hours. When Maggie is invited by her cousin Lucy to a social gathering where Philip will also be present, she asks Tom to free her of her promise not to see him and Tom consents.

During her visits to Lucy's house, Maggie meets Stephen Guest, whom Lucy expects to marry. The two become attracted to one another, although Maggie considers herself engaged to Philip. One day, the two are left alone to go on a boat trip together, when both Lucy and Philip excuse themselves from coming. They go too far down the river to go back on the same day, and return to town by a different boat, where Stephen refers to her as his 'wife'. He pleads with her to marry him, telling her that their excursion will be considered an elopement and that people will expect them to marry. Maggie refuses because she thinks they would be wronging Lucy and Philip, and leaves Stephen. When word of their excursion and its not resulting in marriage spreads in the town, she is treated coldly and shunned by almost everyone, but most importantly by her brother. The only people who look on her kindly are her mother, Dr. Kenn and Bob Jakin, who takes her into her house. One night, while she sits thinking, she sees the flood waters entering Bob's house. She gets hold of one of the boats, and her first thought is to go to the mill to save her mother and brother. When she gets there, she finds only Tom. She takes him into the boat, but it capsizes when it hits a huge piece of machinery carried along by the flood. Brother and sister drown together.

The facts about Eliot's childhood – her closeness with her brother, her growing up on a farm - and the subsequent estrangement from her brother because of her relationship with Lewes, strongly suggest that she drew from her own life and experiences while depicting Maggie. Literary critics also express the same view. Elizabeth Ermarth, draws attention to the parallels in detail between Eliot's life and Maggie's, as well as suggesting a possible motivation she might have had in writing such an end to Maggie's story:

> George Eliot, born the same year as Maggie, left her brother Isaac, who was born the same year as Tom; she left her home of thirty years for London and despite the hard and lonely beginning she never went back. Maggie went back and her fate is the strongest possible argument and justification for doing the opposite: for doing precisely what George Eliot did in leaving her home behind. (Ermarth 601)

Abba Woolson, for her part, claims that with Maggie's tale Eliot aims to defend her choice to live with Lewes: Nowhere, so far as we know, does she more

directly justify her course, unless it be in the novel which is generally recognized as a picture of her early life.(Woolson 119) She also states that Maggie's particular situation is an example of a recurrent pattern seen in other novels by Eliot : “All [Eliot's] novels are different presentations of this one case – of the superior young woman *versus* society; and though nature and right are both on her side, society always wins.” (Woolson 93)

IV.I SOCIAL NORMS

As in the previous novels, the society depicted in *The Mill on The Floss* also has norms of its own, which it expects all of its members to comply with. Maggie grows up often frustrated by these standards. She feels that they are unjust, but there is usually very little she can do to change things.

One social norm that Maggie becomes acquainted with very early on is about education. Boys, as they are expected to be involved in business and public matters when they grow up, are given a comprehensive education. Girls, on the other hand, are not provided with such an opportunity. They receive only a perfunctory education, which Eliot calls “shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history” (293), for a much shorter period of time. It is also worth noting that the narrator's words here show Eliot's own awareness of the issue. Boys are even taught Latin, which does not have much immediate practical use for them other than giving them a literary background, because it is the tradition. Indeed, one critic argues that it can even be called a rite of passage specially reserved for boys:

> Until well into the nineteenth century, Walter Ong points out, “learning Latin took on the characteristics of a puberty rite, a rite de passage, or initiation rite: it involved the isolation from the family, the achievement of an identity in a totally male group (the social), the learning of a body of relatively abstract tribal lore inaccessible to those outside the group.”(Armstrong, 132)

In spite of this, Maggie shows she is better at understanding Latin than Tom, when she helps him with his homework. She is also intensely aware of the unequal

opportunities presented to herself and to her brother, as can be understood from her musings:

> If she had been taught 'real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew' she thought she should have held the secret of life; if she had only books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew! (291)

She knows that her potential is cast aside by lack of education, that she could have become whatever it was in her to become if she had acquired more learning. Her reading the few books at home, then Tom's course books and later the books Philip brings can be seen as an attempt to rebel against the denial of education. Her personal perspective and society's notions of proper behavior do not agree with one another, as Reynolds and Humble indicate: "...she continues to act independently and to educate herself; Maggie is unable to reconcile approved behaviour with her intellectual and emotional insights." (Reynolds&Humble 20)

However, any further education for girls is considered superfluous by accepted norms, as they will not have any need for it in what they are ultimately meant by society to become: wives and mothers. What they are supposed to learn, instead, is how to be a good housewife, how to do household tasks like cooking, cleaning etc. Sewing is one of these tasks. Maggie does not like sewing, for example she calls patchwork 'foolish work' when she is only nine, in the second chapter of the novel. Later, when her family is placed in a difficult financial position by her father's bankruptcy, she only does it for economic support to her family and sees it as 'self-mortification' (Book 4, Ch. 3). She is clearly not comfortable with the tasks she is expected to fulfill, which are meant as preparation to equip her for her future role. Bushnell points out the effects of this sort of education on girls:

> That "early education" forced girls to become little mothers very early on, to give up any attempt at self-expression except through the narrow channels offered by a patriarchal society. Maggie confronts such inequities and stifling social expectations throughout her life. (Bushnell)

The outward appearance, as well as the behaviour of girls is judged according to certain norms. Girls are supposed to look pretty, be clean, wear bonnets and be obedient – like Maggie's cousin Lucy - neither of which Maggie has much intention

of doing. She cuts her own hair, for example, because people always comment on how it will not stay smooth. Her mother's sister, Aunt Glegg, reproaches her severely for what she has done:

> "Fie, for shame!" said aunt Glegg, in her loudest, severest tone of reproof. "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread and water,--not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles." (65)

Mrs. Glegg's comments make it clear that doing such a thing against norms should bring with it not only the consequence of reprimand, but also that of severe punishment – too severe for a child. This makes norms more like a kind of unwritten law, where the punishments for various kinds of crimes are predetermined by general consensus.

Girls are also not expected to speak their minds on important matters, but to keep silent and follow men's judgement. When Maggie goes against this convention and upraids her aunts and uncles for being unwilling to help her father, Tom says she should be guided by him:

> "But it's always the same, Maggie," said Tom, with the little frown he put on when he was about to be justifiably severe. "You're always setting yourself up above me and every one else, and I've wanted to tell you about it several times. You ought not to have spoken as you did to my uncles and aunts; you should leave it to me to take care of my mother and you, and not put yourself forward. You think you know better than any one, but you're almost always wrong. I can judge much better than you can." (237)

Maggie tells her mother and Tom that they should not find fault with her father when he loses the mill, and again she tells her father not to have his enmity recorded in the family Bible. She is clearly for speaking her own mind on matters, and telling people what to do if she considers them to be doing wrong.

Maggie is also cognizant of the restrictions that social norms place upon her as a woman and her powerlessness due to those restrictions, however there is not much that she can do to remedy this in practice, except maybe to defy Tom. Being unable to find gainful employment is one of the limitations imposed by norms. When Tom implies that he shows his affection for his father by working to pay his debts, instead

of going against his wishes by meeting with Philip Wakem, she states that she will not submit to him because she cannot work, or because he is her brother. She does not recognize either of those qualifications as warranting her obedience:

> “I have a different way of showing my affection.”
> "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world."
> "Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can."
> "So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right. I will submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit to it from you. You boast of your virtues as if they purchased you a right to be cruel and unmanly, as you've been to-day. Don't suppose I would give up Philip Wakem in obedience to you. The deformity you insult would make me cling to him and care for him the more." (355)

Later, when Maggie asks Tom to release her from her promise not to see Philip again, Tom makes a similar claim that his doing business in the world outside and being more 'worldly-wise' than his sister gives him the authority to judge what is good or bad for her in her stead:

> "Yet you might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you. (401-402)

Having first been incapacitated by society - and men as part of that society - through limitations, women are rendered ineffective and of secondary importance. Elizabeth Ermarth remarks on women's inferior place in the society of St. Ogg's:

> In St. Oggs one is either male or not-male, and while there may be a way to be a proper female, in a deeper way to be not-male means merely to be wrong or inferior in some essential way. For a woman in this society to be "right" means accepting a place that is defined for inferior creatures, always adjunct to the more significant activities of men. (Ermarth 588-589)

The narrator of the novel also comments on how in certain instances, like Maggie and Stephen's assumed elopement, public opinion, which is the force that determines social standards, is always female:

> Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender,--not the world, but the world's wife; and she would have seen that two handsome young people--the gentleman of quite the first family in St. Ogg's--having found themselves in a false position, had been led into a course which, to say the least of it, was highly injudicious, and productive of sad pain and disappointment, especially to that sweet young thing, Miss Deane. (502)

This 'world's wife' is in a way the conceptualized form of the English country ladies that Charlotte Brontë's narrator in *Shirley* described. She sees anything differing at all from herself and her values, her standards as wrong, even fallen as in Maggie's case. Maggie tries to resist the false public opinion in St. Ogg's against her, to hold on to a place in the community by finding a means to live, but she fails. This public opinion is also heavily judgmental, as indicated by the chapter title 'St. Ogg's Passes Judgement'. It reaches verdicts on what she *should* have done: “Why did not Miss Tulliver accept the shelter offered her by her aunt Glegg? It did not become a girl like her to refuse it.” (518-519), and again on what sort of character she *must* have: “She must be very bold and hardened to wish to stay in a parish where she was so much stared at and whispered about.” (519).

IV.II PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN

There is plenty of evidence in *The Mill on the Floss* about how society in general and men in particular perceive women, in the characters' stated views on the subject. Maggie's character and behaviour, as with the previous women characters in this study, is often at variance with these perceptions.

Mr. Tulliver and Mr. Wakem, the lawyer, provide good illustrations as to how men see women. Being a farmer as well as a miller, Mr. Tulliver draws his parallel from among farm animals when talking about Maggie:

> "The little un takes after my side, now: she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid," continued Mr. Tulliver, turning his head dubiously first on one side and then on the other. "It's no mischief much while she's a little un; but

> an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep,--she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." (8)

He apparently sees women as comparable to sheep to be sold, as a sort of possession. The fact that he makes this comparison about his daughter gives an indication to her worth in his eyes. He also thinks that women should not be too intelligent: "A woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt." (13)

The lawyer, Mr. Wakem, is more educated than Mr. Tulliver. However, this does not stop him from entertaining a low opinion of women. He also sees women as a kind of property or commodity, and their closest male relatives as being their owners. This can be understood plainly from his words to his son Philip, when Philip states that he wants to marry Maggie:

> “We don't ask what a woman does; we ask whom she belongs to. It's altogether a degrading thing to you, to think of marrying old Tulliver's daughter." (436)

Mr. Glegg's – Aunt Glegg's husband's- views on the subject, as reported by the narrator, are somewhat better than those of the previous two. He relies more on religion and on the account given in Genesis of woman's creation. He thinks women are creatures made out of a man's rib, have 'contrary' natures and that thei chief duties consist of doing household work – making pastry, rolling napkins etc:

> And his second subject of meditation was the "contrairiness" of the female mind, as typically exhibited in Mrs. Glegg. That a creature made--in a genealogical sense--out of a man's rib, and in this particular case maintained in the highest respectability without any trouble of her own, should be normally in a state of contradiction to the blandest propositions and even to the most accommodating concessions, was a mystery in the scheme of things to which he had often in vain sought a clew in the early chapters of Genesis. (120)

> ...and yet he thought Mrs. Glegg's household ways a model for her sex. It struck him as a pitiable irregularity in other women if they did not roll up their table-napkins with the same tightness and emphasis as Mrs. Glegg did, if their pastry had a less leathery consistence, and their damson cheese a less venerable hardness than hers; nay, even the peculiar combination of grocery and druglike odors in Mrs. Glegg's

> private cupboard impressed him as the only right thing in the way of cupboard smells. (122)

In answer to a question of Tom's, the verdict of his tutor, Mr. Stelling, about women's intelligence is that their understanding is superficial, although prompt. He claims that they could never study or work at anything in depth:

> "Mr. Stelling," [Maggie] said, that same evening when they were in the drawing-room,"couldn't I do Euclid, and all Tom's lessons, if you were to teach me instead of him?"
> "No, you couldn't," said Tom, indignantly. "Girls can't do Euclid; can they, sir?"
> "They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say," said Mr. Stelling. "They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow." (150)

When Tom makes fun of her on this subject later, she feels dejected, as if Mr. Stelling's pronunciation has doomed her in some way:

> Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie, behind Mr. Stelling's chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called "quick" all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom.
> "Ha, ha! Miss Maggie!" said Tom, when they were alone; "you see it's not such a fine thing to be quick. You'll never go far into anything, you know."
> And Maggie was so oppressed by this dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort. (151)

Maggie is faced with a 'destiny' that is essentially created by preconceived ideas like Mr. Stelling's, the basis for which is questionable. Although she does not like to accept this view, there is really no avenue open to her in which she can prove otherwise. Again, Tom's words on her becoming a clever woman show that it may not be such a desirable thing after all – he claims it will likely make her a conceitful person and an object of hate:

> "Well, *you'll* be a woman some day," said Tom, "so you needn't talk."
> "But I shall be a *clever* woman," said Maggie with a toss.
> "Oh, I dare say, and a nasty, conceited thing. Everybody'll hate you." (147)

Critic Elizabeth Ermarth observes that such preconceived notions about intellect and capacity place one sex above the other, and automatically put women at a disadvantage:

> ...less obvious, perhaps, is the fact that the norms Maggie struggles with are sexist. They are norms according to which she is an inferior, dependent creature who will never go far in anything, and which consequently are a denial of her full humanity. (Ermarth 587)

As demonstrated by Mr. Glegg's thoughts on women and on his wife, which were touched on earlier, Mrs. Glegg sets her standards of being a woman by how well her housekeeping is. The same is true of her sister, Mrs. Tulliver:

> Mrs. Tulliver's view of the whole duty of women befits a Dodson sister: it is to make beautiful elderflower wine; it is to keep her clothes tidy so no one can speak ill of her, for she does not "wish anybody any harm" (implying with her usual logic that if she keeps her clothes neat she will somehow be wishing her neighbors well); it is to make pie fit to "show with the best" and to keep her linen "so in order, as if I was to die tomorrow I shouldn't be ashamed." (Ermarth 591)

This demonstrates how women's perceptions of themselves are determined by what they have been taught from an early age about women's duties and place in society.

IV.III MORALS

Morals are another matter in which Maggie's and society's perspective often disagree. Maggie has her own innate sense of morality, which is later influenced by her reading of Thomas a Kempis. She is for having pity and compassion for one's fellow mortals when they do wrong, and being aware of one's own faults, not just congratulating oneself on one's virtues. She makes her opinions known when she is talking about Tom's hardness and desire to punish her, after he discovers her and Philip's meetings :

> "I don't want to defend myself" said Maggie, still with vehemence; "I know I've been wrong,--often, continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had

> them. If you were in fault ever, if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you; I should not want punishment to be heaped on you. But you have always enjoyed punishing me; you have always been hard and cruel to me; even when I was a little girl, and always loved you better than any one else in the world, you would let me go crying to bed without forgiving me. You have no pity; you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. It is a sin to be hard; it is not fitting for a mortal, for a Christian. You are nothing but a Pharisee. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues; you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a vision of feelings by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness!" (354-355)

Her boat ride with Stephen and its consequences is another point on which Maggie stands by her own judgement of right and wrong. According to the morals of the town of St. Ogg's, a young woman cannot go on a trip with a gentleman that lasts till the morning, and not be considered as having eloped. Such a situation necessitates immediate marriage, failing which the young lady's reputation becomes compromised, and she is deemed to be morally in grave error:

> Maggie had returned without a trousseau, without a husband,--in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. (503)

Maggie, however, does not consent to do as the community's morals dictate. When Stephen suggests they should get married, she refuses. She follows her own conscience, which is against causing Philip and Lucy pain by wronging them in such a way. She also does not want to be in the position of the woman who stole Lucy's prospective fiancée from her, which shows that she has a feeling of sisterhood with the members of her sex. This is a feeling that prevents her from acting in way that would be particularly hurtful for another woman.

In such a situation like Maggie and Stephen's, society automatically blames the woman, not the man, for being at fault. As the man is believed to be of a higher moral standing normally, he is considered the unfortunate, misled party who was led astray by the audacious, scheming woman: “it would have been more correct to say

that she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion." (503).

> As for poor Mr. Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise; a young man of five-and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases,--he is really very much at the mercy of a designing, bold girl. And it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself: he had shaken her off as soon as he could; indeed, their having parted so soon looked very black indeed--for her. (503)

Finally, the narrator of the novel demonstrates how the world's wife, or public opinion, who sits in judgment on Maggie in this affair, sets itself even above God due to its presumed responsibilities toward society: "No good could happen to her; it was only to be hoped she would repent, and that God would have mercy on her: He had not the care of society on His hands, as the world's wife had." (504).

After rumours about her trip with Stephen start circulating, Maggie is treated as a fallen woman by the townspeople, who cast 'unusual glances' (MF 505) at her. Dr. Kenn takes her part and tries to convince people that Maggie was not at fault, Stephen also sends a letter absolving her of all guilt, but it is to no avail. Dr. Kenn finds the struggle on his hands an impossible one: "he suddenly found himself as powerless as he was aware he would have been if he had attempted to influence the shape of bonnets." (517). He tries to find a job for Maggie at St. Ogg's, but fails.

The conduct of the women of the town also shows clearly how cruel women can be towards one of their own, when they perceive her as being at fault:

> The ladies of St. Ogg's were not beguiled by any wide speculative conceptions; but they had their favorite abstraction, called Society, which served to make their consciences perfectly easy in doing what satisfied their own egoism,--thinking and speaking the worst of Maggie Tulliver, and turning their backs upon her. (518)

This is an example of women siding with society and its harsh rules instead of with a lone, helpless woman in need of support, merely to satisfy their own opinions of themselves. From a feminist point of view it can be said that this amounts to a betrayal of the whole sex.

IV.IV EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER IN GENERAL

A look at Maggie's overall character at this point may give an idea as to why she goes against social norms and disagrees with perceptions about women, what guides her actions and why she fails.

From childhood, Maggie is not what is expected of a girl her age: she is tomboyish, always getting her pinafore dirty by romping about outdoors, she can't tolerate the procedure of having her hair curled and her mother cannot keep her in bonnets. In short, she does not fit into the confines that define what a 'proper' little girl should be. Her physical aspects – having unruly hair, her skin being darker in color than the Dodsons – meet with her aunts' disapproval, as well as her wayward behavior. Judith Mitchell describes her with reference to the ugly duckling story: Maggie Tulliver has occasionally been cited as an ugly duckling of literature and possibly as a prototype for George Eliot herself (Mitchell 20).

Maggie has an affectionate character, but her feelings of affection for her family are not rewarded or reciprocated, especially by Tom. On one occasion, for example, when she hugs Tom and accidentally spills his wine this is the reaction she receives:

> [Tom] must have been an extreme milksop not to say angrily, "Look there, now!" especially when his resentment was sanctioned, as it was, by general disapprobation of Maggie's behavior.
> “Why don't you sit still, Maggie?" her mother said peevishly.
> "Little gells mustn't come to see me if they behave in that way," said aunt Pullet.
> "Why, you're too rough, little miss," said uncle Pullet.
> Poor Maggie sat down again, with the music all chased out of her soul, and the seven small demons all in again. (92)

Her display of fondness for Tom earns rebukes from four people at once, therefore discouraging her from behaving in a similar way again. Her family does not understand her craving for love, which always makes her eager to win their approval, not their reproval. She is most eager to win Tom's affection particularly, and cannot bear it when he is displeased with her, as, for example, is the case when she forgets to feed his rabbits and they die of neglect. Tom is often cruel towards

Maggie and withdraws his affection from her when he is disappointed with her behavior, knowing that that is what would injure her the most. Both the people around her and the environment in which she lives disallow her receiving what her spirit needs:

> Maggie, thirsting for the education which is wasted on her brother Tom, longs also, with passionate ardor, for greater love and sympathy than his colder heart can give. ...Thus her mind craves instruction, her heart love, her nature support. All these we find denied her by the circumstances of her lot. (Woolson, 58)

Maggie is often inclined to do what she feels to be right, without much thought for how her actions may be viewed by others. She is a young woman who speaks her mind when she deems it necessary, as seen in some of the examples given earlier. Also, when she first refuses Stephen, she does not care for what other people will think of her decision: "But among her thoughts, what others would say and think of her conduct was hardly present." (492). She stands by what she has decided, by her own sense of right and wrong, for as long as possible, and tries to resist being directed by false public opinion about her. The words *resistance, determination, unswerving* are used to describe her attitude during this period. She refuses to give up easily and leave:

> I will not go away because people say false things of me. They shall learn to retract them. If I must go away at last, because--because others wish it, I will not go now. (509)

Instead, she chooses to continue to live in the surroundings that are familiar to her, even if it has to be in isolation: “Unable to make 'a world outside' herself as men do, she forces herself back from the affair with Stephen into isolation, searching, as Philip reminds her, for 'a mode of renunciation that will be an escape from pain'.” (Bellringer, 54)

Maggie is also independent in spirit, if she cannot always be so in fact. After Tom rejects her because she has not married Stephen, she wants to earn her own living and not be dependent on anyone:

> But she was not without practical intentions; the love of independence was too strong an inheritance and a habit for her not to remember that she must get her bread; and when other projects looked vague, she fell back on that of returning

> to her plain sewing, and so getting enough to pay for her lodging at Bob's. She meant to persuade her mother to return to the Mill by and by, and live with Tom again; and somehow or other she would maintain herself at St. Ogg's. (505)

Placed in a situation at home where she is neither emotionally nor intellectually satisfied, where her spirit is stifled by her family, her environment and the financial difficulties of her family, she silently protests against her underprivileged circumstances:

> She rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness; and fits even of anger and hatred towards her father and mother, who were so unlike what she would have them to be; toward Tom, who checked her, and met her thought or feeling always by some thwarting difference,--would flow out over her affections and conscience like a lava stream, and frighten her with a sense that it was not difficult for her to become a demon. (292)

However her protest is mostly a silent one, she does not have the power to rebel actively, other than in small ways. Her running away to the gypsies, or meeting in secret with Philip can be seen as such small rebellions.

They may also be seen as signs of an unwillingness to grow up, which is what Bushnell argues is true in her case: "[*The Mill on The Floss*] tells the story of a girl who cannot and will not grow up (Maggie dies at nineteen), because she searches for better, more fulfilling answers than those offered by the adult world confronting her." (Bushnell)

Similarly, Elaine Showalter suggests that Maggie finds growth and living in the real world of adults, where she would have to struggle to continue her existence – earn her own living, live by adult rules - too painful:

> Maggie is the progenitor of a heroine who identifies passivity and renunciation with womanhood, who finds it easier, more natural, and in a mystical way more satisfying, to destroy herself than to live in a world without opium or fantasy, where she must fight to survive. This heroine, like Maggie, has moments of illumination, awakenings to an unendurable reality; but she quickly finds a way to go back to sleep; even death is preferable to the pain of growth. (Showalter)

Maggie's death, or what Elizabeth Ermarth terms her 'long suicide', is in many ways a failure. She fails to truly resist false public opinion, she fails to make a stand

for herself before Tom and St. Ogg's, and she fails to continue her existence in spite of a disapproving society. For this reason, her fate can be seen as as much a cause of dissatisfaction for feminist critics as marriage was shown to be in the previou chapter. The discrepancy between George Eliot's own life and Maggie's end is another factor that displeases feminist critics, as Austen states: “The particular anger against George Eliot rises from her failure to allow this freedom for her heroines even though she achieved it herself.” (Austen 55)

However, this failure, which critics state is shared by her other heroines, can be seen in a different light. If the reason for the failure is considered, rather than the fact itself, it assumes a more positive aspect. It becomes a means for exposing the root causes leading to it, mainly the unjust social norms and false perceptions in society and points the finger at society as the real culprit that dooms women to disappointment. This is why one critic claims failure is important in women's writing:

> George Eliot's females fail in the sense that...they can find no social medium for their desire outside domestic wifedom. Her ardent espousal of Dutch realism is not only a political endeavor to expose the distorted social system but also a protest against the hegemonic aesthetics that has devalued the feminine and its failure; feminine subjectivity as the experience of failure is the ultimate story to be written and remembered in women's writing. (Cho 152)

It is possible to evaluate Maggie and Tom's actual deaths being the end of the novel as an author's compromise between social convention and her subjective feelings: “An ending has to be devised which will at once satisfy conventional morality and Marian's own sentimental weakness for the relationship of Maggie and Tom.” (Hanson 227) Death is probably also the only way left for Maggie to be free, as she does not want to leave the places and people she knows, and as no one in St. Ogg's is willing to give her a job to sustain herself. She really has no options left, no means for living independently, when the flood comes. So death can be seen as representative of freedom for her: “the realm of freedom, the place where she can give herself most freely, is the space of death.” (Dillon,712).

A comparison between Maggie and the other women characters shows that there is really only one prototype for the rest of the women in the novel. And that is

the type of woman belonging to the category of those who conform with society's standards. All of Maggie's aunts and Lucy fit into this description. Lucy, in outward appearance and behaviour, is correct in every way, the image of the proper young lady - never getting her clothes dirty or indulging in naughty behaviour, her hair always in place. Mrs. Tulliver even regrets that she is not her daughter, instead of Maggie.

The Dodson sisters - Aunts Pullett, Glegg and Deane – can be considered the standard of what is proper for married ladies. Household duties and womanly concerns such as following the latest fashion in bonnets, having the best lace etc. are all that interest them. Mrs. Glegg, for example, reproaches Mrs. Tulliver for having 'unmatronly' curls (The Mill 51) and tells her when she should serve dinner and what food would be more 'becoming' for her to serve, for the purpose of economizing. When their sister's husband faces bankruptcy, the three find it most regrettable that the linen with their family name embroidered on it will have to be sold, as well as Mrs. Tulliver's china. Such behaviour makes them fit to be termed "textbook cases", if the conduct books for women published in the 19th century were to be taken as textbooks for womanhood. Patricia Ingham describes the subject matter of these publications:

> In conduct books for women where the coding of femininity was reflected, shaped and passed on, there is a bizarre blend of moral injunctions and practical recommendations on household management. ...Fitted into a broad framework laying down the most essential feminine quality as disinterested kindness and selflessness are recommendations as to regularity and judgment in the provision of household linen; advice on supplying food in some variety but in moderate quantity; and on how to keep the all-important domestic hearth. (Ingham, *Language* 22)

Maggie's father's only sister, Mrs. Moss, on the other hand, is also an epitome of womankind in another way. She is the image of fertility, a kind of earth mother figure, with her eight children. Although not happy with the financial and physical difficulty of looking after so many children, she sees it as her lot in life and is resigned.

Thus, there are only two comparable types of women in *The Mill on the Floss*. One is Maggie, who is aware of the restrictions placed upon her by society but cannot act on this awareness, except for her passive resistance to marriage, and the second is all the rest, who conform. This makes *The Mill on The Floss* the only novel among those analysed in this study that does not include women of the third category, who act to resist the injustices of social norms. It tells instead of women that one would be more likely to encounter in real life in the England of the early 19th century, the large majority who would not or could not rebel.

CHAPTER V

CLARA DAWES

For the purposes of this study, the previous three novels having furnished an understanding of how women see women – with regard to the three topics under discussion - and what sort of characters they create as representatives of their sex, examining the women characters of D. H. Lawrence, a male writer, and his view of women will provide a more balanced evaluation.

Before this evaluation can be made, however, the major events in the plot of *Sons and Lovers* need to be considered. The novel starts with the marriage of Gertrude and Walter Morel. Gertrude, who comes from a middle-class family, meets Morel, a miner, at a Christmas party. She is charmed by his different aura and fine dancing, he is fascinated with her because she is a real lady, and they get married. However, Mrs. Morel soon becomes dissatisfied with the financial difficulties of being a miner's wife and with Morel's coarseness of manner, and regrets her decision to marry him. They have four children, William, Annie, Paul and Arthur. As the children grow up, Mrs. Morel's life becomes more and more of a trial for her. Her husband drinks and wastes the little money he earns in pubs. When she complains of this, he physically abuses her. Their children, especially William and Paul, grow up hating their father for what he has done to their mother. To fulfill herself through her children's success in life becomes Mrs. Morel's only hope and purpose. As William enters adulthood he slowly rises in the world of business and eventually finds a job in London. He also finds a girlfriend, Lily, of the type his mother approves of, a lady. However, she has nothing to recommend her other than her good looks and pleasing manner, and is too shallow for William. Pushed into a corner about Lily and overworked, he catches pneumonia and dies. Paul becomes Mrs. Morel's next source of hope.

Paul often visits Willey Farm, the home of some friends of his mother's, and becomes friends with the young people in the family – the sons and the daughter Miriam. He gives her lessons in French and mathematics. Over time, their relationship deepens into love, but of a largely spiritual kind, owing to Miriam's religious character. At the age of fourteen, Paul starts to work at Jordan's Surgical Appliance Factory. He and Miriam eventually have sex years later, because of Paul's desires, but it is not satisfactory for either of them. Paul sees that he does not want to marry and breaks off with Miriam. Meanwhile, he has been introduced to Clara Dawes, a woman who is living apart from her husband and is a member of the suffragette movement. Both are strongly attracted to one another and start having an affair. Mrs. Morel finds out that she has cancer, and after months of illness, Paul and Annie decide to put morphine in her milk and end her pain. She dies, and later Paul breaks up with Clara, who goes back to her husband, Baxter. Paul is devastated at the death of his mother, but somehow goes on with his life, knowing he has to survive.

As for Lawrence's own ideas and experience of women, which can be assumed to have had some influence on his writing and his women character, his mother was a great influence on him in his early life, like Mrs. Morel is on Paul. She was a woman aware of the inequality between men and women, and frustrated with the existing situation of women in society. Lawrence himself describes her and her contemporaries as shaping the characters of their children:

> My Mother's generation was the first generation of working-class mothers to become really self-conscious, the woman freed herself at least mentally and spiritually from the husband's domination, and then she became that great institution, the character-forming power, the mother of my generation. I am sure the character of nine-tenths of the men of my generation was formed by the mother: the character of the daughters too. (qtd. in Dix 20)

He clearly understood that women were mostly impotent in many areas of social life, such as the business world or politics, and that they needed to express their aggravation at being hindered in this way. This is probably due to the fact that, in addition to his mother's influence, he also met and became friends with intellectual women who were members of the suffragette movement, Louie Burrows and Alice Dax. This gave him the opportunity to see things from politically active women's

perspective. So far as his ideas about the relationship between man and woman are concerned, he did not see man as the superior party and the woman as always deferring to him. He rather saw it as a partnership of equals, and acknowledged their differences, as indicated by his own words:

> But the man who wrote "It is as is life were a double cycle, of man and woman, racing opposite ways, travelling opposite ways, revolving upon each other..reaching forward with outstretched hand, and neither able to move till their hands have grasped each other...each travelling in his separate cycle" was not trying to establish a pattern that can loosely be described as male chauvinist, that of dominant man seeking submission of woman. He was trying to find something different. (Dix 69)

These ideas and the impressions he gained from the women he met are reflected in his literary works – for example, Carol Dix suggests that Clara Dawes was possibly modeled on Alice Dax (Dix 32). However, some feminist critics claim that his writing is not reflective of the sympathy for women his close acquaintance with these friends would normally indicate. They state that he sees the male as superior and accuse him of misogyny, as Carol Siegel points out:

> Although D. H. Lawrence has always had some strong supporters among academic feminists and, in the last few years, has gained in this area, the predominant opinion among feminist literary critics is that his writing exemplifies misogynist discourse. The critics promoting this view of Lawrence often concede that some sympathy with the feminist movement of his time is apparent in his work up through *The Rainbow,* but after that they see what has been called a "turn against women" and, more specifically, a turn against feminism. That Lawrence was interested in feminism early in his career and familiar with the work of important early feminist theorists, such as Olive Schreiner, is common knowledge. (Siegel)

If his works are against women as perceived, this is certainly not what he himself intended. In a letter to a female friend written in 1912, Lawrence makes his intentions clear: " I shall do a novel about Love Triumphant one day. I shall do my work for women, better than the suffrage." (Lawrence, *Letters* 85). His aim is obviously to speak *for* women, even more successfully than women political activists, not against them. Not all critics are of the opinion that his writing is male-biased, however. Nancy Armstrong argues that his ideas about sexuality at least are

in common with women's:

> Again we find that the male author, someone like D. H. Lawrence, for instance, shares a notion of sexuality with women that similarly breaks down the distinctions between masculine and feminine discourse maintained in novels throughout the nineteenth century. (Armstrong 145)

V.I. SOCIAL NORMS

The norms of the society Clara Dawes lives in are somewhat different from those in the previous three novels, as the novel is set in a different period. The beginning of the twentieth century in England is a time when women had organized themselves politically to demand the right to vote, and this organization – the suffragette movement – and the demonstrations they held on the streets in major cities had become a fact of life. Thus, society put members of this movement in a different category, and judged them by another set of standards, which did not necessarily make going against existing norms acceptable, but can be considered an adaptation to the existence of views diametrically opposed to it. Paul's conversation with Mrs. Morel after he goes for a walk with Clara indicates this phenomenon. Mrs. Morel is concerned about Clara's reputation, and Paul says there is no reason for her to be:

> ‘But won’t people talk?’ she said.
> ‘Why? They know she’s a suffragette, and so on. And what if they do talk!’
> ‘Of course, there may be nothing wrong in it,’ said his mother. ‘But you know what folks are, and if once she gets talked about—-' (358)

As Clara is known to be a suffragette, it is apparently within the norm of behaviour expected from her to 'walk about' with another man, not with her husband. As she tells Paul, she does not regret what she has done (358) and has already shown herself defiant of the existing social standards that would cause people to talk, which is what Paul points out to his mother:

> ‘Well, my dear, she lives separate from her husband, and talks on platforms; so she’s already singled out from the sheep, and, as far as I can see, hasn’t much to lose. No; her life’s nothing to her, so what’s the worth of nothing? She goes with me—it becomes something. Then she must pay—we both must pay! Folk are so frightened of paying; they’d rather starve and die.’ (359)

Clara also has a style of dress – an outward expression of her radical ideas - that goes against the expectations of society: “She wore a large, dowdy hat of black beaver, and a sort of slightly affected simple dress that made her look rather sack-like. She was evidently poor, and had not much taste.” (223) She is not well-groomed and perfectly dressed as considered appropriate for women.

Her lifestyle in itself can be seen as an affront to the social norms she is actively protesting: she lives separately from her husband, with her mother, works in a factory and for a while at Jordan's; she is the breadwinner in the house, is politically active and speaks on platforms for women's rights, and later she also goes to live with another man, Paul, while still married. All of these are unacceptable notions for the society she is living in.

Something else that would be considered completely inappropriate by the general public is that she voices her own desires in her relationship with Paul, as Carol Dix alludes to:

> So despite his protestations to Miriam, Paul was not simply attracted to the sensuous woman ... but to the type of woman who had worked out her own place in the world, and was able to express her own sexuality. He needed that, as would any man. (Dix 32)

She also certainly plays an important role in Paul's life because she facilitates his sexual growth: “After all, it was Clara who taught young Paul Morel the ways of the world and he had a lot to admire in her.” (Dix 3)

V.II. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN

As a member of a movement that fights against unjust or false perceptions about women, especially men's, Clara is well educated about what those perceptions are

and opposes them almost militantly at every turn when they are expressed – even when they are not voiced seriously, as is the case with some statements Paul makes to her in the early days of their acquaintance. She fiercely defends a fellow-suffragette, for example, when Paul voices his opinion about her:

> ‘I think she’s a lovable little woman,’ said Paul.
> ‘Margaret Bonford!’ exclaimed Clara. ‘She’s a great deal cleverer than most men.’
> ‘Well, I didn’t say she wasn’t,’ he said, deprecating.‘She’s lovable for all that.’
> ‘And, of course, that is all that matters,’ said Clara witheringly.
> He rubbed his head, rather perplexed, rather annoyed.
> ‘I suppose it matters more than her cleverness,’ he said; ‘-which, after all, would never get her to heaven.’
> ‘It’s not heaven she wants to get—it’s her fair share on earth,’ retorted Clara. She spoke as if he were responsible for some deprivation which Miss Bonford suffered.
> ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I thought she was warm, and awfully nice—only too frail. I wished she was sitting comfortably in peace—-‘
> ‘‘Darning her husband’s stockings,’’ said Clara scathingly. (270)

Clara clearly thinks that all men share the same false ideas about women, such as that they should stay at home doing 'womanly' work like darning stockings, and blames all men for the opportunities women are deprived of.

She articulates her opposition to such unjust perceptions in more public settings as well, such as in a gathering of family and friends at Willey Farm. During a discussion there she objects to the notion that women should not be equal with men in the labour market and that their work is deserving of less payment because they do not support a family. This passage was cut out of the first publication of the novel by the editor:

> The conversation turned again on the point whether women's wages should be equal with those of men. Mrs. Leivers upheld that men had families to keep, Clara said, so much work should have so much pay, man or woman. Mr. Leivers was inclined to agree with her. Whatever Mrs. Dawes had said, Paul would have taken sides against her. He argued that a woman was only an accessory in the labour market, and

> that, in the majority of cases she was a transitory thing, supporting herself alone for a year or two. Clara quoted the number of women who supported father, mother, sisters etc. (273)

She also shows her strong contempt for the perception of woman as a perpetual ‘damsel in distress' that the knight – the man - has to save and fight for, as someone always in need of protection and not allowed to fight her own battles. This is in reaction to an innocuous comment Paul makes when she, Paul and Miriam go for a walk and see a man leading a horse:

> ‘What a treat to be a knight,’ [Paul] said, ‘and to have a pavilion here.’
> ‘And to have us shut up safely?’ replied Clara.
> ‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘singing with your maids at your broidery. I would carry your banner of white and green and heliotrope. I would have ‘W.S.P.U.’ emblazoned on my shield, beneath a woman rampant.’
> ‘I have no doubt,’ said Clara, ‘that you would much rather fight for a woman than let her fight for herself.’ (274)

V.III. MORALS

Clara's actions also indicate that she has her own sense of right and wrong, and that she does not give much weight to society's notions of morality. When her husband treats her brutally and is unfaithful to her and she feels trapped, she thinks herself justified in leaving him although she does not divorce him. Later, when she falls for Paul, she tells him that she does not feel as if she has done something morally wrong in being with him: ' “You don't feel criminal, do you?” She looked at him with startled gray eyes. “Criminal!” she said. “No.” ‘(357-358). When he also asks if she feels they have been sinful, she gives the same answer: ' “Not sinners, are we?” he said, with an uneasy little frown. “No,” she replied.' (358).

Neither does she voice regret and say her actions were wrong later on in their relationship. In terms of society's moral values, the case is just the opposite. Considered from that point of view, and judging by the fact that her simply going for a walk with Paul can cause concern about what people will say, her behaviour is

completely immoral and sinful, as she is having sex with another man while married, and committing adultery.

Among the women characters studied in this thesis, Clara also is the one who takes to the most extreme point the principle of following one's own morals against all public opinion. None of the other three women even consider having an affair while still married. Helen ends her friendship with Gilbert after he learns the truths about her life, with the intention of never seeing him again. Shirley considers even a proposal based on financial concerns and false expectations unacceptable. Maggie too, even though she is not officially engaged to Philip, can not envisage starting a relationship with Stephen and 'wronging' Philip. Thus, probably owing to the fact that she is living at a later time period when society has become somewhat less strict, as well as to her character, Clara takes the most radical stand of them all against the moral values of society.

V.IV. EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER IN GENERAL

Clara's whole character is in many ways influenced by her beliefs about women's rights and her activism. Signs of her defiant character, probably an effect of her being a feminist, can even be seen in the way she carries herself, as the first description of her shows:

> She had scornful grey eyes, a skin like white honey, and a full mouth, with a slightly lifted upper lip that did not know whether it was raised in scorn of all men or out of eagerness to be kissed, but which believed the former. She carried her head back, as if she had drawn away in contempt, perhaps from men also. (223)

She likes to be independent and do as she pleases, as is evidenced by her earning her own money, leaving her husband when he cheats on her, and choosing to be with Paul. In doing these things, she does not feel anxiety about what people will say or how they will judge her, and is guided only by her own judgement. She has a sense of self-worth as well, that makes her demand to be treated with respect, which is what she says Paul did not do, when they are breaking up.

As a member of a movement defending women's rights, she also displays a feeling of solidarity and sisterhood for individual women, like Miriam. She defends Miriam to Paul when he complains that Miriam asks too much of him by demanding that they have a kind of spiritual communion, and tries to show him that he does not really understand her:

> '... Something in me shrinks from her like hell—she's so good, when I'm not good.'
> 'How do you know what she is?'
> 'I do! I know she wants a sort of soul union.'
> 'But how do you know what she wants?'
> 'I've been with her for seven years.'
> 'And you haven't found out the very first thing about her.'
> 'What's that?'
> 'That she doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you.'
> He pondered over this. Perhaps he was wrong.
> 'But she seems—-' he began.
> 'You've never tried,' she answered. (321)

Again, when he tells her she has broken up with Miriam, she asks him if he hasn't treated Miriam badly (352). She does not merely shy from behaviour that would be detrimental to other women, like Shirley And Maggie, she also actively defends them against men, tries to make them see things from the women's point of view.

If the categorization used in the earlier chapters of this thesis is to be used, then clearly, there are no women characters in *Sons and Lovers* who fall into the same category as Clara. Mrs. Morel is the only one who comes close, but her activity is limited to joining the Women's Guild, where women "discuss the benefits to be derived from cooperation, and other social questions" (69), and reading papers there. She is not involved in any political movement; neither can she do anything other than try to resist her husband's violence, even by offering violence herself, and hope to be fulfilled through her children's success, as she has been disappointed in her marriage. This is how Carol Dix describes her:

> The mother, Gertrude Morel, is well known as the thwarted, frustrated young woman, of middle-class origin, who fell for a miner because he danced well, married him and lived to regret her marriage and life, in the dull tenements of Nottinghamshire collieries, and the poverty-stricken, argumentative family life that became her lot. (Dix 29)

Miriam Leivers, compared with Clara, also falls into the second category, like Mrs. Morel. At the farm, all she does is housework – clean,cook, sew etc. - and farm work. What is more, she is scolded harshly by her mother if she does not come up to standard on that. She wants to have a real education and actually do something, other than housework. She knows she has little opportunity to do so because she is a woman, and expresses her frustration to Paul:

> 'I want to do something. I want a chance like anybody else. Why should 1, because I'm a girl, be kept at home and not allowed to be anything? What chance *have* I?'
> 'Chance of what?'
> 'Of knowing anything—of learning, of doing anything. It's not fair, because I'm a woman.' (185)

She is contrasted with her elder sister Agatha , who has become a school-teacher. She is also somewhat envious of her: "Agatha, who was fair and small and determined, had rebelled against the home atmosphere, against the doctrine of 'the other cheek'. She was out in the world now, in a fair way to be independent." (207). At the end of the novel, she does manage to make some change in her situation and be like Agatha by going to a farming college, where she has a chance of becoming a teacher.

Scott Sanders compares Clara with both Mrs. Morel and Miriam, and states what differentiates her from them:

> Like Mrs. Morel, she is unhappily married to a man whom industrial work and scanty education have brutalized. Like Miriam, she has sought to escape her position through education, with the result that she finds factory labor more confining and demeaning than before. Unlike the other two women, however, she is a militant feminist, seeking to achieve the collective advancement of women and to regain a sense of her own dignity through the feminist movement.
> (Sanders 46)

Annie can also be seen as one of the women who are aware of women's position in society as she also becomes a teacher and starts to earn her own living. Mrs. Leivers, on the other hand, who is deeply religious, belongs firmly in the group of those who conform. She even advocates the idea that men should receive more

wages than women for doing the same amount of work, because they have families to look after.

Of the characters analyzed in this study, it can be said that Clara is the most radical. She breaks with conventional morality, takes up political activism and vigorously defends women's rights. She may not have broken the law like Helen, bu sh certainly defies all social norms and preconceived notions about women by her behaviour, lifestyle, words and even clothes.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The four novels chosen for this study, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Shirley, The Mill on the Floss* and *Sons and Lovers* all portray women characters that struggle against unfair norms, illogical perceptions and rigid morals of the society in which they live. They all find a different source of strength for this struggle: Helen relies on her professionalism as a painter, Shirley on her wealth and estate and Clara on her political convictions, while Maggie only has her conscience. The difficulties they face are also various: Helen and Clara contend with brutal and debauched husbands, Maggie faces being left without means to live and Shirley has to confront an uncle who tries to tyrannize her. Chronologically speaking these portrayals of women are not in a progressive order according to the degree of their defiance. Helen and Shirley are women beyond their times, Helen probably most of all, Maggie constitutes a step back because she ultimately fails, and Clara is a woman of her time.

However, all four women are involved in modes of behaviour and speech that can in some aspects be termed 'feminist'. In using this term, the period in which each novel was written needs to be kept in mind, as what was later called the feminist movement did not exist when the first three were written. Nor were social or legal conditions ripe for the envisioning of such women characters as modern feminists would like to see portrayed in literature.

Instead, judging by the subject matters of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Shirley* and *The Mill on The Floss*, what Anne and Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot wrote can be seen as the beginnings, in literature, of what would transform into feminism, as small steps in that direction, as Mary Pringle points out:

> In just the nineteenth century, for example, Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot forcefully dealt with women's rebellion against a male-dominated culture. All of these writers wrote of the constraints of feminine life and the "marriage plot". If what they wrote was not ideology, it was what would come to be known as "feminist." (Pringle, Roller and Smith 237)

It can be said that these contributions towards literature that dealt with injustices and inequalities suffered by women provide precedents or cautionary examples for women of later generations, whether they be real women or fictional characters in a novel. Anne Brontë relates how a young woman decides to escape from her husband. Charlotte Brontë tells of a young woman who confounds men with her bravery, her unique religious convictions and the masculine manners she adopts. George Eliot tells of the defeat of Maggie, who is more intelligent than the ordinary people around her, and who wishes to fulfill her potential by leading a better existence, but ultimately is forced to surrender to society and to her conscience.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the aspects of femininity George Eliot draws attention to by doing so and making such a character as Maggie her heroine, are more positive - compared to what Charlotte Brontë is able to say through her heroines - pointing to not what women lack but what they possess and what sets them apart from men spiritually:

> While Brontë curses the fact that women are denied intellectual development, Eliot admits the terrible effects of this malnourishment but also implies that emotional life is thereby enriched for women. While Brontë shows how difficult it is for women to be assertive, Eliot dramatizes the virtues of a uniquely female culture based on supportive camaraderie instead of masculine competition. While Brontë dramatizes the suffocating sense of imprisonment born of female confinement, Eliot celebrates the ingenuity of women whose love can ...make "one little room, an everywhere". And while Brontë envies men the freedom of their authority, Eliot argues that such authority actually keeps men from experiencing their own physical and psychic authenticity. (Gilbert&Gubar 498-499)

D. H. Lawrence, for his part, reflects a type of woman that one could easily encounter in real life in the second decade of the twentieth century in England. Due to the fact that he writes at a later period than the other authors, he is able to portray

an even more emancipated woman. As a male writer, he records the phenomenon of suffragettism and feminism in the character of Clara Dawes, who lives independently, defends women's rights in public settings and conducts her love-life as she chooses. In a way, he portrays in her the culmination of what the earlier women authors were wishing their heroines to achieve and chronologically is able to reap the benefits of both the earlier women writers' works and the efforts of early or proto-feminists.

To conclude, the four women characters analyzed in this thesis – Helen Huntingdon, Shirley Keeldar, Maggie Tulliver and Clara Dawes – all defy existing social norms, perceptions about women and ideas about morality to some extent. The one who can be considered most noncompliant with social norms is Helen Huntingdon, as she goes against the law – the epitome of social norm- in running away with her child. Clara Dawes and Maggie Tulliver both reject society's morals. Clara does so to a greater degree as she has an affair with another man while married, but Maggie also is involved in such a rejection as she refuses to be forced into a marriage that society's morals impose upon her. And Shirley Keeldar is the one who most strongly rejects preconceived perceptions about women as she assumes the manners and authority of a man as an heiress.

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