

Charlotte Brontë's Books of Revelation:
Apocalyptic and Prophetic Allusion in the Novel

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A Thesis Presented to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the degree
of Master of Arts for the Department of English

Ottawa, Canada
September, 1994



Linda Morra, Ottawa, Canada 1994



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ISBN 0-612-15653-2

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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Charlotte Brontë's Books of Revelation

The Bible proved to be a rich resource for Charlotte Brontë; with the exception of The Professor, Brontë's novels are saturated with references to prophecy and apocalypse. These allusions are crucial underpinnings in her novels, for they give shape to character, theme, and plot, even as the significance of these allusions alters with Brontë's own darkening vision.

The introductory chapter analyses the religious and cultural milieu out of which Brontë's novels flourished. The second chapter examines how the prophet is closely aligned to the "poet"~and consequently, both the novelist and the narrator of Jane Eyre. The third chapter examines how prophecy affects the narrative structure in Shirley. The final chapter of the thesis examines revelation in Villette and how it may reveal and conceal: this ambiguity suggests a shift in the prophet's role from divine oracle of God's word to the overwrought imagination susceptible to interpretive subjectivity.

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. I authorize the University of Ottawa to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Linda Morra

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my deepest and sincerest thanks to my thesis supervisor, Professor David Lyle Jeffrey, without whom this thesis would be a sprawling, loosely focused work. I am indebted to him for his bountiful wisdom, support, advice, and time.

Also, my thanks to Professor Aida Hudson for listening to my ideas in their embryonic state; to Professor Fred Flahiff who advised me to opt for a thesis and whose lectures on the Brontës in my undergraduate course were the inspirational source which initiated my passion for the "weird sisters"; and to Professor Irena Makaryk for taking the risk and permitting me to do a thesis with such short notice.

Finally, thanks to Graziella Schieda, Colleen Crawley, Clare Todd, Mark Morra, Russell Fowler, Rachel Touzalin, Marco Timpano and Greg Maillet (in no particular order) for listening and--when they could get a word in--occasionally advising me; to Paula Greenwood, the administrative saint at the Graduate Department for English, for all of her assistance and time; and to my parents for their unconditional support, patience, encouragement, love and prayers, even when they had no understanding of what I was babbling about.

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Chapter One: The Beginnings

I have endeavoured to not only attentively observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself . . . I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print.

Charlotte Brontë to Robert Southey, March 16th, 1837
Elizabeth Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë

You both of you dwell too much on what you regard as the artistic treatment of a subject. Say what you will, gentlemen, say it as ably as you will--truth is better than art . . . Ignorant as I am, I dare to hold and maintain that doctrine.

Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, 1849
Winifred Gerin, Charlotte Brontë and the Evolution of Genius

Mr. Currer Bell needs improvement, and ought to strive after it; and this . . . he honestly intends to do--taking his time, however, and following his guides Nature and Truth. If these lead to what the critics call art, it is all very well; but if not, that grand desideratum has no chance of being run after or caught.

Charlotte Brontë, March 16th, 1850
Elizabeth Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë, 403

When Patrick Brontë asked young Charlotte what her favourite book was, she responded unhesitatingly, "the Bible"(Gaskell,94). As the daughter of a fervent Evangelical Minister, Charlotte Brontë was, from earliest childhood, immersed in religious training and thought. She not only received instruction in the Bible, but was also exposed to her father's published tracts and to his sermons, which often focused on "eschatology and the signs of the times"(Larson, Sages 66). It is of no surprise, therefore, that the Bible captivated her interest and proved to be a rich resource for Charlotte Brontë's creative endeavours: as observed by her Belgium instructor, M. Héger, "Elle était nourrie de la Bible"(Gaskell,238). As she continued to publish, however, her novels conformed less and less to evangelical expectations because of her own growing scepticism about the legitimacy of particular theological doctrines. Despite this scepticism, Brontë's novels are saturated with references to prophecy and to apocalypse, with the exception of her earliest--and, after revision, her latest--novel, The Professor. These biblical references are crucial underpinnings in the major novels, giving shape to character, theme and plot, even as the significance of these allusions alter with Brontë's own transforming vision.

To understand how biblical allusion functions in Charlotte Brontë's texts, it is necessary first to grasp a sense of the religious and cultural milieu which shaped her own ideas. Although Brontë's knowledge of the Bible and of religious ideas was fostered largely by her father, it was also nurtured by biblical ideas and practices which were an integral part of Victorian culture. Church attendance in almost any given religious sect was observed faithfully each Sunday and readings from the Bible and The Common Book of Prayer were a part of everyday routine:

[There was] daily Bible study and exegesis in the family circle, with key texts taken up in the accompanying prayers; the familiar uses of

cross-references to texts in tracts, the marginalia of the Pilgrim's Progress and the Bible itself; and the often unconscious adoption of biblical words and phrases in normal discourse, all help to make the use of biblical texts for illustrative purposes a habit of mind. At home and in his place of worship, the 'man in the pew' used allusion to support his views and to underpin his faith. (Wheeler, 15-16)

Evidently, it was customary for the Victorians to absorb religious teachings and, consequently, for such teachings to influence their behaviour and their actions:

"Christian faith was characteristic of the frame of mind"(Houghton,21). Given the pervasiveness of and the widespread attention to the Bible, it is obvious that religious ideas and biblical principles were at the forefront of people's interests. Within Yorkshire itself, the district in which Charlotte Brontë lived, Elizabeth Gaskell observed that religious tradition was manifested in "the fact that the Old Testament names in general use among the Puritans [were] the prevalent appellations in most Yorkshire families of middle or humble rank, whatever their religious persuasion [might have been]"(63).

Despite the overwhelming evidence of religious ideology and practices both in Victorian society and in the Brontëan home, the specifics of Charlotte Brontë's own religious persuasion are much more elusive. According to Gaskell, Charlotte's mother came from a family who adhered to Methodism; however, her father maintained slightly different views:

With his dislike of Calvinists and Puseyite priests, and his wish to avoid the excesses of personal election on the one hand and baptismal regeneration on the other, Mr. Brontë did occupy a fairly central position with regard to church discipline, upholding the good old plan of the Church of England . . . He was . . . at the receiving end of the two great streams, closely connected with one another, which had revitalised religion in Great Britain, Methodism and the Evangelical movement. (Winniffrith,35)

It is easy to conjecture that "much of what the Brontës saw, heard and read was concerned with religion"; however, it is much more difficult to determine "how their original minds reacted to the variety of religious beliefs they encountered" (Winnifrith,28-29).

Charlotte Brontë's religious beliefs can be ascertained to a certain degree from what she reveals in her letters, essays and novels. Most obviously, her uncompromising belief in God and His divine mercy may be inferred from her correspondence. Even when her brother Branwell's condition worsened and even when his demise was followed by the loss of two more sisters within a span of seven months, Charlotte "held fast" to her "profession" as a Christian, and found solace in her faith. Thus, she writes on March 24th, 1848:

These things would be too much, if reason, unsupported by religion, were condemned to bear them alone. I have cause to be most thankful for the strength that has hitherto been vouchsafed both to my father and to myself . . . the crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion; the desolate after-feeling sometimes paralyzes. I have learnt that we are not to find solace in our own strength; we must seek it in God's omnipotence. Fortitude is good; but fortitude itself must be shaken under us to teach us how weak we are! (Gaskell,364)

Charlotte's acute suffering was mitigated by her belief that "our overcast lot is not singular" and by her submission to God's divine will(Gaskell,460). According to Gaskell, Brontë believed that God had an ultimate plan which governed human life:

She said, in her own composed manner, as if she had accepted the theory as a fact, that she believed some were appointed beforehand to sorrow and much disappointment . . . that it was well for those who had rougher paths, to perceive that such was God's will concerning them, and try to moderate their expectations, leaving hope to those of a different doom, and seeking patience and resignation as the virtues they were to cultivate. . . there was some good reason, which we

should know in time, why sorrow and disappointment were to be the lot of some on earth. It was better to acknowledge this, and face out the truth in a religious faith. (Gaskell, 510)

Accordingly, the notion that suffering is the mark of God's elect and ultimately part of His divine plan surfaces in both Jane Eyre and Villette. Yet, Brontë's belief in the necessity of suffering changes with time: in Jane Eyre, Jane's suffering is confined to particular moments in her life and in retrospect she understands why such suffering is necessary; in Villette, Lucy Snowe *believes* she suffers because she is one of God's elect, but is not granted an explanation. Lucy's fundamental position as God's elect, moreover, is undermined by narrative events.

As Charlotte became more ambiguous about the purpose of earthly suffering, so her attachments to particular doctrines became more relaxed. In one of her earlier letters, her stringent opinion about all other religious sects is asserted:

My advice to all Protestants who are tempted to do anything so besotted as turn Catholic is, to walk over the sea on to the Continent; to attend mass sedulously for a time; to note well the mummeries thereof; also the idiotic, mercenary aspect of all the priests; and *then*, if they are still disposed to consider Papistry in any other light than a most feeble, childish piece of humbug, let them turn Papists at once--that's all. I consider Methodism, Quakerism, and the extremes of High and Low Churchism foolish, but Roman Catholicism beats them all. (Gaskell,240).

Yet Charlotte's own beliefs, sometimes Calvinist in nature, altered and softened--evidently affected by her brother's conduct and ensuing death. When her brother died, she was able to assert with conviction that "he is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last--rests well, after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life--fills and quiets my mind now"(Gaskell,302). She no longer condemned religious differences, but remarked that "certainly it is more in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel to preach unity

among Christians than to inculcate mutual intolerance and hatred"--a notion which reverberates in Villette as Lucy asserts that "I saw nothing to hinder [Presbyterians, Lutherans and Episcopalians] from being one day fused into one grand Holy Alliance, and I respected them all, though I thought that in each there were faults of form"(Gaskell,292;Villette,513). As it will become evident in the ensuing chapters, Jane Eyre, Shirley and Villette reflect Brontë's changing religious beliefs.

Her particular interest in the prophetic is nourished "from her youth upward in deeply biblical Yorkshire" and seems to become most obvious in her work in Belgium; specifically, in her *devoir*, "Vision and Death of Moses on Mount Nebo," she writes of Moses "looking down upon the Promised Land, [as] he sees [the Israelites's] prosperity in prophetic vision"(Larson, Sages 66;Gaskell,238). Janet Larson aptly traces the different sources for Charlotte's knowledge of prophecy, beginning with her father's sermons, to the fictional stories created in the nursery and composed of "apocalyptic visions of total destruction and recreation" to Brontë's "own book of prophecy foretelling Angria's downfall"(Larson, Sages 66). Charlotte Brontë's interest in prophecy, however, was not singular: religious practice and thought particularly related to eschatology and to prophecy had been integral to English society for years. Although prophecy was the subject of an ongoing exegetical debate for centuries--"a concern of professional scholars, and a respectable way of saying things about God, man, and their relationship in society and history"--and although Christianity, specifically fundamentalist Christianity which nourished ideas about prophecy, was strong in the early nineteenth century, the French Revolution particularly revived an interest in prophetic, apocalyptic and Millennialist thought(Wheeler,7). Frank Wheeler

observes that consequently apocalypse "was discussed more publicly, and perhaps with more vehemence, than in any previous age"(Wheeler, 63).

In Christian historiography, the Millennium entails the return and reign of Christ on earth for a period of one thousand years(Jeffrey,509). Its establishment could be predetermined by a series of precursors, which, according to prophetic tradition, include "civil discord, war, drought, famine, plague . . . and an increase in sinfulness"(Cohn,35). Typically, an interest in the Millennium and in prophecy has tended to escalate when there is an increase in social or political discord, or great cultural changes--it arises, perhaps in any period, in part from a psychological need for security, for hope, and for a sense of justice:

[It occurred] when population was increasing, industrialization was getting under way, traditional social bonds were being weakened or shattered and the gap between rich and poor was becoming a chasm. Then in each of these areas in turn a collective sense of impotence and anxiety and envy suddenly discharged itself in a frantic urge to smite the ungodly--and by doing so to bring into being, out of suffering and inflicted and suffering endured, that final Kingdom where the Saints, clustered around the great sheltering figure of their Messiah, were to enjoy ease and riches, security and power for all eternity. (Cohn,60)

Although such notions differed from one religious sect to another, W.H. Oliver asserts that the common strand between all points of view was the transformation of current society through divine intervention:

The core of biblical millennialism was simple. It was a flexible predictive mechanism which showed how an existing condition of disorder would move towards a crisis, and how the crisis would bring on a new situation in which old wrong would be set right. The distinguishing millennial and apocalyptic feature is the accomplishment of this change by a miraculous and divine agency, an external power intervening decisively in human affairs. (22)

The French Revolution, and the political and social upheavals in England--brought about in part by the industrial revolution--led many people to believe that they were on the brink of the thousand year reign. That particular interest in eschatology and prophecy was renewed in the Victorian era because many individuals looked to prophetic fulfilment as a means of setting straight the "deplorable" state of society and morality.

Such a way of thinking also affected one's consideration of time and, in particular, the notion of temporal closure. The Millennium, mentioned in Revelations, the last book of the Bible, is structurally the closing or the grand finale, in which all will be ordered harmoniously:

The Greek word for revelation is "apocalypse," and the climax of Christian teaching is the "revelation" or Apocalypse at the end of the Bible which tells us that there is an end to time as well as a beginning and a middle, a resurrection as well as birth and a death; and that in this final revelation of the unfallen world all mystery will vanish . . . it moves on to a new heaven and earth (ie, an earth renewed or revealed in the form of heaven), in which the chaos of nature becomes our own garden, as in Paradise, a world no longer continuously perceived but continually created. (Frye, Symmetry 35)

Because the Millennium is in the last biblical book which dramatizes the end of our concept of time, it presupposes that there is a beginning and a middle to history--in short, it suggests that history has an observable order and pattern. The notion of "endings" was of great importance to the Victorians: for example, it was conventional to invoke the image and device of marriage at a novel's close. Marriage at the end of a novel echoes the Apocalyptic symbol of closure of Christ's return for and marriage to his bride, the Church. As this "marriage" closes the Bible and fulfils its structure, so marriages in the Victorian novel--and in a number of other literary works--close and fulfil plot structure. Yet, the extent to

which this biblical notion of temporal closure can be linked to endings in Victorian fiction is affected by the extent to which confidence in the Bible's legitimacy as revelation is called into question.

In The Reader's Repentance, Christine Krueger examines marriage as a literary device used at the end of novels written by female writers in the early nineteenth century. According to Krueger, biblical allusion was an empowering technique which helped to legitimize a woman's writing; however, to conclude a novel with marriage was to undermine this empowerment. Using Elizabeth Gaskell as an example, she asserts that it was necessary to resist such closure:

As empowering as we have seen those evangelical narratives to have been, they were finally circumscribed by the resolution of apocalypse, symbolized by the marriage of Christ and the Church at the end of history.

To be a prophet in this tradition, as women preachers had been, meant consenting to this patriarchal representation of human events. What Gaskell aims for instead is a narrative to inspire feminist prophecy, a history without reconciliation, an apocalypse without marriage. (208)

When considering Brontë's novels, the notion of marriage as a kind of reconciliatory history is of great importance: her novels shift from the idealized and harmonized marriage of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre to the inconclusive and anti-apocalyptic nature of Lucy Snowe's relationship with M. Paul Emmanuel in Villette. Such a shift in her novels parallels her increasing sense of religious doubt about theological certainties and also suggests that, perhaps for feminist purposes, she refused to accommodate the conventional marriage at a novel's close.

The inconclusiveness of Brontë's final novel, Villette, also correlates with the historical rise of individualism and subjectivity. Individualism had its roots in

Enlightenment development in both philosophic and theological thought: rather than a traditional reliance upon divine revelation and truth, philosophy and theology shifted towards emphasis upon human perception of truth. This shift made a great impact upon the writings and teachings of John Wesley, the Methodist preacher. Wesley's own teachings rested upon the Lockean-based notion "that religious truth is concerned with experiential presuppositions and that experience itself need not be non-religious"(Brantley,2). Because his theology was indebted to Lockean thought, Wesley believed that religious experience was perceived through the senses--that "experience is a complex process with elements each leading back to what the senses tell"(Brantley,13). Methodist preachers particularly invited this approach by encouraging their followers to read the scriptures, to interpret them and to apply them to their own life and experience(cf. Joseph Scott in Shirley). In her study of the religious influence upon female novelists, Krueger observes that both John Wesley and William Law encouraged individualism:

The scripturally authorized individualism and practical piety . . . reemerged as an apparently apolitical spirituality in the writings of such evangelical High Anglican divines as the Reverend William Law . . . [who] exhorted [his] readers to personal scripture study and active evangelism . . . Evangelical hermeneutics, the driving force behind Law's call and Wesley's revival, holds scripture to be divinely inspired--the Word of God. Scripture itself imposes on the individual a duty to attend to the Word, the authority to interpret it, and the duty to spread it--to speak for God. (22)

A century later the Word of God was still considered to be the ultimate truth, yet for the Victorians, those truths were increasingly filtered through the vagaries of individual subjective experience. Although Brontë's personal faith may not have been affected, it is likely that exposure to such ideas had an impact on her writing.

It is also known that Brontë studied the Romantic writers who celebrated,

and therefore perpetuated, individualistic expression. The Coleridgean literary theory of the imagination, for example, emphasized the necessity of human interpretation and involvement in the acquirement of knowledge:

[His theory] stressed that all knowledge was acquired by an active integrating mental process; the passive receptivity assumed by the Lockean and empiricist notion of the 'tabula rasa' model of the mind was an impossibility. Thus in reading poetry we are not receivers of the word, we are, by definition, *participators* in it. (Prickett, Words 45)

Whereas Lockean ideology encouraged sense-perception or the reception of knowledge through the senses, Coleridge went one step further. He developed a theory which removed the (creative) interpretation from religious institutions into the hands of the individual who read the Bible and whose sense of God "had been translated from "outer" space to "inner"": "If this process of what is commonly called "internalization" had begun as far back as the Reformation, with its stress less on communal worship than on the individual's reading of the Bible in private, it had only come to completion with the Romantic movement" (Prickett, Reading 206). Reliance upon each individual's understanding of the scriptures, then, became fully operative by the Victorian era: Caroline Helstone in Shirley can thus assert her "right of private judgement" of Scripture (323).

Although the rise of individualism encouraged and elicited subjective responses, for the early part of the nineteenth century the Victorians persisted in believing that the Bible was the source of ultimate truth. Whereas scepticism became a characteristic of the later Victorian period, confidence in reason or intuition strove against that movement. When one experienced moral confusion, or theological uncertainties, it was always believed that the "truth" could be discovered eventually:

It is . . . faith in the existence of ultimate truths in religion and ethics, in politics, economics, and aesthetics (as well as in the natural sciences), and in the capacity of the human mind to discover them, by some form of reason or of intuition, which unites the partisans of every school. That, one is tempted to say, is the intellectual certitude in Victorian England. But it is a great one, for on such a foundation the universe can be held together: it can remain rational.
(Houghton,14)

If many Victorians had doubts about their faith, about theories being put forth and about established religious, social or political institutions, for the most part they never doubted that ultimate truths did exist and, consequently, did not doubt "their capacity to arrive at [that] truth"(Houghton,14). It is with this belief that Mr. Hale in North and South can assert that if "we know each other, and speak freely to each other about these things . . . the truth will prevail"(Gaskell,227). As the century evolved, however, such certainties about the discoverability of truth became increasingly destabilized: more frequently, knowledge was thought to be relative, and the understanding of these truths to be subjective. While the encouragement of individualism, which stimulated personal truth and judgement, undermined any possibility of one common objective interpretation, differing hermeneutical approaches towards the Bible and controversies introduced by religious factions undermined adherence to absolute truths:

In England in particular, the question of the status of scripture posed problems of peculiar, even unique, urgency and complexity. A hundred and fifty years of Protestant/Catholic controversy had produced no decisive hermeneutical outcome--but rather, a growing awareness of the ultimate subjectivity of biblical interpretation.
(Prickett,Words 39)

The varying practices of biblical hermeneutics--most notably, typology and Higher Criticism--became another source of growing doubts and of subjectivity.

These social upheavals and divergent hermeneutical practices resulted in an irrevocable breaking off from decaying medieval institutions. As Houghton suggests, such a time of great change in which traditional ways of thought were breaking down inevitably evinced a sense of anxiety from the Victorians:

From their perspective it was the medieval tradition from which they had irrevocably broken--under Christian orthodoxy under the rule of the church and civil government, under the rule of king and nobility; the social structure of fixed classes . . . old opinions, feelings, ancestral custom and institutions [were] crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds [were] darkened by the shadow of change. (Houghton,15)

The Victorian period was one in which atheistic tendencies were becoming more prominent--a movement which was opposed because "it was then assumed, in spite of rationalist denials, that any collapse of faith would destroy the sanctions of morality; and morality gone, society would disintegrate. [It was an age] in which the opinion was that religious belief was necessary for moral and social purposes was universal, and yet real belief was feeble and precarious"(Houghton,58). Since morality was inextricably linked to religion, religious doubts caused alarm about the possibility of chaos and anarchy. Thus, there were two countermovements operating simultaneously in the Victorian period--one of increasing doubt and another of resurgent faith.

The renewal of faith in the Victorian period had, as one of its literary manifestations, "a great, almost astonishing, revival of biblical typology"(Landow,3). George Landow, in his study Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows, examines typological hermeneutics which became a common approach to reading the Bible in the nineteenth century. As an approach to reading the Bible, it always involved the connection of "types" with "antitypes":

Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is and leads to, is a degree of history, or more accurately, of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning and point is, and so become an antitype of what has previously happened. (Frye, The Great Code 80-1)

A typological approach to the Bible entails a movement towards the future and the eternal world, "the two things coinciding with apocalypse or Last Judgement"(Frye,85). The "prophet" or biblical expert is confronted with "effects" which must be unravelled and eventually traced back to the "causes"; thus typology --the linking of two time periods, "the second of which is said to 'complete' or 'fulfil' the first"--ostensibly "provides a meaningful structure to human history"(Landow,5).

Yet, typology itself begins to shift from reliance on biblical scriptures towards reliance upon human understanding of these scriptures because, in part, of the Romantic emphasis upon human participation in reading and in interpreting poetic works--an emphasis which was developed further by John Keble in his Lectures on Poetry. According to Prickett, Keble's work on the poetic amalgamates two different biblical approaches and, in doing so, places greater emphasis upon human interpretation:

The Prayer Book and the Gospel are essentially 'poetic' because they compellingly assert the truth. What Keble has done, in effect, with the poetic theory of religious language, is to bring together two very different stands in biblical hermeneutics. On the one hand, he has preserved the ancient Augustinian and typological tradition of reading these scriptures in terms of hidden layers of meaning only to be unravelled by the patient reader with prayers and study. On the other hand, in line with the common movement of Romantic aesthetics, he

has shifted the *origins* of this encoding process from the inscrutable workings of God, and the Fall, to the mind of the human biblical writer. He has, in effect, *psychologized* typology, thus providing a direct link between Augustine and Freud. Typology is not now the cryptic structuring of the Holy Spirit, but the basic mode of the unconscious mind. (Prickett, Words 47)

Since "typology was based upon a non-canonical belief that God had dictated every word of the Bible," confidence in typology as divine order was also undermined as doubts about the Bible's authority increased and, consequently, as the Bible was seen less and less as a source of divine and objective truth(Landow,55).

In particular, Higher Criticism, which had its roots in Germany, focused its attention on the Bible as a poetic work rather than a historical artifact. In his study, Romantics and Victorians, Stephen Prickett examines how the Victorian period had two contrary movements, one of innovation, and one of conservatism: conservatism was the response to the innovative ideology being put forth by Higher Criticism which undermined the Bible's authority and divinity. Innovative ideology attacked traditional approaches to reading the Bible because it suggested that "the Bible had to be read . . . as the record of the myths and aspirations of an ancient and primitive Near Eastern tribe"(186). German biblical scholarship--influenced by geological discoveries which demonstrated that the earth was older than suggested by biblical records--suggested that "the scriptures had evolved over a long period of time," and not within the time frame outlined within the Bible(Landow,56). Such an approach undermined both the Bible's validity as a historical document and previous faith in sacred interpretation because the historical legitimacy of God's Word was no longer guaranteed (Prickett, Words 13). The emphasis, therefore, was necessarily placed on the Bible's moral and

developmental qualities, rather than its historical validity.

In response to this religious doubt and ensuing anxiety, various intellectuals stepped forward with their own agenda, assuming the role of "prophet" to point out sources of societal and political failures and corresponding possible solutions. Yet, these "prophets," Houghton suggests, heightened the prevailing sense of doubt and confusion:

As one prophet after another stepped forward with his program of reconstruction, the hubbub of contending theories, gaining in number as the century advanced, and spreading out from the intellectuals to the large audience of the periodicals, created a climate of opinion in which, quite apart from any specific doubts, the habit of doubt was unconsciously bred. One had an uneasy feeling, perhaps only half-conscious, that his beliefs were no longer quite secure. (12)

In the midst of such confusion, literary figures--poets and preachers--were increasingly being turned to for moral guidance and thus, became moral antennae for society, sensing change and responding appropriately. Novelists also saw themselves as artists with a religious mission, and were thus often seen as prophets; accordingly, the novel itself was looked to as the source which "answered the need for prophecy by making it a primary theme"(Laib,4).

Novelists could adopt the role of the prophet with more freedom in the Victorian period because its definition could be more loosely applied after "the Reformation issue of the "liberty of prophesying" [was] extended from the pulpit, where it was generally assumed to be confined, to the market place of publication . . . consequently the prophetic could have secular as well as sacerdotal contexts"(Frye,115). The "poet-as-prophet" convention which Carlyle and Victorian novelists, including Brontë, invoked had its origins in Romantic ideology. That convention in turn had classical antecedents--Sir Philip Sidney, for

example, in his A Defence of Poetry, recalls that the Romans called their poets *vates*, meaning a "diviner, foreseer, or prophet"(23). Although poets "were the first lawgivers both in religion and in society" in both Jewish and Classical Greek and Roman cultures, the Romantics revived the tradition with a special emphasis upon prophetic voice. In doing so, they were also mindful of the sometimes necessary social isolation of the prophet. Prophets are conventionally seen as foretellers; however, he or she was also the voice of social conscience and did not necessarily speak about theological issues, but was concerned about the moral condition of society. Brontë's praise of Thackeray as a contemporary Micaiah falls into this tradition because she responds to him as a novelist who stands apart from English society and who indicts its degenerated state.

As Wordsworth asserted, if the poet is perceived as prophet, the model for "poetic forms must also be the Bible"(Prickett, Words 117). Victorian novelists appropriately turned to and alluded to the Bible in their texts and also used it as a means of validating their stance when they expressed universal truths. Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, George Eliot and Thomas Carlyle, to name only a few, responded to this need in their respective literary works and were received as literary "prophets": "those who proposed to lead England out of the wilderness of doubt and fear were welcomed literally and figuratively as prophets because they filled the need for guidance, supplied new principles to take the place of discredited ones, or reassured the country that the traditional ways were best" (Laib,3). Dickens, for example, was considered to be a "Victorian novelist with messages to deliver to his public" because his "moral aesthetic . . . as language directed to a concrete context which, many felt, needed a newly Authorized Revision of Scripture"(Larson, Dickens 37).

Thomas Carlyle was perceived as the major Victorian prophet who spoke out against the moral failures in society and who sought reform. He based his own tracts upon a framework of biblical and literary references, amalgamating "Puritan and Romantic traditions" which validated his polemic and stance as prophet (Larson, Dickens 19). By doing so, he himself "[adopted] the voice of the Old Testament prophet, a voice that is portentous, direct and urgent" (Goldberg, L). His conscious self-designation of the prophetic role is evident in his use of biblical language, particularly apocalyptic and prophetic language, with which he indicted the social evils in England and persuaded his readers to reform. Of particular interest is Carlyle's advocacy of the view that "perception itself was inherently prophetic" (Laib, 29):

[Nature] is a Volume written in celestial hieroglyphs, in the true Sacred-writing; of which even Prophets are happy that they can read here a line and there a line. As for your institutes, and the Academies of Science, they strive bravely; and, from amid the thick-crowded, inextricably intertwined hieroglyphic writing, pick out, by dextrous combination, some Letters in the vulgar character. (Carlyle, 236-7)

What Carlyle refers to as "perception" entails not only seeing the world or experience in one's ordinary frame of mind, but also insight, an understanding of the message written in "hieroglyphs" which resides within that experience. The poet was considered to be one who possessed heightened creative and imaginative faculties which allowed him or her to perceive these "hidden Truths." Such a notion is also threaded in the fabric of Villette's narrative: Lucy Snowe is "prophetic" in that she declares she is able to "read here a line and there a line" in the world about her.

The novel, then, became an important tool in the reconstitution of faith--for the Victorians were "insistent that a work of fiction was only proper if virtue and

vice met with their due reward in this world"(Winnifrith,51). Barry V. Qualls, in his germane study, The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction, examines the Victorian novel's particular characteristics and expectations maintained by both authors and readers alike for its content. Of utmost importance, he suggests, the novel had to conform to genres other than literary: "to avoid the charge of 'lying' and frivolity, [it] had to take on the forms of history and biography which most readers associated with legitimate non-frivolous reading"(10). Because Victorian fiction was mimetic, and often assumed to be biographical or historical, allusion became a device to "conflate the real and the imaginary" which validates one's literary work and simultaneously heightens the tension between the two realms(12). In particular, the content of the approved novel was to provide a moral example for the Victorians, an example upon which they meditated and which became a source of guidance: for "observing carefully one's own life or that of another was seen as a 'second scripture by which to understand the Written Word'"(Qualls,2). As a mediating device between the public and the Bible, novelistic narrative conveyed a sense of order and morality that was becoming less and less discernable in the Victorian period. The landscape, then, of the novel--its characters, events, plots--was shaped into "a religious topography" which obliged the reader to "see the presence of the 'supernatural' in [their] 'natural' world"(Qualls,9)

The Victorian novel can thus be seen as "biblical romance," as Qualls terms it, because its defining feature is "its quest to be at once secular scripture and sacred scripture"(14). It became the medium in which writers explored spiritual insights, often setting the groundwork of the text with biblical scriptures. As Wheeler's study Allusion in the Victorian Novel richly suggests, the role of

allusion is pivotal because it is an "indicator of the relationship between a given work and a literary tradition"(1): thus, the presence of biblical allusion comes to suggest the status of the Victorian novel as religious in content and form. Biblical language had the double function of creating "a mimetic image" of the Victorian world and "[illuminating] the process of "salvation" by which the 'inward world' might survive [their] reality"(15). Jane Eyre, for example, conforms to "biblical romance" because its plot structure parallels the journey motif and the events of Pilgrim's Progress and, consequently, provides spiritual truths and moral instruction for the reader.

Such a religious concept of the novel was upheld by Brontë who believed that "the great artist was given artistic ability and intellectual strength so that he [or she] could use his [or her] art to reform society"(Wheat,62). She herself adopted the stance of social prophet as is made explicit in her preface to the second edition of Jane Eyre. Her appreciation and admiration of Thackeray as a novelist who assumed the role of prophet implicates her within that tradition. Brontë took her "mission" as artist, novelist and prophet whose duty was to convey "Truth" very seriously:

Though my observation cannot penetrate where the very deepest political and social truths are to be learnt . . . though I must guess and calculate and grope my way in the dark, and come to uncertain conclusions unaided and alone where such writers as Dickens and Thackeray, having access to the shrine and image of Truth, have only to go into the temple, lift the veil a moment, and come out and say what they have seen--yet with every disadvantage, I mean still, in my own contracted way, to do my best . . . it will be trifling, but I trust not affected or counterfeit. (Shorter, Life II,391)

Yet, the Romantic notion of "poet-as-prophet" seems to be at odds with Charlotte's notions of religion and of feminism. Her writing moods are indeed referred to in

Romantic terms by Gaskell as a "possession" during which time "her tale lay clear and bright before her, in distinct vision" and by Brontë herself as "an influence . . . which becomes [my] master" (Gaskell,306;Shorter,Life,386). These comments on the importance of inspiration to her writing are often used to substantiate her classification as "a Romantic novelist"(Wheat, 24). Charlotte's imaginative faculties, however, are always described as a gift from God and as subordinate to His divine influence; thus, she asserts that she trusts "God will take from me whatever power of invention or expression I may have, before He lets me become blind to the sense of what is fitting or unfitting to be said!"(Gaskell,495). In short, she considers her imagination as a gift from God:

The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession. (Gaskell,383).

Brontë desired to use her imagination for moral and spiritual purposes. For this reason, she is evidently pleased when Shirley elicits one curate's reformation of conduct (cf.Gaskell,406)

On the other hand, the "poet-as-prophet" convention was gender-specific, grounded upon the "male hegemony of Romantic aesthetics" and therefore, had different implications for the female writer(Krueger,86). Christine Krueger argues convincingly, however, that Victorian female writers used religious and biblically-based discourse to challenge masculine authority and to "vilify their critics as 'pharisees' and 'sinners'": "Most importantly, finding in scripture calls to essentially literary vocations as preachers, prophets, and evangelists, women writers could re-envision women's lives and represent them authoritatively. These

women were revising and subverting dominant Christian ideology and thereby reconstructing social discourse"(8). Women, then, appropriated biblical language to legitimize their calling as artists and prophets and "to invest their own speech with authority"(24). Such motives, as we shall see, are particularly applicable to an understanding of Shirley: the central female characters, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone, using biblical language, become spokespersons for resistant female subjection to patriarchal order and authority.

Brontë herself was very conscious of the social prescriptions imposed both upon women and upon female writers. In an early letter written by Robert Southey which asserts that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be," she overtly acquiesces to his suggestion to endeavour to follow a "womanly" life style (Gaskell,173):

I have endeavoured to not only attentively observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself. . . I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print.
(Gaskell, 174)

Southey's recommendations correlates with Victorian social codes and expectations which were confining; consequently, the female writer of "serious novels" was rare, since women were expected to write domestic novels, letters, and journals--not mainstream fiction or elevated works of poetry. As Brontë developed as a writer, she opposed such constraints more and more. She appreciated Thackeray, for example, not only because of his stance against moral hypocrisy, but also because of "his indifference to the sex of the writer and his recognition of her intellectual powers. He [judged] her as a writer only, by her use

of language"(Gerin,343).¹

Brontë still had to contend with a slew of critics who believed that the sex of the writer predetermined one's literary material and who lowered "the standard by which to judge a work of fiction, if it proceed from a feminine pen"(Gaskell, 387). George Henry Lewes, for example, recommended Brontë to write in the style of Jane Austen, whose work found both appeal and approbation in the eyes of male critics. Brontë's response to his advice is indicative of her awareness of the cultural expectations imposed upon female writers and her refusal to write anything except that which was "Truth":

What did I find [when I read Austen's novels]? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air . . . (Shorter, *Life II* 387)

Even when writing to her publisher, W.S. Williams, Brontë firmly adhered to her belief that "the first duty of an Author is . . . a faithful allegiance to Truth and Nature; his second, such a conscientious study of Art as shall enable him to interpret eloquently and effectively the oracles delivered by those two deities" (Shorter, *Life I*, 44 5). She considered seriously her role to deliver the Truth "in preference to the jargon of conventionality" and, if she could not do so, or was forbidden to do so, preferred to remain silent(Sept,1848).

One route which Brontë followed to circumvent the conventions prescribed for female writers by tradition and by the expectations of male critics was the

¹Brontë's respect for Thackeray's indifference to gender does not mean that he was exempt from her criticisms about his female characters. In one of her letters she writes, "as usual, he is unjust to women; quite unjust. There is hardly any punishment he does not deserve for making Lady Castlewood peep through a keyhole, listen at a door, and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid"(Gaskell,468).

adoption of her male persona, Currer Bell:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because--without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine,"--we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.(Gaskell,285-6)

Her stance as a male was used as a "practical-seeming refuge from those claustrophobic double binds of 'femininity'--and entitled her to write with disregard for her gender and to write what compelled her--what she felt to be 'true'"(Gilbert, 65). Her "vague impression" of such prejudices became stronger, when, after Shirley was published, critics became more certain that Currer Bell was female. Yet, many critics continued to insist that the author of Jane Eyre and Shirley must have been female, until--to Charlotte's great indignation--her sex was announced publicly as by George Henry Lewes. Apparently, after reading his review in the "Edinburgh Review," the headings for which were "Mental Equality of the Sexes?" and "Female Literature," and receiving a letter from him explaining the "frankness" of his review, Charlotte responded thus:

I will tell you why I was so hurt by that review in the "Edinburgh"; not because its criticism was keen or its blame sometimes severe . . . but because after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an *author*, not as a woman, you so roughly--I even thought so cruelly--handled the question of sex. (Gaskell,397-8).

She objected to his insistence upon "measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex" and refused to accommodate his gender-based advice: "Where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me . . . 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"(Gaskell, 386).

She did not "pass away from the public," but continued to publish what she thought every genuine artist should write about: Truth, which, for Brontë, equated with the "divine gift" of poetry: "It is *poetry*, as I comprehend the word, which elevates that masculine George Sand, and makes out of something coarse, something godlike" (Shorter, Life II 388). It is also poetry, she asserted, which alters the acidity of Thackeray's prose into "purifying elixir"--because, behind his poetry, "he wishes only to reform"(Shorter, Life II 388). She herself was willing, as a contemporary prophet, to stand on the margins of society, to defy convention, to defy gender biased judgements and "to pluck the mask[s] from the face of the Pharisee[s]"(JE,35). Her insistence upon writing "poetry"--in defiance of Lewes's recommendations to write like Austen-- was an insistence on writing that which was prophetically "Truth," because Brontë considered adherence to truth the obligation and duty of the prophetic artist.

* * * * *

Evidently, the biblical allusions in Brontë's novels are not merely employed as a socio-political strategy to validate her position in Victorian society as "prophet," but are also literary devices which have a myriad of purposes. Although commonly recognized as a brief reference to another text, allusion, as defined by Janet Larson, can be subdivided into three categories: the reference, the direct quotation and the subtextual allusion which provides a parallel plot structure to an author's text, or "in which a biblical passage, chapter, or whole book (or other

religious text) . . . forms an underpattern for longer stretches"(Dickens16). Direct quotation itself can be further divided into the "echo" which involves verbal repetition or patterning and which can resonate with any number of references-- and the adapted quotation wherein the original text is altered to suit the author's purposes. This study will concentrate on Larson's varying models of allusion and primarily on the second mode of subtextual allusion as defined by her; its function, as she asserts, is to "provide a medium of interpreting episodes or characters," and uses "a biblical book or passage to which sets of allusion in the fiction can act as an analogical matrix for part of a novel or for wider reaches of its imaginative vision"(Dickens 17). She adds, moreover, that two different subtextual references may co-exist, and consequently, may be in continual tension, or may operate in hierarchical fashion "with one subtext mediating the other"(Dickens 17). Although Brontë alludes to more than just the prophetic and apocalyptic books in the Bible, the interest and focus of this study will reside in prophetic references and their associated imagery because they operate and resonate in the text on a larger scale: these references contribute to her thematic concerns, portrayal of character and the structural patterns within the novels being examined.

Janet Larson also divides up allusion as it functions within a text into two primary types, as stable or unstable; that is, allusion can stabilize or destabilize meaning within a given text. Stable allusion is a tool to assist the reader in determining an accurate sense of character and also provides the reader with psychological reassurance. In Jane Eyre, for example, the biblical references are pivotal in determining the characterization of Jane, Mr. Rochester and St. John, and therefore, are also secure evaluating devices within the text. Unstable allusion is open-ended and ambiguous: the reference can "be read in divergent ways

[which] creates ambiguity in characterization" (Dickens 20). If meaning is initially perceived to be satirical, for example, that initial reaction is undermined by other rival allusions made within the same context. Unstable biblical allusion is more common to Shirley and Villette, in which scriptural references are ironically juxtaposed with incongruous characters and situations, or are undermined by two overlapping and incompatible biblical images: in these texts, scriptural references and their corresponding meanings become increasingly ambiguous.

Finally, allusion in Brontë's novels takes on three kinds of tendencies or purposes. In the first text, allusion is primarily a source of stabilization because it secures the moral groundwork or fabric of the text: the scriptural references in Jane Eyre are an indication of the value system operating within the text. These allusive passages, taken collectively, can operate as running moral commentary to provide a scale by which the reader can evaluate and judge characters and events appropriately. In Shirley, the allusions are frequently, although not always ironic; the purpose of allusion has altered to become an instrument of satire and social commentary. Prophetic allusions can also be used as a satirical device to undermine character through narrative observations, or through the juxtaposition of narrative event and biblical event. In Villette, allusions are "unstable," since the complexity of Lucy Snowe's character is elusive and the biblical references often contradictory. Although Lucy Snowe as the first person narrator, observes, records and impresses her own interpretation upon her experiences, these interpretations are often misconstrued, and evidently biased. Such subjectivity in perception ultimately becomes a theme within the text: the ambiguity of allusive passages are also a reflection of the subjectivity of human and psychological experience. Like the "broken scriptures" found within Dickens' novels, the biblical

references within Brontë's final text are fragmented and counterpointed to create a sense of incompleteness and irresolution--ultimately, a reflection of the Bible's status by the mid-nineteenth century

In the pages which follow, we shall see that prophetic allusions contribute to the structural patterning, characterization, and thematic interests within Brontë's novels. Allusive passages also elucidate the tradition within which Brontë was working and therefore, will provide a lens through which Brontë perceived her world, through which the Bible's status in the Victorian period will become evident and through which her works can be examined. Finally, and consequently, the relationship between Charlotte Brontë's novels and the prophetic books in the Bible implies that Brontë's stance is--more than novelistic--prophetic, a stance which implies that authorship was her calling.

II.

The Prophet: A Spokesperson for Moral Principles

A vast number of critics have argued that the "presentiments," "sympathies," and "signs" which Jane either experiences, sees or dreams are a consequence of her "intuitive consciousness," are the psychological projections of her mind, or are her attempts to manipulate narrative events. Robert Heilman asserts that "Jane's strange, fearful symbolic dreams are not mere thrillers, but reflect the tensions of the engagement period, the stress of the wedding-day debate with Rochester, and the longing for Rochester after she has left him"(99); Angela Hague observes that Jane's intuition is "telepathic sympathy" and that this intuition "affects the connections between human beings and the actions they take"(598); Robert Bernard Martin insists that Jane assigns "non-rational origins to phenomena that she cannot otherwise explain, and then, as she grows in understanding, [gives] more rational explanations for them"(64); Terry Eagleton claims that Jane has "engineered" the plot so that "the effect . . . is to show Jane moving eagerly forward without the objectionable implication that she is egoistically drafting her future"; and finally, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar focus the attention of their study on the psychological facets of the novel, claiming that Jane's experiences on her journey have psychological or metaphorical significance. The common link between these critics is the attempt to either suppress, minimize or deny the supernatural elements--and thus, the underlying religious facets--of the novel. Angela Hague particularly expresses discomfort with the supernatural, preferring to attribute Jane's experiences to "intuitive perception"(Hague,598).

By treating Jane's experiences, and especially her dreams, as merely psychological projections, many of these critics suggest that any putative supernatural occurrence can be explained in naturalistic terms. Such readings are problematic for a number of reasons. It was popular to employ gothic elements in

the Victorian novel--such as the use of supernatural--because they had such appeal for the nineteenth century reader. Although gothic elements within a novel were sometimes explained away rationally later in the plot, such was not always the case. Also, as discussed in the first chapter, religious elements in the novel would have been sought out and perceived as a source of truth and moral instruction by the Victorian audience; such an approach neglects to account for or glosses over Jane's own belief in the supernatural and her dreams, which predict future events--events of which she could not have had any previous natural knowledge; and finally, although these studies are useful in other ways, by diverting one's attention from the divine, providential workings towards the heightened sympathies or extra-sensory powers of human beings, such critics refuse to recognize an important--even integral--facet of Charlotte Brontë's life and writing: her religious faith. This faith inevitably coloured her opinions, interests and, most importantly, the writing of her novels.

Brontë's religious and moral principles surface in Jane Eyre and are immediately apparent in the dedication and corresponding preface, which introduced the second publication of the novel in 1847. Both the dedication and preface are devoted to the same person: William Makepeace Thackeray. Brontë esteemed him to be one of the most consciously moral, "prophet-like" individuals of her time. Her admiration for him was often expressed in her correspondence, before she publicly dedicated Jane Eyre to him. Of him, she found the confidence to assert that "the more I read Thackeray's works, the more certain I am that he stands alone--alone in his sagacity . . . alone in his feeling, alone in his power, alone in his self-control"(Shorter,Circle,385). Her admiration of Thackeray did not entirely reside in his ability to write, but also in his ability to declare the acrid

"truth," even if it bred hostility in the public realm. For her, he was an oracle of truth--"If Truth were again a goddess, Thackeray should be her high priest" (Shorter, Life 401).

Her warm commendation of Thackeray in her preface also reflects what she believed made an ideal novelist:

There is a man in our own days whose words are not framed to tickle delicate ears; who, to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society much as the son of Imlah came before the throned kings of Judah and Israel, and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophet-like and as vital, a mien as dauntless and as daring I have alluded to him, Reader, because I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognized; because I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day, as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things. (IE,36)

Herein lies the key to her respect for Thackeray: if he could maintain a life of integrity, morality and scrupulousness--the groundwork from which he could speak the unfettered truth--he warranted the recognition as social critic, regenerator and "prophet." By comparing him to the "son of Imlah," or Micaiah, Brontë enforces Thackeray's singularity. Although King Jehoshaphat's messenger pleads with the Old Testament prophet to "let they word . . . be like the word of [the other four hundred prophets] and speak that which is good," Micaiah's refusal to compromise illustrates that his nature is that of a true prophet: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak"(I Kings 22:13-14). Brontë's respect for Thackeray, then, resides in his strength, like Micaiah, to stand alone, and to speak the unornamented, unbiased truth, rather than "tickling" the "delicate ears" of his reading public.

Brontë's prefatory comments also imply that, for her, fundamental

principles exist upon which moral decisions and judgements are to be based and which draw upon religious tradition and the Bible. She thus makes the distinction between "self-righteousness" and "religion," and "conventionality" and "morality." Following the example she perceives in Thackeray, Brontë consistently protests against the hypocrisy and moral pretensions of the age; objects to criticisms and judgements made on Jane Eyre based on its unconventionality; and rails against readers "in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong":

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns. These things and deeds are diametrically opposed: they are as distinct as is vice from virtue. Men too often confound them: they should not be confounded; appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ (JE,35).

Although she may not have equalled Carlyle in rank as a Victorian sage, the preface to and content of Jane Eyre indicate that the posture Brontë assumed was more than simply that of the writer of "domestic" novels. As Qualls observes, the subtitle, "'An Autobiography: Edited by Currer Bell' would have asked any serious reader to acknowledge the book's place in the long line of spiritual autobiographies and biographies that aspired to teach by illustrating one man's self-conquest amidst Vanity Fair's allurements"(Qualls, 51). Since the book can be seen as a source of moral instruction for the reader, the content and preface become suggestive, not only of Brontë's religious beliefs, but also of the stance she adopts as a "prophet" who unveils and reproves societal failings. She is, in some respects, a preacher or "a *seer* speaking *unseen* 'facts' to a society peopled by readers who see worldly success as a measure of godliness"(Qualls,9). The novel becomes the medium

through which Charlotte Brontë as novelist, and as seer, preaches to her readers who have been "led astray" and through which she compels us "to see the presence of the 'supernatural' in our 'natural' world"(Qualls,9).

The principles which Charlotte Brontë outlines in the preface are carried through into the novel, particularly in relation to Jane Eyre who undergoes a spiritual journey and who becomes the novel's spokesperson for moral principles. Since Jane Eyre is on such a journey, her observations, her explication of certain religious principles and her experiences are meant to exemplify and affirm "those providential assumptions about life which were important to early Victorian readers and which they expected to see celebrated in their literature"(Vargish,58)-- in this respect too, she functions as a kind of prophet. Prophecy, according to contemporary usage, has typically been restricted in definition to refer to the prediction of future events and the ensuing fulfilment of that prediction. The inclination to consider a prophet as "someone with a mysterious knack of foretelling an inevitable future" is erroneous according to biblical tradition:

The 'seer' has insight, not second sight: he is not a charlatan, but the contrary of one, an honest man with a sharper perception and a clear perspective than other men possess. The imagination . . . in looking at society not only sees its hypocrisies but sees through them, and sees an infinitely better world. The prophet can see an infinite and eternal reality, but nobody can see an indefinite future, except conditionally. (Frye, Great Code,59)

In defining the prophet as such, Northrop Frye is invoking notions from the Romantic period which involved the poet's extra-sensitivity and vision. While such notions may have influenced Brontë's own definition of the prophet, the biblical notions of the prophet had still greater emphasis. As David Jeffrey has observed, the role of the biblical prophet involved vision, sensitivity to the calling

of God and, most importantly, a life of integrity which enabled the prophet to recognize and condemn social evils; yet his or her value "stood directly in proportion to his or her detachment from politics, obtuseness to what was popular and separation from formal institutions of religion" (Mappings, 284).

Given these characteristics, Jane Eyre can be considered a prophet-like character: like Micaiah, she stands apart from the "formal institutions of religion," is visionary, maintains and encourages others to maintain a biblical, moral lifestyle and recognizes and indicts the hypocrisy and unprincipled lifestyles of various characters. It is not Jane Eyre alone who can be considered a prophet: on her spiritual journey, she is confronted with a series of characters who adopt a similar posture, some of which, as the reader discovers, are "false" prophets for one reason or another. Nevin Kirby Laib instances Bessie Levin, Helen Burns, and Maria Temple as "minor" prophetic characters who "prefigure or influence Jane's future" (54). Of particular note are the characters Mr. Rochester and St. John who are diametrically opposed and stand on either side of Jane to influence and to sway her from her spiritual journey. Both characters exert powerful control over Jane by citing and manipulating scripture for their own purposes; however, given the biblical principles and examples upon which Brontë grounds her prefatory remarks and which are reiterated by Jane in the novel, it becomes evident that they are "false" prophets, making decisions which are based on shifting moral ground.

Mr. Rochester superficially appears as a prophet because of his ability to read character and to interpret "signs"--although he does not always heed them--because of his endeavours to divine the future, particularly respecting Jane Eyre; and, as Laib pointedly observes, because "Jane comes to regard him as her guide to future happiness" (39). At times he consciously poses as a prophet, particularly

when he adopts the guise of a gypsy; his motives, however, make of him a false prophet because they are often self-interested and defy moral, biblical principles. His judgements, moreover, are based less on reason and more frequently on passion, which leads him to make fallible decisions. He appears to be, at other times, a "true" prophet, however, since "part of his message is true and good, reflecting Jane's own best wishes for herself and projecting some qualities of the future that are ideal for her"(Laib,39).

His association with a prophet-like character is enforced when he adopts the apparel of a gypsy, a kind of "pagan priest"(Laib,37). He arrives at Thornfield in such a disguise to tell the "young and single" their fortunes. Evidently, his observations are accurate, for the ladies return exclaiming that he "knows all about us" and Miss Ingram, hearing of Mr. Rochester's "poor fortunes," withdraws her interest in him, just as he predicts(JE,223). When Jane enters the library in which the "gypsy" is seated, she refers to him as a "sybil": his disguise, according to Laib, reveals Rochester's character because "a gypsy is a pagan prophet, free from the morals of religion and society that the master of Thornfield wishes to circumvent"(40). His discourse with Jane while he is dressed as the gypsy especially indicates his apparently prophet-like qualities. When he does elaborate upon Jane's "fortunes," his words ring true, despite her protestations:

You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick, because the best of feelings, the highest and sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits for you. If you knew it, you are peculiarly situated: very near happiness; yes, within reach of it. The materials are all prepared; there only wants a movement to combine them. (JE,226)

Jane indeed becomes "sick" because of her restrained emotion; she is indeed

peculiarly situated; and she does refuse to initiate a "movement to combine [the materials]"--that is, she remains a passive observer who does not feel it is her place as both governess and as a Victorian woman to express her emotions to a superior.

Mr. Rochester proceeds to read her destiny "on the forehead, about the eyes, and in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth"(JE,226-7). His speculations about Jane's love for him and about her response to the guests at Thornfield Hall are again quite precise. Jane expresses bewilderment because his speculations are quite accurate: "[The gypsy's] strange talk, voice, manner, had by this time wrapped me in a kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from her lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart watching its workings and taking record of every pulse"(JE,228). Although it is evident that Rochester is endeavouring to procure a declaration of love from Jane, it is also obvious that his powers of acumen are startlingly exact. His observations are not only an accurate reflection of Jane's character, they also suggest what will occur in their relationship in the ensuing weeks: her eye, which is "susceptible," is favourable to Mr. Rochester's plans, but the brow is an "enemy to a fortunate issue" because it declares that

Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things: but judgement shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. (JE,230)

His recognition of the "brow's" dominance encourages him to conceal his former marriage; true to his observations, Jane's judgement does have the final word in the matter of their marriage and, in this respect, is an "enemy" to Mr Rochester. Since her better judgement, self-respect and her desire to live a principled, moral life is

of primary importance to Jane, she refuses to succumb to her passion for him.

Mr. Rochester does not only "prophecy" in the guise of a gypsy, he makes two predictions upon first meeting Jane--based upon the nature of her character--regarding the direction her future path would take. The first occurs within Jane's first two weeks at Thornfield Hall. Of her, he observes:

Know that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidante of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to tell of yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy, not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations (JE,167).

His prophecy is correct: she becomes the confidante not only to Mr. Rochester, but also to Georgiana and Eliza Reed, and St. John. His acute sense of perception leads him to make another prediction, based on her character, a few weeks later. In the course of his conversation about his mistress, Céline Varens, he questions Jane about love and jealousy; before she has the opportunity to respond, he confirms that she has not experienced such emotions and foretells what her experience will be:

Your soul sleeps: the shock is yet to be given which shall waken it. You think all existence lapses in as quiet a flow as that in which your youth has hitherto slid away. Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears, you neither see the rocks bristling not far off in the bend of the flood, nor hear the breakers boil at their base. But I tell you--and you may mark my words--you will come some day to a craggy pass in the channel, where the whole of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up and borne on by some master-wave into a calmer current (JE, 173).

Jane encounters the "craggy pass in the channel" and the "whirl and tumult, foam

and noise" at Thornfield Hall; ultimately, however, she is borne on by a "master-wave" rather than "dashed to atoms."

Mr. Rochester's perspicuity and ability to determine the likelihood of future events do not make of him a true prophet: his sense of acumen is not directed by divine power, for his motives are self-interested and defy what Jane Eyre would consider immutable moral tenets. When he is prepared to marry Jane, he describes her in terms which indicate that his life is founded on erroneous principles: she is "the pride of his life, [and] the desire of his eyes," an abstract from 1 John 2:16 of the Bible which cites three areas in which humankind is liable to sin(JE,305). Tellingly, Rochester omits the third area because it reveals his own most apparent weakness: the lust of the flesh. Such an omission reveals that Mr. Rochester is a false prophet: since the true prophet is in the service of truth, deceit is not permissible to him. Unlike Micaiah, Mr. Rochester evades the truth and attempts to circumvent or subvert all obstacles to his purposes. He consciously eludes and challenges moral doctrines: although he is able to envision "destiny" who delivers her message to him like the man's hand which scrawls the message of doom for King Belshazzar, Rochester refuses to heed its warnings:

I was arranging a point with my destiny. She stood there by that beech trunk--a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath at Forres. 'You like Thornfield?' she said, lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento, which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house front, between the upper and lower row of windows, 'Like it if you can! Like it if you dare!'(JE,174)

He is torn by his desire to follow through with his own will to marry Jane in defiance of his previous, existing marriage and thus, challenge "destiny's" decree. Ultimately, he refuses to heed "the writing on the wall": "'I will like it,' said I; 'I dare like it'; and '(he subjoined moodily) 'I will keep my word: I will break

obstacles to happiness, to goodness--yes, goodness. I wish to be a better man than I have been"(JE,174). As Vargish suggests, Rochester's decision to be "a better man" is founded upon his own desires, not acceptance of God's law: "His repentance should [be] . . . a characteristic though tentative redirection of his large and generous impulses and thus . . . [the] proper and effectual mastery [of his will]"(63). Not until he is "chastised" and until "divine justice pursued its course" does Rochester experience "remorse, repentance, [and] the wish for reconciliation to [his] Maker"(JE,471).

His defiance of immutable principles and his self-interested desires make of him a false prophet; his fraudulent behaviour is underscored by the patterns of imagery associated with him. When he addresses Jane, he employs terms derived from the Bible: he refers to himself as a shepherd, and to Jane as his sheep, an obvious parody of Christ and his followers. Upon his return to the room in which he has left Jane to attend to Mr. Mason, he reassures her: "I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb--my pet lamb--so near a wolf's den, unguarded: you were safe"(JE,245). He evidently assumes a Christ-like stance by alluding to and reworking Jesus's parable of the shepherd and his lost sheep: he, like Christ, will be the shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep to recover the stray one and protect it from wolves. After his marriage to Bertha Mason is revealed, he pleads with Jane for forgiveness in similar terms:

Jane, I never meant to wound you thus. If the man who had but one little ewe lamb that was dear to him as a daughter, that ate of his bread and drank of his cup, and lay in his bosom, had by some mistake slaughtered it at the shambles, he would not have rued his bloody blunder more than I now rue mine. (JE, 326)

Again, Rochester fails to situate accurately his biblical reference--in a manner Brontë could expect her Victorian readers not to miss. The allusion made here is

to Nathan's parable in which a rich man who owns flocks takes the single "little ewe lamb" from a poor man to feed a guest; the parable is intended to rebuke and indict King David for his adultery with Bathsheba(cf.II Samuel 12:1-13).

Although Rochester associates himself with the poor man who is wronged, by invoking the reference, he is immediately related to the rich man--and to King David. The parable is analogous to Rochester's situation, since he, like David, would have been guilty of deceit, adultery and bigamy had he married Jane.

That he is not a true prophet or "shepherd" is also reinforced by the imagery in the panels of the Last Supper in the room in which both Jane and Mr. Mason are left. The imagery indicates Mr. Rochester's planned deception: "anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor--of Satan himself--in his subordinate's form"(JE,239). Such an observation foreshadows the "revelation" of Mr. Rochester's own betrayal, of which Jane at the time has no notion. Rochester's error resides in his self-appointed role of prophet and his consequent decisions regarding both his and Jane's life which are made on his *own*--rather than divinely established--moral grounds. He willfully believes his sufferings--described in apocalyptic terms--will be alleviated by "overleaping an obstacle of custom--a mere conventional impediment which neither . . .conscience sanctifies nor . . . judgement approves"(JE,247). Rochester delegates Jane as the "instrument" to his reformation: "God, who does the work, ordains the instrument. I have myself--I tell you without parable--been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the instrument for my cure"(JE,248). Finally, he is a false prophet--and false penitent --because he permits his wilful passion to take control rather than submitting to God; and because he presumes that he can bypass both custom

and conscience to appoint Jane as the source of his redemption rather than God.

Whereas Rochester fails in his inability to temper his wilful passion with reason and judgement, St. John Rivers as "prophet" fails because he assumes that, pharisaically, his reason and judgement are completely aligned with God's will. His ascetic, rigorous pursuit of Christian honour suggests that he is devoid of passion and reflects his cold temperament:

I consider that no service degrades which can better our race. I hold that the more arid and unreclaimed the soil where the Christian labourer's task of tillage is appointed him--the scantier the meed his toil bring--the higher the honour. His, under such circumstances, is the destiny of the pioneer; and the first pioneers of the Gospel were the Apostles--their captain was Jesus, the Redeemer, Himself (JE,380).

In his quest for "honour" and in his ambitious desire to be associated with the Apostles, St. John neglects his duty to love those for whom he is "toiling." When Jane Eyre asks him if he is a "true philanthropist"--if he loves with *agape* love--he can only answer with uncertainty: indeed, he is not one to express or to feel compassion for human suffering, particularly because he confuses human affection or charity with romantic love or lustful desire. He thus asserts that love is the operation of "man's selfish sense" or his base appetites (JE,430). St. John's lack of human feeling is confirmed when, in contrast with Mr. Rochester and his uncontrollable passion for Jane, he asserts the nature of his feelings for Miss Rosamond Oliver: "While I love Rosamond Oliver so wildly--with all the intensity, indeed, of a first passion, the object of which is exquisitely beautiful, graceful, and fascinating--I experience at the same time a calm, unwarped consciousness that she would not make me a good wife . . . When I colour, and when I shake before Miss Oliver, I do not pity myself, I scorn the weakness" (JE,

399-400). St. John's denial of "fleshly desires" makes him comparable to, as Jane suggests, an "automaton" or a "statue"(JE,371):

[The soul] is just as fixed as a rock, firm set in the depths of a restless sea. Know me to be what I am--a cold, hard man . . . Natural affection only, of all the sentiments, has permanent power over me. Reason, and not feeling, is my guide: my ambition is unlimited; my desire to rise higher, to do more than others, insatiable. I honour endurance, perseverance, industry, talent: because these are the means by which men achieve great ends and mount to lofty eminence.
(JE,400-401)

Jane expostulates that he is thus no more than a "pagan philosopher"--a rigid stoic. St. John is devoid of what both Eyre--and Brontë--think is imperative to fulfil human existence--love.

His rigidity makes of him a false prophet because his will ultimately supplants God's and stifles the will of others. Apparently, his almost overpowering control of Jane demands of her not only self-abnegation, but eventually self-annihilation:

As for me, I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted. The thing was as impossible as to mould my irregular features to his correct and classic pattern, to give to my changeable green eyes the sea-blue tint and solemn lustre of his own. (JE,424)

Rather than making herself in God's image, Jane feels compelled to make herself in St. John's image--"to mould [her] irregular features to his correct and classic pattern." He is a false prophet because his demands for Jane to conform to his own ideas are sacrilegious and are misdirected: a true prophet is one that ought to

direct others towards the truth and righteous living, not to follow him or her or to be made in his or her image. Rather than attending to God's direction, St. John asks Jane--using the name of God to uphold his purposes--to submit herself to his own will rather to God's, "by straining to satisfy [him] till [her] sinews ache"(JE,430). He is what Robert Keefe describes as a "spiritual vampire"--"a greater threat to Jane than any of the previous antagonists who attempted to devour her or lure her to the grave. He dangles in front of her the bait of sanctity waiting confidently for his victim to follow it into the maw of his insatiable lust for power"(111).

Although St. John observes the letter of the law--down to its minutest detail--he fails to observe the spirit of the law: when he commands Jane to marry and to accompany him to India, his interests are self-oriented and completely devoid of consideration and love for her. Jane questions his motives:

Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? (JE,430)

She realizes that although his decisions hinge upon principle he is only able to provide the "forms of love" rather than its vitalizing substance. Jane struggles to make a decision until she realizes that St. John is as "erring as I" and therefore, not superior to her and so privileged with the right to control her, but in fact "an equal"(JE,426). She observes that although he is "pure-lived, conscientious, [and] zealous" he still "had not yet found that peace of God which passeth all understanding"--a peace which is achieved, according to biblical scriptures, by "[being] careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving"(JE, 378;Phillipians 4:6-7).

Yet John is in some measure accurately prophetic, like Rochester, because of his powers of acumen. His perception of Jane's character--as well as that of other characters--is evidence of his insight. Jane observes that his eyes are "clear enough in a literal sense, [though] in a figurative one were difficult to fathom. He seemed to use them rather as instrument to search out people's thoughts, than as agents to reveal his own"(JE,372). In one instance, he prepares to offer her a position as a school mistress; after "he seemed leisurely to read my face, as if its features and lines were characters an a page," he responds, apparently drawing conclusions from this "scrutiny"(JE,380):

I believe you will accept the post I offer you . . . and hold it for a while: not permanently, though . . . for in your nature is an alloy as detrimental to repose as that in mine, though of a different kind . . . I mean that human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on you. I am sure you cannot long be content to pass your leisure in solitude, and to devote your working hours to a monotonous labour wholly void of stimulus (JE,380-2).

His predictions are quite right, for Jane does become sufficiently restless and eventually returns to Thornfield to seek out Mr. Rochester.

St. John also consciously adopts the posture of both prophet and martyr; his name overtly associates him with St. John the Divine, the writer of the book or Revelations. To further confirm and emphasize this association, St. John reads from Revelations to coerce Jane in accompanying him to India. Reading from the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, he "described from its page the vision of the new heaven and the new earth--told how God would come to dwell with men, how He would wipe away all the tears from their eyes"(JE,442). His reading becomes more tailored for Jane's listening, however, "as his eye had turned on Jane": "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My

son. But . . . the fearful, the unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"(JE,442). Evidently, St. John believes that unless Jane fulfils the destiny he has prescribed for her, she will be given "up to perdition as a vessel of wrath"(JE,443). Like Rochester, he poses as a shepherd who knows what is best for Jane, and thus, he supplicates "strength for the weak-hearted; guidance for wanderers from the fold"(JE,442). Although, like Rochester, he poses as "a pastor recalling his wandering sheep--or . . .[as] a guardian angel watching the soul for which he is responsible," he is a false prophet because he assumes that his will is indistinguishable from God's will(JE,443). Whereas the true prophet provides his or her listeners with an "option, as well as a reminder of what is at stake in the choosing," St. John forces one particular option upon Jane(Jeffrey,293).

Ultimately, Jane recognizes that neither Mr. Rochester nor St. John is a guide to be submitted to, albeit for different reasons: "I was almost as hard beset by [St.John] now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgement"(JE,443). Here the novel seems to work in some respects like a parable: the opposing extremes of unchecked passion and rigid reason prove equally inimical to love--or a balanced life. Jane, in observing other characters, particularly Mr. Rochester and St. John, understands that principles, judgement and passion must be balanced. Her commentary on the temperament of the Reed sisters is especially revealing:

True, generous feeling is made small account of by some; but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless, for the want of it. Feeling without judgement is a washy draught indeed; but judgement untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition. (JE,265)

Although Mr. Rochester endeavours to sway her with passion and St. John endeavours to sway Jane with reason, ultimately, Jane's will prevails. She is finally the most truly prophet-like character because she adheres to principles, and yet is compassionate; because she has dreams which foretell the future; and because she not only has the visionary capabilities of both St. John and Mr. Rochester, but also "has the special ability to sympathize with others, to share their feelings"(Laib,60). Most importantly, the prophetic insight she receives guides her to make correct choices and eventually, leads her to experience a superior, divine love.

Unlike both Rochester and St. John, she is more closely to be associated with the true prophet because she has powers of vision and imagination, manifested in her paintings and in her visions. As Northrop Frye asserts, the artist and prophet are closely allied by their powers of perception: "The fully imaginative man is . . . a visionary whose imaginative activity is prophecy and whose perception produces art."(59). When Jane explains her endeavours to capture her ideas and visions in the form of paintings, her vocabulary suggests the close alliance between perception as a form of prophecy and imagination: "As I saw [the paintings] with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived"(JE,156-7). Although the paintings may be a "pale portrait" of the original idea, the results attest to her power of vision. As a number of critics have pointed out, the paintings themselves have an ethereal quality to them; Mr. Rochester calls them "peculiar," and "elfish," the content of which has a "solemn depth"(JE,158).

Her power of vision is not reflected merely in her paintings: Jane also has dreams and visions which either guide her to make the "right" decisions or prepare her for some future catastrophe. Jane herself expresses her belief in the power of signs, sympathies and presentiments:

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs; and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life, because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man. (JE,249)

Signs and presentiments, Laib observes, "are unalloyed prophecy . . . not subject to errors of passion or judgement. They can be ignored, defied, or explained away . . . but they are not wrong"(58). Unlike other characters in the novel, Jane learns to read signs, to listen to presentiments and to be attentive to sympathies. Thus, when she dreams of the recurring image of a baby for a period of a week, she is certain that the dream forebodes ill tidings: in this case, John Reed's death, followed by Mrs. Reed's illness, decline and subsequent death. Jane's dream with the image of the baby is renewed the evening before her appointed wedding-day, in which she follows the "windings of an unknown road"; it is followed by a second dream in which Thornfield Hall becomes a "dreary ruin" with only a "shell-like wall" remaining(JE,309). The two dreams evidently foretell what is to become of Jane, Mr. Rochester and Thornfield Hall: Jane pursues an "unknown road" which eventually takes her to the doorstep of her cousins and away from Mr. Rochester and Thornfield Hall is burnt down in the fire to become a ruin.

After the catastrophic announcement of Mr. Rochester's existing marriage--

and when Jane is in anguish about what she should do regarding her future--she is privileged with a vision--what Jane describes as a "trance-like dream"(JE,346):

I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come--watched with the strangest anticipation: as though some word of doom were to be written on her disc. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart--

"My daughter, flee temptation."

"Mother, I will." (JE, 346).

Jane's "dream" is consistent with old testament prophetic visions because of its imagery and because it is revelatory: it instructs Jane as to the right path she should take.

Jane's power of perception and vision is only one facet of her prophet-like character. She also speaks out the truth, more often when she feels an inner prompting to do so. David Jeffrey describes the prophet's role as one that includes submission to God, a necessary condition of his almost involuntary ability to pronounce the truth: "When appointed, or 'called,' the prophet is required to submit his own skills and conscious imagination utterly, permitting himself to be seized by the Spirit of God and given directly whatever words he has to speak . . . and ordered whatever alarming symbolic acts to perform"(284). As a child, Jane reacts against the unjust treatment she receives from the hands of Mrs. Reed; the terms in which she describes her reaction suggest that "something" spoke for her:

"What would Uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?" was my scarcely voluntary demand. I say scarcely voluntary, for it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their

utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control.
(JE,60)

In another confrontation, Jane "dares" to refute--in bolder, more passionate terms-- Mrs. Reed's accusation made before Mr. Brocklehurst that Jane was a deceitful child--and Jane dares to "because it is the *truth*": "I will tell anybody who asks me questions about this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. *You are deceitful!*"(JE,69). The same "involuntary" force takes over Jane when she first expresses her--albeit reserved--sentiments for Thornfield and Mr. Rochester for the first time:

I got over the stile without a word, and meant to leave him calmly. An impulse held me fast--a force turned me round. I said--or something in me said for me, and in spite of me--

"Thank you, Mr. Rochester, for your great kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you; and wherever you are is my home--my only home. (JE,273-4).

Considering her normally passive, reserved temperament and her reluctance to speak out, these speeches are an anomaly for Jane. Her involuntary speech is, in part, derived from her passionate temper--for in these two scenarios her emotions are wrought to an intense pitch; yet, the terms which are used--"force," "impulse," "involuntary"--all suggest a power beyond her control.

She also hears an inner voice which prompts her at various points in her life to certain actions, always for her own well-being. When she desires a change from Lowood Institution, that voice encourages her to seek employment through the newspaper; when Jane agonizes over what she should do once the possibility of marriage to Mr. Rochester has disintegrated, once again an inner voice commands her to "leave Thornfield at once":

A voice within me averred that I could do it, and foretold that I should do it . . .

"You shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it."(JE,325)

The message which Jane hears delivered from that inner voice is an extract from the Sermon on the Mount where, appropriately, Christ is speaking about adultery:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Matthew, 5: 27-30)

These inner promptings warn Jane of committing the sin of adultery and instruct her to make choices for her own benefit.

Jane is not only prompted and guided by the "voice within," but is also reassured by it or informed of future events. Such guidance usually follows once Jane has prayed for assistance or direction. When she first leaves Mr. Rochester and is searching for guidance and reassurance; she finds God's direction and solace in Nature:

We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence. I had risen to my knees to pray for Mr. Rochester. Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky Way. Remembering what it was--what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light--I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew

that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits. Mr. Rochester was safe: he was God's, and by God would he be guarded. (JE, 350-1)

Through "prayer and supplication," and in recognizing His presence in Nature, Jane receives comfort and peace that Mr. Rochester would be protected by the "Source of Life." As Vargish suggests, "the concept of an apprehensible providential intention gains tremendous force from the romantic sense of the immanence of God in nature"(65). She prays again for Providence to "sustain [her] a little longer" when her situation becomes quite desperate: immediately following her prayer, she sees a light, which at first she believes to be an *ignis fatuus* and which she discovers later to be the candle at the River's house where she is taken in and restored.

Finally, during the climactic struggle between Jane and St. John, when she entreats Heaven to "show me the path" which she should take, she hears Rochester's voice(JE,445). She describes the experience as parallel to "an inspiration. The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison: it had opened the doors of the soul's cell and loosed its bands"(JE,446). The "shock of feeling" generated in Paul and Silas's prison is "supernatural" which Jane readily acknowledges in her prayers after she wins the struggle: "I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet"--and which she again acknowledges when she discovers that Rochester had uttered her name at the same time she had heard him summon her(JE,445;472). Herein lies the crucial difference between Jane, and Mr. Rochester and St. John: she receives divine guidance and is prompted by an inner voice, to which she is obedient.

Jane's interest in the supernatural is evident from childhood. When Brocklehurst questions her, demanding which books of the Bible she prefers, her answer is illuminating: "I like Revelations, and the Book of Daniel, and Genesis, and Samuel, and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Jonah"(JE,65). She finds apocalyptic and prophetic books appealing because, as Qualls suggests, the structure of these books permits justice to triumph: "they stimulate her imagination because they are *narratives* with ends where promises are fulfilled and sufferings rewarded"(JE,55). The pattern of reward and punishment give her reason for endurance: if she perseveres, she will be rewarded accordingly. Years after leaving Gateshead Hall, she could "answer the ceaseless inward question" and see clearly "*why* [she] thus [had] suffered"(JE,47). The apocalyptic references also provide--as Larson defines subtextual allusion--a "pattern that the older Jane gives to the narrative of her life": that is, a narrative in which all the characters, including herself, are justly rewarded and which has closure like that provided by the book of Revelations(Qualls,55). That pattern is fulfilled when Jane describes her eventual marriage to Rochester, alluding to a passage from Genesis: "No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh."(JE,475-6). Here, "sexual love. . . becomes a source of virtue rather than of corruption, of reciprocity rather than of exploitation" because it is divinely sanctioned (Vargish,61). Her prophetic insight leads her to be restored to Mr. Rochester at which time a holy alliance grounded on purer love can be attained, rather than one founded on idolatry and erroneous principles: She becomes his "vision," "his right hand" and "the apple of his eye"(JE,476). Thus, her marriage to Rochester invokes closure like that of the biblical Revelations; to enforce this association, Brontë concludes the novel with

the last words of the Book of Revelation: "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus!"(JE,477).

Since the novel's form has spiritual and moral overtones, Jane's function takes on spiritual and moral qualities as well. Although such qualities make a prophet out of Jane, it does not mean that she is infallible. She recognizes in retrospect that her adoration of her husband was idolatrous: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, *in those days*, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol"(italics added;JE,302). Since idolatry is the chief sin against which biblical prophets inveighed, it is necessary that Jane is separated from Mr. Rochester until she learns to love him appropriately. It is her continuous compliance with and reliance upon God, her interest in pursuing truth which makes her--rather than St. John and Mr. Rochester--a true prophet. Since she "fervently longed to do what was right; and only that" and since also she recognizes that she is "human and fallible," she is also able to speak out about the moral failings of others; to Mr. Rochester, she asserts that "you are human and fallible . . . the human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted"(JE,444,169).

As a prophet, writing her "autobiography," Jane has the opportunity to explicate and elucidate truths and principles. In the Lowood Institution, she is confronted for first time with "principles" and moral values through the character Helen Burns. The latent prophet-like qualities in Jane are nurtured by Burns-- Jane, for the first time, is obliged to consider questions concerning proper conduct and fundamental questions about life. Helen teaches her many New Testament

principles with which Jane is unfamiliar, but which she adopts later in life. From her, Jane learns to--

read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how He acts; [to] make His word your rule, and His conduct your example . . . Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you . . . with this creed, revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low; I live in calm, looking to the end.(JE,90-1)

Accordingly, Jane looks to the "end" of her life in her written autobiography in which she finds "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"(II Peter 3:13).

When Helen Burns encourages her to bear "what it is your fate to be required to bear," Jane Eyre is puzzled by this new principle of endurance:

I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathize with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser. Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes. I suspected she might be right and I wrong; but I would not ponder the matter deeply: like Felix, I put it off to a more convenient season. (JE,88)

The doctrine is evidently well learned, for at "a more convenient season"--when she feels obliged to leave Mr. Rochester--her words echo those of Helen: "Mr Rochester, I no more assign this fate to you than I grasp at it for myself. We were born to strive and endure--you as well as I: do so"(JE,343). She applies these principles to herself, for when obliged to leave Mr. Rochester, she reminds herself that "I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad. . . Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this"(JE,344). She adheres to them, thanking "God [who] directed me to a correct choice: I thank His Providence for the guidance!"(JE,386).

Jane thus becomes--as all prophets are--a spokesperson for truths and moral

principles. She pauses at various junctures in the novel to elucidate these truths, to exhort others to do that which is right or merely to state the condition of things as she sees them. When she describes the reasonable progress Adèle Varens makes in her studies, for example, she acknowledges that while some persons may think her praise moderate, she is "not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth"(JE,140). And Jane insists upon telling the truth for the entire novel, not only to her readers, but also in conversation with other characters. When Mr. Rochester strives to find peace and security in Jane, she reveals his flawed moral grounding and teaches him to look to God for assistance: "A wanderer's repose or a sinner's reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom, and Christians in goodness: if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to mend and solace to heal"(JE,247). It is Jane herself, then, who has become the novel's prophet, moral guide and spokesperson for transcendent truth.

Chapter Three: Shirley and Conflicts of Vision

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

Proverbs 29: 18

For once I myself saw with my own eyes the Sybil at Cumae hanging in a cage,
and when the boys said to her "Sybil, what do you want?" she replied, "I want
to die."

Petronius, The Satyricon (1stAD)

Charlotte Brontë concludes Shirley satirically, observing that she "see[s] the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral"(S,599).

Recklessly heedless of these remarks, I will venture, perhaps in folly, to search out the putative "moral" and simultaneously, the structural unity of the novel--a gesture which seems owing to the novel given its unfavourable early reviews. Compared to the widespread praise which Jane Eyre inspired, Shirley's initial critical reception was lukewarm--a reception which surprised Brontë who "took great pains with Shirley" and who believed "that it was not inferior to the former work"(Gaskell,424). After reading Jane Eyre, George Henry Lewes had suggested to Charlotte Brontë to write with less "melodrama" and with a greater consciousness of social and historical issues; although she endeavoured to adhere to his advice in her ensuing novel, Lewes responded to Shirley with very little enthusiasm. In an elaborate dissection of the novel and of its failings, he directed his attention towards what he believed to be the greatest problem, its diffuse focus:

In Jane Eyre, life was viewed from the standing point of individual experience; in Shirley that standing point is frequently abandoned. . . In Shirley all unity, in consequence of defective art, is wanting. There is no passionate link; nor is there any artistic fusion, or intergrowth, by which one part evolves itself from another. . .

It is not a picture; but a portfolio of random sketches for one or more pictures. The authoress never seems distinctly to have made up her mind as to what she wants to do. (Allott,163-5)

Lewes's review is unduly harsh with Charlotte Brontë's third novel; despite his almost completely unwarranted criticisms, Lewes initiated a series of attacks on Shirley with which more sympathetic critics to this day must contend.

Sadly, most contemporary critics have followed his lead--their words reiterating his original comments--and have attacked the book on the grounds of its purportedly flawed structure. Indeed, a great deal of criticism on Shirley is a

response to what appears as its lack of focus and integration of theme and content. Robert Keefe asserts that "the relationship between cause and effect shows signs of breaking down. Whole chapters could be omitted, as G.H. Lewes pointed out, without disturbing the progress of the novel . . . Point of view threatens to become fragmented as clumsy narrative techniques, such as Shirley's *devoir*, are introduced"(131). In his article, "Private and Social Themes in Shirley," Asa Briggs is evidently in accord with Lewes as he points out that the novel is a "bundle of loosely connected--sometimes unconnected--themes. It lacks compactness"(206). Winifred Gérin insists that "its faults . . . are of construction, rather than content," although she concedes that "for the same reasons that the plot was dislocated, the book contains some of the most philosophical thinking and the sheerest poetry of expression of all Charlotte's novels"(390). Earl A. Knies attributes the fragmented narrative to the "multi-voiced narrator" and concludes that the effect is "a lack of focus, and this is strengthened by the fact that, to cover her larger canvas, she introduces several, not always interdependent themes"(163;176). Robert B. Heilman suggests that he perceives, if not a multi-voiced narrator, at least "two different ways of telling each part of the story"--the two ways referring to the public and private facets of the novel(124).

Although the criticisms made against Shirley may have some merit, many other critics have found an underlying principle of unity at work in the novel. Cynthia Linder has suggested that two interconnected themes are the unifying elements in the novel:

If the novel is read as a realistic study of society, instead of assuming that it is another novel written in the romantic mode, then it will be found to have a coherence and order, in which character, event and action mutually support and illuminate two themes: these are class-relationships and feminism, the latter with its various related topics,

such as the education of women, and freedom of choice in marriage.
(72)

To bolster her argument, she dredges up Brontë's original and alternate choices for the novel's title: initially, Brontë selected "Hollow's Mill," followed by "Fieldhead"--both of which suggest that she was not focusing on the biography of a person, but on the action within a geographical place. In finally selecting Shirley, Linder believes that Brontë "does not relinquish her central theme, as the title . . . refers to the titular owner of Fieldhead, who was also the owner of the ground and buildings called Hollow's Mill"(72). In such a fashion, she unifies the themes of feminism and class-relationships, by focusing respectively upon a female protagonist and the working relationship between the employers and employees at Hollow's Mill.

Whereas Linder sees these two themes as organizing principles, Susan Freeman adopts an entirely different approach, declaring that the novel's seeming incoherence and rival thematic concerns are in themselves the novel's primary interest:

Public truth and private truth are popular antagonists, their incompatibility a nineteenth-century commonplace, so that to compose a novel in which public and private affairs take place concurrently, with equal validity, sometimes even to the same people, even in the same chapter, even within a single human being, may seem to display perilous eccentricity. . . in this novel public and private matters multiply into oppositions between--among others--action and inaction, the real and the ideal, the specific and the general, the practical and the fantastic, the text and its significance, and of course the male and the female. (562)

Freeman recognizes that such "flexibility" in a novel "risks disconcerting readers who prefer consistency--but it is also bold, new"(560). She quite accurately observes two diametrically opposed tensions operating within the novel, the one

public and associated with the masculine and the other private and associated with the feminine; she suggests that the slow transition from the former to the latter constitutes "the most fundamental action of the novel"(565). Brontë's warnings to the reader to reduce expectations "to a lowly standard" should be heeded, however, because that transition towards which the reader is guided and the expectations which he or she comes to maintain are the ones least satisfied.

Both Linder and Freeman offer feasible--and not entirely incompatible--solutions to questions raised about the novel's thematic focus; yet these suggestions can be seen as subordinate to or as subsets to an even larger underlying principle. The main plot structure of Shirley is a reworking of a biblical narrative structure: Brontë achieves "artistic fusion," since from its opening to the conclusion, a pattern which parallels biblical structure emerges from the events, characters and chapter-titles. Linder's suggestion that the novel is concerned with feminism can be readily accommodated in this structure, since the main plot, a biblical pattern of events, parallels "male," or public interests of the novel, whereas "female," or private interests undermine or interrupt this structure: the confusion which Freeman observes is the inevitable result of these rival concerns. The male world is evidently dominant, since the first four chapters, as Freeman notices, are almost completely devoted to its realm: "Brontë does not remark on the absence of females for her narrative, though (with the exception of telling the mysterious story of Mary Cave) she has rigorously excluded them: in . . . the world of public affairs, they simply are not to be found"(566). The "female" concerns can be perceived as subplot which intrude upon the prearranged and often mechanical nature of the main or "male" plot--a nature affirmed by the title

of the last chapter, "The Wind-Up."¹ The rival "modes of consciousness" which Brontë employs, then, "[resist] easy resolution, even when [s]he tries to foreclose the issues" with fairy-tale marriages(Larson, Dickens, 35).

Pertinent to the biblical pattern and references Brontë employs in Shirley is Janet Larson's discourse on allusion as it operates in literary texts, and specifically, in Dickens' novels. More specifically, Larson examines and explicates how subtextual allusion in Dickens functions:

Dickens employs subtextual allusion, in which a biblical passage, chapter or whole book (or other popular religious text) signalled by local direct reference, quotation, or echo also forms an underpattern for longer stretches . . . Two types of subtexts in his novels offer different kinds of structuring. One is the narrative that parallels events in Dickens' plot while providing a running commentary, *sub voce*, on his characters who are analogous to its own . . . The second type of subtext is the nonnarrative but pervasively influential parallel text, which can serve in two ways: for parts of a novel it may provide a medium of interpreting episodes or characters . . . or a biblical book or passage to which sets of allusions in the fiction point can act as an analogical matrix for part of a novel or for wider reaches of its imaginative vision (Dickens, 17).

Larson elaborates on this theory, explaining that a novel may have competing subtexts or that a number of subtexts may exist in hierarchical fashion, so that completely incompatible references to the Bible may co-exist in a work of fiction; thus two (or more) references may "persist in a state of unresolved tension" and work against each other for ironic purposes, or work in a specific order of

¹The relationship between male and female characters and the corresponding plot structures has biblical precedents. Northrop Frye, in *Words with Power*, observes that apocalyptic imagery in the book of Revelations reinforces this principle: "The individual is symbolically male and the community symbolically female . . . the centre is symbolically male and the circumference symbolically female"(208).

importance, an importance which is dictated by the novel's larger concerns (Dickens,17).

Such is the case in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley: Larson's second type of subtextual allusion--in which the Bible "forms an underpattern" for a plot structure --is operating in Brontë's novel, while simultaneously, a persistent sense of the apocalyptic pervades the novel. The underpattern of references suggests that the direction of the novel's main plot parallels the movement from Genesis to Revelation, although the novel's course does not always precisely match that of the Bible--indeed, often there is a slight backward movement before the scriptural references move forward again. While various critics, notably among them Peter Allen Dale, have observed that Brontë's Villette and Jane Eyre follow the same movement, Shirley has never been remarked upon in this fashion; however, the opening of Shirley immediately confirms a similar patterning. The narrator evokes images of a "genesis," suggesting that the novel will not refer to "late years," but will "evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the mid-day slumber, and dream of dawn"--or will turn to the "beginning of this century"(S,39). Within the second paragraph of the first chapter, we have already shifted from "the beginning" to the Book of Exodus, with the reference to the "unleavened bread with bitter herbs" eaten on Passover in Egypt(cf.Exodus 12:15).² A cursory glance at chapter titles also indicates this paralleling of biblical structure. The first chapter is titled "Levitical," conjuring up the association with the tribe of Israel which was devoted to priestly service and consequently, refers to the third Book in the Bible. The eighth chapter is titled "Noah and Moses," character names taken from Genesis

²This reference is a curious overlapping of references to Passover and to Good Friday, an example of the "fractured" biblical references which one occasionally finds in this novel--and which suggests the overlapping of two different plots.

and Exodus; the sixteenth chapter refers to Pentecost, as it is titled "Whitsuntide," and thus resonates with allusions to the book of Acts in the New Testament; and the final chapter, "The Winding Up," echoes the book of Revelations in which all "accounts" are purportedly "settled" (S,587).

The male or public facets based on this biblical structure dictate the "rules" of the social game, set up and "[give] patterns and structures to society, its myths and preferred forms of belief"; these rules also carry "socially determined, observed and reified rules and goals" (Slethaug,66). For this reason, Joe Scott can invoke the scriptural passage 1 Timothy 2:11 to silence "authoritatively" female protests and rebellion: "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (S,322). In contrast, the feminine aspects of the novel--those parts which critics typically find out of place, disruptive or useless--play with these established rules, since "play is the random disrupter, the leveller, the disseminator" (Slethaug,66) Caroline Helstone objects to Scott's scriptural reference, first asking his permission for "the right of private judgement" to interpret the scriptures:

I account for them in this way: [Paul] wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn; to make it say, "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection." (S,323)

Although the possibilities she cites are far-fetched, it is significant that Caroline gives voice to and "re-visions" the scriptural interpretation of that passage.

Typically, a woman was subject to male perspectives and mediation of Scripture:

although Brontë was conscious of this tradition, "she also had been nourished on the Protestant tradition which had taught her to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the Scriptures"(Vargish,382). Caroline's evaluation and re-interpretation of the male perspective of the passage from 1 Timothy is an objection to their conventions and domination. Since the female characters in the novel are perceived to be "a kittle and a froward generation" who have no place in the "Monday morning" work world, inevitably critics also find that the "game" established by the male facets of the novel--rather than the "play" of the female parts--are that which provide the "privileged structures, meanings or signifieds"(S,322;Slethaug,66).

Although this biblical narrative structure, which parallels male interests, is supposed to provide "meaning," it is used for satirical and ironic purposes, rather than to insinuate a sense of order or to invoke closure. In Jane Eyre, both the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress were used as subtexts which paralleled Jane's own quest and which provided the reader with psychological reassurance, affirmation of faith and a sense of poetic justice. The biblical subtext in Shirley operates in a completely different fashion: rather than providing the reader with a source of reassurance or religious affirmation, the biblical references undercut any sense of romantic expectation and thus also deny the reader any sense of satisfaction. In fact, most of the biblical references, particularly in relationship to male characters, are employed ironically. These allusions in the novel suggest that the biblical patterns and apocalyptic closure--which, as it will become apparent, male characters strive for--are hollow, unsatisfactory and reflect a deepening sense of the inadequacy of traditional biblical principles established by patriarchal society: although male characters frequently allude to scripture, they seem to have lost its

spiritual vitalizing substance and have instead degenerated into spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, Robert Moore's mill and machinery are his "gods . . . the Orders in Council are . . . another name for the seven deadly sins . . . [and] Castlereagh is [his] Antichrist" (S,57;cf.Prov.6:16,1John 2:18). The mercantile classes, as the narrator observes, do not operate "from the motives Christ teaches, but rather from those Mammon instills" (S,183). Materialism has become the god of male characters and instead, the "spiritual, emotional and imaginative values have fallen by default to women" (Keefe,134). The biblical passages to which Brontë alludes are thus fractured: on the one hand, losing their potency because moral standards have become detached from their original biblical foundation, and on the other, maintaining their "two-edged" power as the narrator uses them to undermine and to denounce the hypocrisy of the male characters.

The opening chapter title, Levitical, for example, refers to curates--"three rods of Aaron"--who have inherited the forms of the priestly duties from the Old Testament, but who have "[denied] the power thereof" (S,40;II Timothy 4:5). Similarly, in the opening chapter, when Mr. Helstone walks in upon the three curates dining, the pattern of ironically employed, of fractured biblical allusions and consequently of undermined expectations is immediately established. He accosts them, with "What! has the miracle of Pentecost been renewed? Have the cloven tongues come down again? Where are they? The sound filled the whole house just now. I heard the seventeen languages in full action," only to subvert the reference to the book of Acts by altering the reference (S,45):

What do I talk about the gift of tongues? Gift, indeed! I mistook the chapter and book, and testament:--Gospel for law, Acts for Genesis, the city of Jerusalem for the plain of Shinar. It was no gift, but the confusion of tongues which has gabbled me deaf as a post. *You*, apostles? What!--you three? Certainly not:--three presumptuous

Babylonish masons (S,45-6).

Rather than Pentecost, Mr. Helstone alters the reference to confusion of tongues at Babel to denounce the hypocrisy of his three clergymen. Similarly, the chapter titled, "Noah and Moses," prepares the reader for characters who could potentially be associated with the corresponding Old Testament figures. Instead of being presented with leaders or representatives of God, the reader is confronted with poor counterfeits: Moses Barraclough and Noah O'Tim's may "preach peace" but in reality "make it the business of [their] life to stir up dissension . . . for bad purposes of [their] own"(S,155). The appropriation of scriptural references in this manner "fractures" biblical patterning itself, thus creating instability and incertitude and easily overturning assumptions.

As this parodic biblical pattern is threaded through Shirley's plot structure, a simultaneous sense of the apocalyptic is built into the narrative. The apocalyptic imagery and references, although usually associated with the Bible's book of Revelations, are in Shirley also largely drawn from books such as Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Mark and Thessalonians. The previous reference in Shirley made to the behaviour of the characters Moses and Noah is a perfect example of this overlaying of the biblical plot structuring and apocalyptic context: although their names are drawn from the Old Testament, their "preaching of peace" is an echo of an apocalyptic passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:3: "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with a child"(S,155).

Intimately related to apocalypse is the sense of expectation of some disclosure or "unveiling," or of "a radical break between history and the new kingdom":

Apocalypse grows out of a conviction that most persons and institutions are irredeemably corrupt, fit only for destruction. To this extent it expresses pessimism or despair; but it is also inspired by unshakable faith that God will put everything right for the virtuous few. (Kinsley,46)

Characters are constantly waiting for a change, for some sudden action to restore or to establish a new order. Mr. Yorke, for example, asserts that he perceives "the wide-spread spirit of disaffection against constituted authorities . . .as the most promising sign of the times"(S,83). This sense of expectation, Kate Lawson observes, is "arguably a key to the meaning of the novel itself":

The narration of Shirley can be seen as occupying a space of deferral structurally analogous to the one described in Proverbs: [Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Prov.13:12]. The narration is predicated on expectation, on hope . . .there is little sense of completion, of finality, because finality is incompatible with deferral. We must wait for an end which is not now but soon. This structure of deferral surely accounts in part for that lack of unity, for that heterogeneity and randomness of structure which Lewes noted. (Lawson, Dissenting,735-6)

The sense of apocalyptic expectation built into the narrative permeates the entire structure of the novel.

As early as the first chapter, characters and events are referred to in apocalyptic terms. Mr. Sweeting, one of the three curates, in conversation with Mr. Helstone, elaborates upon the character, Mike Hartley, the "Antinomian weaver." Apparently, Hartley is a self-appointed prophet and social critic, rather than one called by God; he self-interestedly invokes biblical language and passages as he warns Mr. Hall, a curate, that "he and all his hearers are sitting in outer darkness"(S,48), an echo of Christ's warning that "the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and

gnashing of teeth"(Matthew 8: 12). He seems to know of or suggest future events and uses biblical passages to support these "prophetic" perceptions--advising, for example, that Robert Moore "should be chosen as a sacrifice, an oblation of a sweet savour" to appease the wrongdoing within the region(S,48;cf.Isaiah19:21). He is also apparently "a very Ezekiel or Daniel for visions": Hartley relates to Mr. Helstone, who in turn relates it to the curates, a "vision" which is "revealed to him in Nunnely Park"(S,49):

"Before dark, when he heard what he thought was a band at a distance, bugles, fifes, and the sound of a trumpet; it came from the forest, and he wondered that there should be music there. He looked up: all amongst the trees he saw moving objects, red, like poppies, or white, like May-blossom; the wood was full of them; they poured out and filled the park. He then perceived they were soldiers--thousands and tens of thousands; but they made no more noise than a swarm of midges on a summer evening . . . he followed them to Nunnely Common; the music still played soft and distant. On the common he watched them go through a number of evolutions, a man clothed in scarlet stood in the centre and directed them; they extended, he declared, over fifty acres; they were in sight half an hour; then they marched away quite silently: the whole time he heard neither voice nor tread--nothing but the faint music playing a solemn march."
(S,49)

Hartley, "a wise Daniel as he is," follows up his vision by giving the "the interpretation thereof: it signifies, he intimated, bloodshed and civil conflict"(S,50).

Like Rochester and St. John, Hartley self-consciously invokes prophetic discourse to validate his stance. Evidently, this character is working his audience in the tradition of the prophet of Amos, who had "[refused] to compromise with polite conventions, a social reputation in northern Israel for being a fool and a madman, and an ability to derive the substance of what he says from unusual

mental states, often allied to trance. Such prophets also foretell a future which is an inevitable result of certain foolish policies"(Frye, Words,53). Given many of the "foolish policies" being executed by local mill owners and the history of the Luddite riots, "bloodshed" is easy for him to conjecture. Like Amos, Hartley is recognized as "crazed," but usually achieves this state by "drinking for a few weeks together"(S,48):

The man would be half a poet, if he were not wholly a maniac; and perhaps a prophet, if he were not a profligate. He solemnly informed me that hell was foreordained my inevitable portion; that he read the mark of the beast on my brow; that I had been an outcast from the beginning. God's vengeance, he said, was preparing for me, and affirmed that in a vision of the night he had beheld the manner and the instrument of my doom . . . he delivered himself of the comfortable message that he could wish Mr. Moore to set his house in order, as his soul was likely shortly to be required of him (S,242-3).

Hartley avails himself of scriptural references and vocabulary to validate his own perceptions; he is able to foretell Robert Moore's "sacrifice," but only because he initiates it. Hartley's introduction in the first chapter is an important narrative device because it immediately throws the reader into a "time-scape" which is flooded with apocalyptic forms and images and which remains constant for the duration of the novel.

Indeed, the setting and atmosphere of Shirley seems to be a reworking of passages abstracted from Matthew and from the Book of Acts. In the former passage, the "signs of the times" are enumerated by Christ:

And you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all things these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. (Matthew 24: 6-7)

Again, the introduction of Shirley establishes a tone which corresponds to this passage: Mr. Helstone speaks of the "signs" of a possible riot at Hollow's Mill and Mike Hartley has intimated that civil conflict is to ensue shortly. Later, the narrator suggests that the "throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern countries"(S,62). Finally, the "rumours of wars" are fulfilled as "Discord [breaks] loose . . . from control" in the form of a riot at Hollow's Mill on the evening of Whitsunday:³ "The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and brick-bats, and, close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows"(S,338). Pentecost loses its spiritual significance to become a perverted version of the male world of riots and conflict.

The latter passage, taken from the Book of Acts, contains a prophecy from Joel which Peter sees as being fulfilled at Pentecost--typologically, the corrective "answer" to Babel, but which the characters in Shirley also seem typologically to fulfil:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy . . .

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: (Acts 2: 17-20)

Evidently, Brontë reworks that passage into the novel, for characters are frequently

³Ironically, on the celebration of Pentecost, the riot is described in terms parodic of the event from the book of Acts: Moore, for example, "speaks at last . . . and he seems to have the gift of tongues"(S,336). Again, the pattern in which any scriptural reference has lost its spiritual basis is reinforced.

seeing visions or having dreams or prophesying, and "wonders" abound. The moon--while it may not "turn into blood," becomes blood red just before Robert Moore is almost lethally wounded. As Mr. Yorke observes, the moon "rising into the haze, [is] staring at us wi' a strange red glower . . . What does she mean by leaning her cheek on Rushedge i' that way, and looking at us wi' a scowl and a menace?"(S,504). *Shirley* is also certainly a novel of visions: Mike Hartley, the narrator, Robert Moore, and Shirley Keeldar, among others, are capable of seeing and relating visions to others.

The fictive narrator's capability of "seeing" visions and relating future events is the result of his privileged stance: he is able to foretell events because *he* is the storyteller who knows about, relates and manipulates those events: "Like the Almighty . . . [he] *creates* his own universe with its peculiar inhabitants, laws and events"(Prickett, *Reading*,185). He is, in some senses, a prophet because he is able to suggest what will occur in the future, which is beyond the characters' knowledge in the events of the story. He discloses what the future holds for Jessy and Rose Yorke twenty years from the point in the narrative: "[Mr. Yorke] has no idea that little Jessy will die young" and that Rose will be "a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere"(S,167-8). He dwells again upon Jessy at a later point in the narrative:

But, Jessie, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild . . . The wind cannot rest: it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist . . . This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too--when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new-made in a heretic cemetery, sat near a wood-fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling . . . They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for so long as they lived; and they knew that heavy falling rain was

soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them; but Jessie lay cold, coffined, solitary--only the sod screening her from the storm. (S,391-2)

If it is argued that he is living and writing in a time period after which all these events have passed, it can be equally argued that his disclosures about future events are described in terms of "revelations"; in reference to his limited powers about Martin Yorke, for example, he states that "Martin might be a remarkable man: whether he will or not, the seer is powerless to predict: on that subject, there has been no open vision"(S,170).

Many criticisms made by critics involve the narrator who plays with his privileged position, usurping the conventions of the novel and intruding with his own personal remarks; yet, his observations, although not tied to the plot development, are a narrative device which relates to the thematic interest of the feminine play with established orders and conventions. Indeed, the narrator often expresses feminine concerns and point of views in the midst of his storytelling. In discussing Caroline Helstone's unrequited love, he parodies scripture to express the passivity a woman is expected to adopt:

Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions; utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyred . . . You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. (S,128)

The scriptural precedent to which the narrator is referring is found in Luke 11: 9-

12; the nature of that passage is one in which asking is met with receiving. When one asks for "an egg" of his Father, it is not likely that He "will . . . offer him a scorpion"; indeed, the contrast between the two is intended as an expression of incredulity. The cynicism and satiric bitterness of the narrator becomes "more symptomatic of the larger spiritual crisis toward which his ironic allusions point, a crisis in divine and human relationships marked by the loss of belief in any transcendent power of transformation working through the community"(Larson, Dickens,29).

The ability to prophesy and to see visions is not confined to the narrator, however, since characters within the novel are also able to predict future events or have visions. The characters who have visions can be subdivided into two camps: those who actively pursue the fulfilment of that which they envision and those who act as vessels, receiving the vision and its truth passively and often disinterestedly. Evidently, the narrator falls into the second camp, because as much as he may seem to orchestrate events, he is glimpsing into the future and/or past to relay historical facts to his readers. Besides the narrator, the two rival camps can be aligned with female and male interests--just as Freeman had outlined. The male characters tend towards the former group, since they actively pursue their visions, seeking the means to fulfil them.⁴ The female characters are passive receptacles of truth, receiving the visions, but not attempting to actively make these visions come to pass.

Rose Yorke, for example, declares to her mother that "about each birthday, the spirit moves me to deliver one oracle respecting my own instruction and

⁴ The tendency to look for "signs" could be attributed to the presence of Millennialist thought. The propensity to shape or to construct apocalyptic history--as Hartley does when he interprets historical events with an apocalyptic slant--would often be the inevitable result.

management: I utter it and leave it; it is for you, mother, to listen or not"(S,386). In the opening chapter, although Mike Hartley believes that Robert Moore will become "a sweet oblation," he actively fulfils that prophecy by becoming the self-appointed "revenger of blood," crying out before he strikes out against Moore, "When the wicked perisheth, there is shouting . . . As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more . . . terrors take hold of him as waters; hell is naked before him. He shall die without knowledge"(S,506;cf.Prov.10:25). Similarly, Robert Moore in the last chapter envisions what will happen historically and how that will affect his financial position:

Caroline, I foresee what I will now foretell. This war *must* ere long draw to a close: Trade is likely to prosper for some years to come: there may be a brief misunderstanding between England and America, but that will not last . . .

The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse: the beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street: there shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes: the rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, beaded with the cinders from my mill: and my mill, Caroline--my mill shall fill its present yard.
(S,597)

The narrator confirms the partial accuracy of Moore's predictions: "I suppose Robert Moore's prophesies were, partially, at least, fulfilled. The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes"(S,599). Moore, however, is more "far-seeing" and "calculating" than prophetic(S,240). Other male characters only prophesy that which they wish to see accomplished, Mr. Helstone predicting "great things" regarding the improvement of Caroline's health and Mr. Sympson congratulating "his prophetic soul" about the purported marriage between Shirley Keeldar and Phillip

Nunnley(S,416;447).

Shirley Keeldar stands apart from other characters in terms of her "eagle acute" sight or her tendency towards vision and prophecy(S,309). Whereas the visions of the male characters parallel biblical structure and paradigms, the visions of the female characters, and notably Shirley, undermine their rigid constructs: her visions are "play" because they are "unstructured and lacking rules and goals," whereas the visions of the males are "game" because they have "certain reasoned moves, rules and goals"(Slethaug,65). The narrator makes it quite clear that Shirley stands apart, even above, the conventional rules of society and of human beings, which justifies the title's focus upon her:

A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled--untroubled; not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child . . . she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence angels looked down on the dreamer of Beth-el, and her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as [its] . . . swift glory spreads out, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendours faster than Thought can effect his combinations, faster than Aspiration can utter her longings.
(S,374)

Because Shirley is "a station scarcely lower than . . . angels," she can assert in argument with her uncle that "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 hardly speak in the same tongue"--a reverberation of Isaiah 55:8 where God asserts His authority and dignity above humankind(S,518). It is clear that her union with nature and her visions which are uncontaminated by her own longings and desires differentiate her from other characters:

Her sole book in such hours was the dim chronicle of memory, or the sibyl page of anticipation; from her young eyes fell on each volume a

glorious light to read by; round her lips at moments played a smile which revealed glimpses of the tale or prophecy: it was not sad, not dark. Fate had been benign to the blissful dreamer, and promised to favour her yet again. (S,237)

Shirley stands apart from other characters and is able to receive such visions of life because of her imaginative faculty, "the pure gift of God to His creature"(S,374).⁵ She is, as Frye defines it, a visionary who "creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this one have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism"(Symmetry,8). While it is Shirley's distinguishing mark, other characters perceive imagination as evil--in fact, as an apocalyptic form of blasphemy: "The Abomination of Desolation was no mystery to them: they had discovered that unutterable Thing in the characteristic others call Originality"(S,428). For Shirley, her original mind is her life source, her "[heart] would be cold if that elixir did not flow about [her] . . . [her] eyes would be dim if that flame did not refine [her] vision"(S,78). Her imaginative faculties enable her to re-envision the female "genesis," a striking contrast to and undermining of the novel's and the Bible's Genesis. Shirley is granted, as Larson concedes, a Pisgah sight in which she details Nature and her resemblance to the first woman, as she perceives her: "Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, I see her! and I will tell you what she is like: she is like what Eve was when she and Adam

⁵Shirley is also distinguished from other characters because of her close proximity to Nature; as Patricia H. Wheat suggests, for Brontë, "the artist who was close to Nature was close to Truth, and was not susceptible to the influences of "conventional" society as was the city dweller"(86).

stood alone on earth"(S,314). When Caroline mentions previous male interpretations of Eve, specifically Milton's "first woman," Shirley rebuffs them, to give a version of her own:

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 . . . That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was his son. (S,315-16)

She evinces contempt for Milton's perception of the first woman and re-defines her: she was a creature of strength, vitality and resilience. Yet, women in Shirley's world must contend with societal forces before they can exhibit any such primal character. Shirley becomes a "voice of dissent," as described by Lawson, carrying out what Jane Eyre merely introduces, objecting to the confinement of women and to the "attitude which institutional Christianity adopts towards women"(730).

Brontë herself expressed great concern for the number of women who felt that their lives were devoid of purpose, who were obliged to wait at home for a marriage proposal because of the lack of other avenues:

Your daughters--nor more than your sons--should not be a burden on your hands. Your daughters--as much as your sons--should aim at making their way honourably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home. Believe me, teachers may be hard-worked, ill-paid, and despised, but the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst-paid drudge of a school. Whenever I have seen, not merely in humble, but in affluent homes,

daughters sitting waiting to be married, I have pitied them from my heart. (Shorter, Letters II,367)

These expressions of feminist discontent in Shirley are a rebellion against "the conservative orthodoxy of the narrative's surface endorsement of the established church . . . The voice of female dissent thus accounts, in large measure, for the strained and heightened language which occasionally breaks the otherwise calm surface of the narrative"(Lawson,730). The long gaps in the narrative structure provided by Shirley's vision revitalizes previous interpretations of women--interpretations which were usually filtered through the eyes of male figures.

Her visions, moreover, are not mingled with hopes, and aims: whereas male characters confuse their longings with prophecy and consolidate their aims and beliefs with biblical parallels, the female characters are the receptacles of visions or of inevitable future events. In argument over what country is bound to win the Napoleonic Wars, both Moore and Mr. Yorke cite contemporary scriptural typology to defend themselves: "you forget the true parallel: France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses."(S,70). In contrast, Shirley makes predictions about future events which are not even remotely self-interested; when she speaks to Henry Sympson, for example, she foretells his future prospects:

Harry, it is your mind, which is stronger and older than your frame, that troubles you . . . Study carefully, not only books but the world. You love nature; love her without fear. Be patient--wait the course of time. You will not be a soldier or a sailor, Henry: but, if you live, you will be--listen to my prophecy--you will be an author--perhaps, a poet. . . You will write [a book], that you may give your soul its natural release. Bless me! what am I saying? more than I understand, I believe, or can make good. (S,438)

When one reflects upon Henry's desire, inspired by Shirley's prophecy, to "write a book that [he] may dedicate it to [her]," it can be considered as a possibility that

the narrator of Shirley is indeed Henry Sympson and that consequently, her prophecy is fulfilled.

If Shirley introduces a feminist perspective, and consequently steals the attention from the masculine strand of the narrative, that focus upon her is removed with the introduction of Louis Moore. His subtle control over Shirley re-establishes the dominance of the male plot; consequently, the female characters have little front stage action for the remainder of the novel. Although their relationship may be spoken of in idealistic terms, ominous overtones flood these terms as well. In Shirley, Nature is associated with female characters; male characters are identified by their aloofness and isolation from her; because of this isolation, "men feel free to improve on her, to introduce technological innovations, to create prosthetic extensions of their strength which will make them ever more powerful at the same time they increase their isolation"(Keefe,139). Thus, Shirley is "improved" by her tutor, as she modifies her behaviour to imitate and adopt his; she learns French by hearing and imitating his accent: "What *he* read, *she* repeated: she caught his accent in three minutes"(S,455). Her identity seems to become dependent upon his as she takes "the word up as if from his lips . . . his very tone; she seize[s] his very accent"(S,463). As she takes on his characteristics, Moore speaks of her as one who is to be captured and tamed: "Pantheress!-- beautiful forest-born!--wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods, and pinings after virgin freedom"(S,584). He has apparently become her keeper and consequently, others approach him to receive a "translation" of Shirley: Mr. Sympson, who finds her as "inscrutable . . . as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar . . . [is] moved more than once to call Daniel, in the person of Louis Moore, and to

ask an interpretation"(S,509-10;cf.Daniel 5:5-12)

When Shirley decides to marry Louis Moore, she is distanced from the reader: she is at first subject to the narrator's conjectures about her thoughts; then, interpreted by Moore as she becomes the subject of his diary which not only appropriates her voice, but also controls the narrative; and, after her marriage, she vanishes from the reader's view, only to be alluded to briefly by Caroline and the narrator's housekeeper. As she dwindles into being a wife, she is released from her duties as Esquire, but she also attains the silence of Mary Cave--"a girl of living marble; stillness personified"--as indicated by the ominous echo in her name: Shirley Cave Keeldar(S,81).⁶ By suppressing and silencing Shirley, by containing her like the prophetess Sybil, the vitalizing vision which she provided in the narrative and the hope for a future in which the feminine and masculine are entwined in harmony, is subdued and diminished. The male plot which subsumes the female plot and which is featured most evidently in Louis Moore's diary results not in integration but in destruction; consequently, the novel provides the reader with a false sense of closure. The marriages, which are an ironic parody of the Apocalyptic marriage of the Church to Christ, are deleterious rather than regenerative. Indeed, the "two weddings are announced as if by a stranger; their two unions, if that is what [the] . . . marriages turn out to be, remain invisible and unknown . . . It is Charlotte Brontë's most severe denial"(Freeman, 574).

As if to reinforce the male plot's reinstatement and control, the narrative begins to draw upon apocalyptic imagery related again to their world of work, commerce and power. Although Shirley herself may believe "the Millennium [to

⁶Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert describe Mary Cave as an "emblem; a warning that the fate of the women inhabiting a male-controlled society involves suicidal self-renunciation"(376).

be] yet millions of centuries from mankind; being yet, indeed, an archangel high in the seventh heaven, uncommissioned to descend," the biblical allusions embedded within the narration indicate otherwise(S,574). The Napoleonic wars as described in the concluding chapters are drenched in references to the Apocalypse:

Three terrible archangels ever stationed before the throne of Jehovah. They stand clothed in white, girdled with golden girdles; they uplift vials, brimming with the wrath of God. Their time is the day of vengeance; their signal, the world of the Lord of Hosts, 'thundering with the voice of His excellency.' (cf. Rev.15:6)

"Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?(Rev.8:7)

'Go your ways: pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.' (Rev.15:7;16:1)

It is done: the earth is scorched with fire: the sea becomes 'as the blood of a dead man:' the islands flee away; the mountains are not found. (S, 590;cf. Rev.16:3)

Likewise, the merchants and the mercantile industry are referred to as the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Millennium: "Stocks, which had been accumulating for years, now went off in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; warehouses were lightened, ships were laden; work abounded, wages rose: the good time seemed come"(S,591;cf.1Cor.15:52).

Such an ending is deceptive, as the narrator indicates in one of the concluding paragraphs. Structurally, Shirley may seem to parallel the development from Genesis to Revelation, yet the narrator's injunctions to "calm [our] expectations" and "to reduce them to a lowly standard" could never be more necessary than at the novel's conclusion, for, as Qualls suggests, the novel condemns, "on page after page any notion that time means progress"(72). The various languages running through the text, the class divisions and strife, the

unreconcilable differences, do not in fact point to the book of Revelation. As Helstone suggests, quoted earlier in the essay, the reader is susceptible to mistake "the chapter, and book, and testament"; the narrator corrects any misperception in one of the concluding paragraphs:

I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes--the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage-gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel. (S,599)

The biblically literate reader must realize that in the chapter, "The Wind-Up," we have not reached Apocalypse--we have not even reached Pentecost--we have, in fact, returned to the confusion and the "ashy landscape" of Babel.

Chapter Four

Lucy as Visionary or as Artist: Villette's Concealed Revelations

And I John saw these things, and heard them.

Revelations 22:8

The fully imaginative man is . . . a visionary whose imaginative activity is prophecy and whose perception produces art. These two are the same thing, perception being an act.

Northrop Frye, Symmetry 45;59

In January of 1848, Charlotte Brontë wrote to her publisher, W.S. Williams, explaining that although, for her, the works of Charles Dickens and William Thackeray were superior compared to even her best literary endeavours, she intended to write about "Truth" as well as she was able:

Though my observation cannot penetrate where the very deepest political and social truths are to be learnt; though many doors of knowledge which are open for you are for ever shut to me; though I must guess and calculate and grope my way in the dark, and come to uncertain conclusions unaided and alone where such writers as Dickens and Thackeray, having access to the shrine and image of Truth, have only to go into the temple, lift the veil a moment, and come out and say what they have seen--yet with every disadvantage, I mean still, in my own contracted way, to do my best. (Shorter, Life II 391)

The metaphoric example of the veil which Brontë draws upon in her letter has its origins in the Old Testament: the veil, from the Hebrew *paroket*, was "the curtain which divided the Holy Place from the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies"(Horn,808). Only once a year, specifically on the Day of Atonement, a high priest was permitted to penetrate the veil; this practice ceased when, according to Scriptures, it was rent from top to bottom at Jesus' crucifixion. The image is significant because the veil is intended to *conceal*, but can also *reveal* when it is drawn back, or as in the case mentioned above, torn : it is thus linked to the notion of Apocalypse, which itself means "uncovering" or "unveiling." By using this metaphor in her letter, Charlotte Brontë equates the role of the high priest with that of a select few novelists who were privileged with glimpses of Truth which remained unseen and unpenetrated by the common masses, but which was conveyed to them by the power of their literary "word."

Appropriately, impenetrable truths and inscrutable mysteries are of

indefatigable interest to Lucy Snowe, the protagonist and first-person narrator of Villette. Like Brontë, Lucy persistently and earnestly searches for truth, boldly prying beneath "veils" to record her perceptions of her life and the lives of those around her; and struggling to resist imagination's gilt version of reality:

I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth; I liked seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance. O Titaness amongst deities! The covered outline of thine aspect sickens often through its uncertainty, but define to us one trait, show us one lineament, clear in awful sincerity; we may gasp in untold terror, but with that gasp we drink in a breath of thy divinity . . . (V, 564)

Lucy assumes a peculiar stance in the novel, assuming that she possesses a power of insight and vision with which others are not gifted. When she attends a concert with the Brettons, for example, her observations of the King and Queen of Labassecour suggest that she alone takes pains to examine and to penetrate their inner lives:

I strained my powers of vision to take in these specimens of European royalty . . . Well do I recall that King . . . at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stilet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand . . . Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain ghost--had long waited the comings and goings of that stranger spectre, Hypochondria . . . The Queen, his wife, knew this: it seemed to me, the reflection of her husband's grief lay, a subduing shadow, on her own benignant face. (V,289-90)

According to Lucy, she is privileged with the ability to interpret the "hieroglyphics" of the King's face: she glimpses around the room to discover that his "peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I could not discover that one soul present was either struck or touched" by his "Malady"(V,291).

If Lucy is obsessed with penetrating mysteries to discover the "real truth," that obsession is somewhat warranted: the obvious traces of Providence and the consequent sense of divine justice--which are evident in Jane Eyre--are completely lacking in Villette: instead, as Thomas Vargish observes, "God's will in the form of poetic justice has been replaced in Villette by a portentous silence and mystery"(Vargish,72-3). Consequently, Lucy frequently conjectures about the "meaning" of her own life and God's inscrutable will, which the narrative provides her an opportunity to decipher. Although Divine justice and meaning may not be ostensibly discernable in the novel's structuring, Vargish insists that Villette still "evokes and maintains the workings of a providential intention":

Villette is constantly informed with portents and signs of a divine plan for the protagonist. These portents and signs, and the plan itself, are kept dark throughout--almost as if Charlotte Brontë had reversed the affirmations of Jane Eyre and then asked what had become of our idea of providence. (73)

Brontë's text does not create a world without God, merely a world in which "God plans for His creature . . . in ways too mysterious for human comprehension" (Martin,144). Truth, then, always resides below the surface of things and events, requiring penetration, which "seems validated by the motif of burial and disinterment in the novel"(Bock, 127).

As a result, Lucy Snowe asserts again and again, echoing Miss Marchmont's words earlier in the text, that if God's will is inscrutable, human suffering and divine mercy are also inexplicable:

Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not *your* hour, the waiting waters will stir; in *some* shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend . . .Herald, come quickly! Thousands lie round the pool, weeping and despairing, to see it, through slow years,

stagnant. Long are the "times" of Heaven: the orbits of angel messengers seem wide to mortal vision; they may en-ring the ages: the cycle of one departure and return may clasp unnumbered generations; and dust, kindling to brief suffering life, and, through pain, passing back to dust, may meanwhile perish out of memory again, and yet again. (V,252)

Lucy indeed believes that God "will have mercy on whom [He] will have mercy." The image here of the Pool of Bethesda--taken from John 5:2, the site of miraculous healing where "the sick waited for an angel to stir the water . . . and provide healing for the first to step into it"--conveys how Lucy believes humans are dependent upon God for His seemingly arbitrary mercy, and how they anticipate, frequently in suffering, some healing token from God, often only to be disappointed by either the lack of response or by receiving a response in a "shape" not expected (Siebald,84).

Suffering, however, is for Lucy the mark of God's elect, a notion introduced in Jane Eyre, explored in Shirley and carried into Villette. Although some may pass through life with minimal emotional pain and loss--such as Paulina Home and Graham Bretton--others, such as Lucy, may endure great hardship:

Some lives *are* thus blessed: it is God's will: it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden. Other lives run from the first another course. Other travellers encounter weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable--breast adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night. Neither can this happen without the sanction of God; and I know that, amidst His boundless works, is somewhere stored the secret of this last fate's justice: I know that His treasures contain the proof as the promise of its mercy.(V,468)

Lucy acknowledges that God's workings in the world are a mystery, "a mystery she acknowledges when she uses the word *fate*" and when she suggests that the "secret" of God's justice is shielded from human eyes(Vargish,85). Suffering in

the temporal world, for her, is also evidence of an eternal realm:

Proof of a life to come must be given. In fire and in blood, if needful, must that proof be written. In fire and in blood do we trace the record throughout nature. In fire and in blood does it cross our own experience. Sufferer, faint not through terror of this burning evidence. (V,535)

Lucy perceives herself to be one of the elect, a "specially chosen victim of jealous divinity" who will be rewarded in her afterlife but who, for the present, must endure "fire and blood"(Keefe,161); she concludes that suffering is "part of his great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live" and relishes in the thought that "of this number, I was one"(V,229).

As she accepts the suffering, uncertainty and sense of expectation which permeates events in her life, she transcribes and validates those events using biblical language: by doing so, she gives herself, her perceptions and her life experiences a sense of transcendent purpose. Her perception of her life in terms of a spiritual journey is explicitly conveyed in the first chapter when she refers to her visits to the Bretton household as "the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful beside a certain pleasant stream, with 'green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round'"(V,62)--evidently an allusion to John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. If Lucy perceives her world in spiritual terms and her life as a spiritual journey, it is no surprise that she considers herself more than just one of God's elect--she also sees herself as a spiritual, almost prophet-like figure. Her conception of her relationship to God is evident in her record of the voice she hears, a voice which drives her towards Labassecour: "Leave this wilderness . . and go out hence"(V,104). Such an injunction resonates with God's command to Abraham to "Get thee out of thy country"(Genesis 12:1). Evidently, Lucy is posing as one of God's "chosen," echoing Moses as she queries "Whither should I

go? What should I do?"(V,107;cf.Exodus 17:4-6). At another juncture, she invokes biblical passages, exhorting others in a manner reminiscent of the epistle-writing Paul:

Dark through the wilderness of this world stretches the way for most of us: equal and steady be our tread; be our cross our banner. For staff we have His promise, whose "word is tried, whose way perfect:' for present hope His providence, "who gives the shield of salvation, whose gentleness makes great;" . . . Let us so run that we may obtain; let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course, and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors. (V,534)

Her words are extracted from Paul's letter to the Corinthians (9:24), where he encourages them to "so run, that ye may obtain" and from II Timothy 4:7 where he asserts that "I have fought good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." In keeping with her sense of Providence, Lucy Snowe adopts a stance in the novel which aligns herself with biblical figures--with Abraham, Noah, Paul and most notably, St. John the Divine.

Lucy, whose assertions "I, Lucy Snowe" are verbally reminiscent of those of St. John, parallels him, since both characters are, to a certain extent, passive witnesses or observers of visions--particularly those apocalyptic in nature--and recorders of experience. She quickly establishes this likeness to St. John at the novel's inception, examining the changes at the Bretton household as "signs and tokens" which portend the coming of "a second guest," words which are also verbally reminiscent of the apocalyptic passage, Matthew 16: 3, in which Christ asks his followers to be conscious of the "signs" of his "second coming"(V,62). When that guest, Polly Home, arrives, Lucy establishes herself as an "on-looker" of life, making explicit self-referential remarks about the process of her observation: "*I did take notice: I watched Polly . . . I observed her draw a square-*

inch or two of pocket handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt, and then I *heard* her weep"(V,65, italics added). In some ways, Lucy's role is imposed upon her, since she is "thrust into the shadows by the bustling activity of the new girl"; yet Lucy chooses instead to become the observer or the interpreter of events around her(Keefe,157. Like John who "sees," "hears" "looks" and "records" his visions, Lucy notices, examines and writes her autobiography.

Yet Lucy's self-referential remarks regarding her ordained role as one of God's elect are frequently ambivalent or undercut by other references; although the prophetic figure was one who was alienated from political and religious institutions and although Lucy refers to herself as one who is indeed, "homeless, anchorless [and] unsupported," she seems to be one who is also exiled and cursed, rather than chosen and blessed (V,112). When she leaves England, directed by God as she perceives, she claims that her "soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd"(V,108). Jonah's gourd, however, is "smitten" the next day so that "it withered"--a foreshadowing that Lucy's hopes and expectations will also be "smitten." Later, she associates herself with Noah, who survives the Deluge:

In my reverie, methought I saw the continent of Europe, like a wide dream-land, far away. Sunshine lay on it, making the long coast one line of gold . . . For background, spread a sky, solemn and dark-blue, and--grand with imperial promise, soft with tints of enchantment--strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope. (V,117)

Yet, as soon as she has seen promise of the future in a rainbow, she quickly adds, "Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader--or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral--an alternative, text-hand copy--*Day-dreams are delusions of the demon*"(V,117-8). Instead, she becomes "excessively sick" and returns to her cabin. Again, the biblical references indicate that she is an exiled figure when, in reference to receiving attention from one of Ginevra Fanshawe's courtiers, she

exclaims that "to put such thoughts into my head is like showing poor outcast Cain a far glimpse of Paradise"(V,217). As if to consolidate this notion, she borrows Cain's irresponsible and laconic words to respond to Dr. John's queries about Ginevra's whereabouts: "Am I her keeper?"(V,220;cf.Gen.4:9). Lucy's purportedly "divinely appointed journey" seems to be "an exile, not a mission": "many of the myriad Oriental references in the novel refer to the Babylonian Captivity of Israel. Daniel, Vashti, Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon--the metaphors which are used for people and places in Labassecour point to a journey into foreign captivity, to an exile from the chosen land which is the result of divine anger"(Keefe,37).

Despite such ambiguity about her role, she asserts her privileged stance as one of God's "chosen" and continually filters all that she sees through the lens of her religious view of life; she expresses the vision of her life's narrative in biblical terms, reading God's language in the world about her and imbuing that world with a sense of destiny, even when it may be unpalatable. As a visionary, she is in some senses like Shirley--although, in this case, it seems to be a self-imposed role--and consequently, much of her material takes on the quality of being biblical in substance or origin:

A visionary creates, or dwells in a higher spiritual world in which objects have become transfigured and charted with a new intensity of symbolism. This is quite consistent with art, because it never relinquishes the visualization which no artist can do without. It is a perceptive rather than a contemplative attitude of mind. This suggests that . . .the visionary and the artist are allied.(Frye, Symmetry 8)

The "objects" in Lucy's life are indeed "transfigured . . . with a new intensity of symbolism." As both an artist and visionary, she describes the act of writing in terms which reverberate with god-like power: "I got books, read up the facts,

laboriously constructed a skeleton out of the dry bones of the real, and then clothed them, and tried to breathe into them life, and in this last aim I had pleasure. With me it was a difficult and anxious time till my facts were found, selected, and properly pointed"(V,494). The manner in which she describes her method of composition curiously involves overlapping allusions to the Creation story in Genesis where God breathes life into Adam and of the Valley of Dry Bones in the book of Ezekiel. In the latter reference, God commands Ezekiel to "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord"(Ezekiel 37:4). As the result of his obedience, God revives the valley of dry bones:

Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

. . .So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. (Ezekiel 37: 5-6:10)

Lucy's attempts to "breathe" life into her compositions in a manner which resonates with God-like power is in some ways heretical: she goes beyond the role of the prophet, Ezekiel, as passive instrument and obedient spokesperson for God, competing with Him by evincing "pleasure" in her endeavours to infuse her narrative with breath and life--for she knows, as suggested in argument with Reason, that perfection and order can be achieved in the written word: "where . . . the speech [is] contemptible, surely there cannot be error in making written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve"(V,307). If Lucy assumes this role and consequently, strews her perceptions with religious imagery and terminology and elevates them with biblical references, she also

acknowledges that her narrative is that of a "heretic"(V,235).

More specifically, her narrative is heretical because she imbues that which is not spiritual or divine with a sense of religiosity--namely her relationships with Paul Emanuel and Dr. John Bretton. She has "in her own way repeated the sin of Maria Marchmount: the creature has become the Creator, as the intensity of sexual longing tries to find a language that will at once meet the depth of Lucy's emotional end and somehow justify it . . . She does not, like Miss Marchmount, simply prefer human love to Divine. She seeks to *inscribe* her religion of love"(Dale,16). Since she sees her life in "divine" terms and endeavours to breathe "god-like" life into her narrative, she ordains the two prominent male figures in her life with quasi-preternatural qualities and presents them as god-like figures. Peter Allen Dale suggests that she is thus guilty of "an excessive, a blasphemous love of the creature" and surely Lucy's narrative supports Dale's suggestion: a brief examination of her relationship with Graham Bretton or Dr. John, and a more detailed one of Paul Emanuel easily credits his assertion(9).

When considering memories of Bretton, Graham invites Lucy's opinion of the alterations in his character: of him, she observes that "you were almost the same yesterday as to-day," to which Graham responds that she is an "oracle"(V,402). Lucy's words immediately associate Graham with God, since they are a reverberation of Hebrews 13:8, where God is said to be "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." She places "faith" in his "advice," distrusting it as much as she would "have thought of distrusting the Bible"--thus exalting his "word" to the level of the divine(V,124). When Paulina asks her what she thinks of Graham, Lucy declares that "*I never see him*. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognized me, and then I shut my eyes" and does so

because "I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind"(V,520). Her curious assertion seems to imply not only that for her mutual recognition is dangerous, but also that she perceives him as a god-like figure upon whom she is not worthy to look.¹ Such a notion is reinforced when, later in the narrative, Lucy affirms that humans who "look on [Christ] . . . scarce can see and live"(V,533). She is indeed guilty of idolatry, which is made explicit as she compares "his beamy head in my thoughts to that of the 'golden image' which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up"(V,163;cf.Daniel 3:1).

Lucy finally deifies his letters--they "become a kind of scripture for her, a scripture embodying her 'new creed,' her 'belief in happiness' through love"(Dale,10). When Paulina Home is re-introduced into the narrative, eclipsing any possibility of a relationship Lucy may have had with Graham, Lucy decides to have the letters interred. The manner in which she recounts the procedure of preparing the letters for the burial evokes the image of ancient biblical scrolls: "I then made a little roll of my letters, wrapped them in oiled silk, bound them with twine, and, having put them in the bottle, got the old Jew broker to stopper, seal, and make it airtight"(V,380). As if to reinforce this association, Lucy describes the letters as "most dear still, though Ichabod was written on their covers"(V,379). "Ichabod" is a name given to a child in the Old Testament meaning "the glory is departed from Israel"; he is thus named because "the ark of God was taken" from the Israelites(I Samuel 4:21). Evidently, Graham's letters--a kind of temple for Lucy--are bereft of their earlier "glory." Yet Dale posits that her metaphorical imposition of Scripture upon the letters "effectively unwrites the proposed secular

¹Kazan notes that, paradoxically, Lucy "is endowed with a most powerful gift of sight, managing with averted eyes and face, to note every leisurely movement . . . So despite her claim that she never sees him, she can in fact see him provided her vision is filtered"(554).

creed, for the utterance of the Word, when it comes, inevitably reveals the presumption of the creature who aspires to the role of Creator, whose writing issues, as St. Paul would say, from the 'vanity' of the 'imagination'"(Dale,10;Romans 1.21).

If Graham is a kind of deity for Lucy, he is a deity subject to displacement; for as Graham retreats in her narrative, M. Paul Carl David Emanuel emerges, seemingly a new "messiah." His name most persuasively identifies him as a Christ-like figure or with Christ himself: whereas his first name, Paul, associates him with the great Apostle of Christ, his last name, Emanuel associates him more directly with the Messiah because "being interpreted, [it means] God with us"(Matthew 1:23); the Messiah is also, of course, the "Son of David"(Matthew 9:27). In speaking to Lucy about his passion, M. Emanuel quotes one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians to illustrate his point: "it died in the past--in the present it lies buried . . . in the future there will be a resurrection, as I believe to my soul's consolation; but all will then be changed--form and feeling: the mortal will have put on immortality--it will rise, not for earth, but heaven"(V, 433;cf. 1Cor.15:52). Also like Paul, he undertakes a journey by ship which is wrecked by storm. As Lucy's relationship with him develops, however, the biblical images and references identifying him with Christ rapidly increase. The chapter title, "M. Paul keeps His Promise," is an echo of Christ's promise of the gift of Holy Ghost to his followers. Within this chapter, Lucy begins to identify him more blatantly as a Christ-like or spiritual figure: she asserts that "he was more like a knight of old, religious in his way, and of spotless fame"; and later, that he was a "shepherd" who "collected his sheep from the pasture [to] . . .lead [them] all softly home"(V,474;475). Lucy feels the "longing to trace in [M. Paul's countenance] the imprint of that primitive

devotedness, the signs of that half-knightly, half-saintly chivalry" and openly declares that "he had become my Christian hero"--or perhaps her *miles Christi*(V,491; cf. II Tim.2:3-4)). She considers his friendship as supportive "like that of some rock," evoking the image of Christ as the Rock(V,500; 1 Cor.10:4).

Later, when M. Paul is absent from the school, a rumour is spread "about the third day" that he was to sail abroad(cf. Matthew 17:23); he confirms the report by sending a note to Lucy, asking her to "be ready for me" to which Lucy observes that "in season and out of season he had called me, and I had obeyed him," another reference to Paul's letter to Timothy to be ready to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season"(V,542, 544; cf. Luke 12:40; II Timothy 4:2). As she awaits his return in the schoolroom, she hears what she believes to be the step of the "master-carpenter," but who is M. Paul himself in "his bridegroom-mood" (V,579; cf. Rev. 18:23). Her grief over Madame Beck's interference in their relationship is assuaged by M. Paul's words of comfort which are direct references to Christ's words: his injunction to Lucy to "wipe your eyes" and his remonstrance that "I have not for one hour forgotten you" are extracted, respectively, from Revelations 7:17 where Christ promises He will "wipe away all tears" and from Luke 12:6. When he presents her with her own school, she promises to be his "faithful steward" and promises that "at [his] coming the account will be ready"--a version of Jesus's parable in Matthew 20:8 in which the steward is representative of His followers, consequently identifying Lucy as Paul's disciple(V,587). Lucy perceives his correspondence as divine oracles--for he "would give neither a stone, nor an excuse--neither a scorpion, nor a disappointment; his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed"(V,594). Whereas women in *Shirley* were given stones and scorpions in place of an egg or bread, M. Paul, as a Christ

figure, provides Lucy with fulfilling spiritual and emotional sustenance. These references culminate in Lucy's declaration that "he was my king"(V,587).

When Lucy believes that M. Paul has engaged in business affairs abroad and has left her "without a sign" of farewell, she records her perceptions of the world about her in apocalyptic and, often, destructive terms. William Kinsley asserts that apocalyptic vision, such as Lucy's, is evidence of despair.² Evidently, her distress manifests itself in such apocalyptic perceptions, for as she wanders about Villette--on an evening when she is distraught and frantic, caused in part by the opiate which Madame Beck has administered to Lucy--her descriptions about the cityscape contain a plenitude of allusions to the book of Revelations and other apocalyptic passages. That her vision is fallible and not divine is most dramatically evidenced in her misinterpretation of Villette's fête in the park. Although she realizes the "secret," unveils the "illusion" and picks up "the key of the mystery" regarding Villette's metamorphoses--namely, a city-wide fête--she quite deliberately decides not "to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night"(V,550). Thus, she begins by describing the origin of Villette's fête in apocalyptic terms derived from Matthew 24:6:

In past days there had been, said history, an awful crisis in the fate of Labassecour . . . Rumours of wars, there had been, if not wars themselves; a kind of struggling in the streets--a bustle--a running to and fro, some rearing of barricades . . . a certain day in the year was still kept as a festival in honour of the said patriots and martyrs of somewhat apocryphal memory . . .(V,550-1)

The "crisis," as Lucy describes, it does not only suggest apocalypse, but also the

² Kinsley asserts that "apocalypse grows out of a conviction that most persons and institutions are irredeemably corrupt, fit only for destruction. To this extent it expresses pessimism or despair; but it is also inspired by unshakeable faith that God will put everything right for the virtuous few"(46).

current fête. She recounts the ongoing at the festival in a manner which echoes Revelations 14:2:

The song, the sweet music, rose afar, but rushing swiftly on fast-strengthening pinions . . .Voices were there, it seemed to me, unnumbered; instruments varied and countless--bugle, horn, and trumpet I knew. The effect was as a sea breaking into song with all its waves. (V,552)

Specifically, her description of the music parallels the manner in which John describes God's voice--as the "sound of many waters"--and the voices which praise him: "I heard the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings"(Rev.1:15; Rev.19:6).

Such apocalyptic references inevitably raise the reader's expectations as Lucy perceives Madame Beck and Malevola in Villette's park, both appearing to await the one who she believes to be "the bride" of M. Emanuel:

With solemn force pressed on my heart, the expectation of mystery breaking up: hitherto I had seen this spectre only through a glass darkly; now was I to behold it face to face . . .(cf. 1Cor.12:13)

"She comes!" cried Josef Emanuel.

The flambeau glares still within a yard . . . its long eager tongue of flame almost licks the figure of the Expected.

The revelation was indeed come. Presentiment had not been mistaken in her impulse; there is a kind of presentiment which never *is* mistaken; it was I who had for a moment miscalculated; not seeing the true bearing of the oracle, I had thought she muttered of vision when, in truth, her prediction touched reality.(V,562;5)

Lucy's notion of the "Expected"--her belief that Marie Justine is the "bride" of M. Paul Emanuel--is miscalculated, as she soon discovers. As the opening line of the succeeding chapter indicates, she has undergone confusion comparable to that which occurs in Midsummer Night's Dream.

Although Lucy thinks that she has penetrated the truth, which has "Stripped

away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy" so that she can stand "free," it becomes apparent that her observations are not always accurate: in this instance, she has not penetrated Truth at all, for Marie Justine is M.Paul's godchild(V,566). Yet Lucy has consciously decided to reinforce the "charm" of the mystery of the evening's revels, a decision which leads her into erroneous assumptions about Marie Justine. Lucy's incorrect assumptions about her, however, reverberate throughout the text, since she makes assumptions about others which are easily contested. She assumes that she understands the pattern and destiny of Paulina's life and thus, associates her sufferings with that of Christ's--when Paulina is reintroduced into the narrative as a prosperous and content young woman, it is obvious that "young Lucy had misread the signs of [her] story"(Vargish,82). Despite her comments which indicate otherwise, Paul observes that "you know little of me"(V,453); similarly, Graham asserts that "we each have an observant faculty. You, perhaps, don't give me credit for the possession; yet I have it"(V,401). Although she believes she has lifted the "veil" from the lives of other characters, her own assertions are often called into question. Indeed, Brontë intended that Lucy Snowe was to be a fallible observer and narrator and that "she should not occupy the pedestal to which "Jane Eyre" was raised . . . She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her"(500,Gaskell).

It becomes evident that while Lucy is occupied with penetrating the lives of those around her, she remains almost unidentifiable to others. Paulina puzzles, quite rightly, whether "anybody will ever comprehend you altogether"(V,520). She is persistently badgered by Ginevra Fanshawe who asks "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe . . . Do--do tell me who you are?" to which Lucy enigmatically responds

"Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise"(V,392-4). Her evasiveness suggests that she is indeed one who does not disclose everything for open examination, a notion reinforced when, after Ginevra's inquiries, she observes that often disguises and reticence are required for peace of mind:

If a man feels that he would become contemptible in his own eyes were it generally known that his ancestry were simple and not gentle, poor and not rich, workers and not capitalists, would it be right severely to blame him for keeping these fatal facts out of sight? . . . wherever an accumulation of small defences is found, whether surrounding the prude's virtue or the man of the world's respectability, there, be sure, it is needed. (V,395)

From the novel's outset, she admits that her external composure is a mask and that her "staid manner" is comparable to a "cloak and hood of hodden grey; since under its favour I had been enabled to achieve with impunity, and even approbation, deeds that if attempted with an excited and unsettled air, would in some minds have stamped me as a dreamer and zealot"(V,104).³

In quasi-postmodern terms, Lucy herself acknowledges the limitations of each person's viewpoint--as a perfect example, she cites the viewpoint each character maintains about Lucy:

What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an

³Lucy is in many ways as surreptitious as Madame Beck and, for this reason, avoids open confrontation with her, for "down would have gone conventionalities, away--swept disguises, and *I* should have looked into her eyes, and *she* into mine--we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life for ever"(V,186).

opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature--adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all.(V,386)

If she is "a personage in disguise" about whom various characters maintain differing opinions, the reader too is understandably susceptible to uncertainty about the narrator of *Villette*. Lucy is, evidently, rewriting her life and self-consciously using artifice to do so. She perceives herself "as an aesthetic creation," for "beneath her cloak and hood is a series of poses, a second line of defence against our attempts to penetrate her disguise"(Tromly,64). That Lucy veils her own character from the reader and from other characters, becomes apparent when M. Paul takes the liberty of examining this "mere on-looker of life": he declares that her "susceptibilities were . . . marble--[her] face a mask" and yet insists upon "see[ing] through" Lucy to determine her character: "a resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him"(V,442;V,128). And Paul is successful in penetrating that veil which Lucy adopts because he has "the terrible unerring penetration of instinct"--for, unlike Graham who is "an object of sight [and] . . . the desire of the eye, M Paul is a subject who sees"(V,423,Williams,113). To her amazement, he observes that "we are alike--there is affinity"(V,457). As Tromly concedes, "what Paul Emanuel perceives in Lucy that no one else can see is the passion beneath the disguise, her yearning to be more than the looker-on she has declared herself to be. . . he obliges Lucy to live rather than to look"(76-77).

If Lucy disguises herself, and shrinks away from examination, it becomes apparent that her narrative upon which the reader is dependent is also arbitrary in its disclosures. Although the function of a prophet often involves "setting down"

what is seen and heard, it is increasingly obvious that Lucy withholds from the reader particular facts or experiences, particularly her own, leaving them open to speculation and intensifying, if not creating, a mysterious aura. When she opens the novel, for example, rather than discuss her own familial origins or offer self-description, she commences with the Bretton family. Karen Lawrence draws upon Lucy's fleeting self-description as a person "who, in public, was by nature a cypher," and points out the dual meaning of "cypher": the first being "a person or thing of no value or consequence, or nonentity," the second being "a secret or disguised manner of writing meant to be understood only by the persons who have the key to it"(87). Evidently, Lucy as narrator possesses the "key" to her identity and writes in a "disguised manner," omitting details and events that are central to her experience. She is reticent, for example, about the sufferings she experiences once she leaves the Bretton household, only to gloss over them briefly. At the confessional, she shows the priest "the mere outline of [her] experience" without disclosing that "outline" to the reader(V,233). When she arrives in Villette and recognizes Dr. John as Graham Bretton, she does not inform him or the reader of her discovery whose "dawn had penetrated my perceptions long since"(V,247); not until necessity, in the form of Mrs. Bretton's recognition, obliges her to reveal her identity does Lucy Snowe admit who she is--and she justifies her reticence by claiming that "to *say* anything on the subject, to *hint* at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to myself. I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through"(V,248). Too often, Lucy's narrative is covered with a cloud through which the reader cannot see.

Likewise, she withholds at great length that the "hand of M. Emanuel's was

on intimate terms with my desk . . . he left signs of each visit palpable and unmistakable"(V,430); and that, at their first acquaintance, he offered her "a little knot of white violets" which she preserved "and kept for its sweet perfume between the folds of my best dress"(V,454;187). Although M. Paul gives her gifts throughout her relationship with Graham, she does not mention him or his offerings in the narrative until Graham ceases to be of great importance. Her concealment is carried to the novel's (in)conclusion, since she does not disclose, but rather suspends the ending, creating a sense of expectation like that of the Apocalypse: ultimately, she fails to reveal the fate of M. Emanuel. She shrouds his fate in what become anti-apocalyptic terms--by her repetition of "he is coming" she establishes a sense of anticipation and also prepares the reader for a return like that of Christ's return for his "bride," the Church(cf.1Cor.1:7). Yet, if Paul is like Christ who was to return to Lucy, the apocalyptic imagery she evokes suggests destruction, not of corrupt humanity or institutions, but of Paul himself:

The heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest--so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood . . .the storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full sustenance . . . a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered--not uttered till, when the hush came, some could not feel it"(V,595-6).

By invoking the "seven days" of destruction--a parody of God's seven days of creation--she gives every indication that M.Paul died in the shipwreck; yet, at the last moment, she commands her narrative to "here pause: pause at once. There is enough said" and leaves his fate to the reader's conjectures(V,596). In Shirley, the reader is at least half-heartedly, although satirically, satisfied with some kind of fulfilling ending. No such "varnish" is provided in Villette: the reader's

expectations and knowledge are suspended.

Lucy's concealment of facts sets up a paradigm that is consistent with both vision and the plot sequence in *Villette*, for, ironically, the Book of Revelations *conceals* as much as it *reveals*. Just as its metaphorical language shrouds a complete understanding of events, so Lucy shrouds her almost arbitrary narrative revelations with elliptical comments and metaphors. When she returns home after her six month period with the Brettons, she obscures the subsequent tragic events in her life by using a parable to convey it. Paradoxically, she begins by stating that "it cannot be concealed" that she had undergone some misfortune, but simultaneously, *does* conceal that misfortune in her use of imagery:

I must somehow have fallen over-board . . . there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time--a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (V,94)

Lucy's use of imagery to convey and yet conceal narrative events culminates in the "portrait of a woman in a nun's dress" in Malevola's home, a portrait which becomes an emblem for the internal and external realities of persons and events(V,483):

By-and-bye the picture seemed to give way: to my bewilderment, it shook, it sunk, it rolled back into nothing; its vanishing left an opening arched, leading into an arched passage, with a mystic winding stair . . . Down this donjon stair descended a tap, tap, like a stick; soon, there fell on the steps a shadow, and last of all, I was aware of a substance. (V,481).

If Lucy has difficulties in penetrating "truth," it may be because the truth for

Brontë by this point is often elusive, mysterious, paradoxical or simply incomprehensible.

Ultimately, the elusiveness of truth in the novel is heightened by Lucy's romantic imagination which rewrites the narrative events of her life--for it becomes apparent that her story is the imaginative and controlled rendering of what she would like to be reality. Her imaginative and dramatic propensities alter the "truth" of the narrative, propensities with which she continuously struggles. Although she asserts that "I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination," she admits to that "curse" increasingly as her narrative progresses(V,69). She first denies that she possesses the "artistic temperament," although she confesses she had "something of the artists' faculty of making the most of present pleasure"(V,122); however, when M. Paul commands her to participate in the vaudeville for M.Beck's fête, she admits, after its termination, that "a keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by"(V,211). True to her belief that she is merely a "looker-on," she suppresses her imagination, withdrawing into corners, nooks, shadows and obscure place, where "unobserved I could observe" the "spectacle" of life(V,211). The violence of this struggle is apparent in her image for repressing imagination and passion, "after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core"(V,176;cf Judges 4:21).

As many critics have noted, Lucy is plagued by a dual life: "the life of

thought, and that of reality"--the former which is "nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy," while the latter "[remained] limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter"(V,140). She struggles "to be stoical" and deems it "necessary" to "knock" her passion and imagination "on the head," rather than allow them full reign(V,176). Because she violently represses imagination and passion and because she lives "two lives," she considers the Vashti's performance as scandalous:

It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.

It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

Swordsmen thrust through, and dying in their blood on the arena sand; bulls goring horses disembowelled, make a meeker vision for the public--a milder condiment for a people's palate--than Vashti torn by seven devils: devils which cried sore and rent the tenement they haunted, but still refused to be exorcized. (V,339).

Interestingly, Vashti was King Ahasuerus's first wife who refused to be displayed and to become an object of voyeuristic attention for his guests, even at his request; like Vashti of the Old Testament, Lucy refuses to put herself on display. Yet the Vashti of Villette is completely different, for as a stage character, she is on continuous display. Susan Gezari insists that "the Vashti's acting is scandalous in its obliteration of the boundaries between inside and outside . . . it brings what has so far remained below the threshold of the visible and expressible into light"--between passionate interior and placid exterior(127;142). Yet Lucy admires the "woman who cast herself as a creator rather than a creation, thereby imposing her will on the world rather than performing its will for her"--and Lucy is thus perturbed by Dr. John who "judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement"(128). For Lucy too is an artist whose passion and imagination are the sources of her creative ability.

Her imagination, ultimately, leads her away from, not towards revelation. Her dogged pursuit of "truth" and her interest in penetrating the mystery which supposedly is declared in revelation, are fruitless. This frustration is figured forth in her determination to understand or discover the spectral nun's origin and meaning: although she tries to "[shake] her loose--the mystery" and although the nun's garments fall "down all round me--down in shreds and fragments," ultimately, Lucy discovers that the nun, like the mysteries which she tries to create in her own autobiography, is artifice(V,569). Ultimately, too, it is not Dr. John or Paul whom Lucy worships, nor is it their love which she exalts; it is her gift of the imagination to which she bends her knee; it is her own imagination which transforms her life's narrative:

Divine, compassionate, succourable influence! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at they white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain. Temples have been reared to the Sun--altars dedicated to the Moon. Oh, greater glory! To thee neither hands build, nor lips consecrate; but hearts, through ages, are faithful to thy worship. A dwelling thou hast, too wide for walls, too high for dome --a temple whose floors are space--rites whose mysteries transpire in presence, to the kindling, the harmony of worlds! (V,308)

Lucy Snowe's inaccurate and biased observations, then, reflect a shift from the reliable prophet as divine oracle of God's word to the over-wrought, sensitive imagination susceptible to interpretative subjectivity and the fallibility of human observation.

Concluding Observations

This study of Charlotte Brontë's novels may be useful not only because it traces the evolution of her novels, but also because it may provide insight into the evolution of the novel as a genre. Jane Eyre, for example, provided readers with a sense of poetic justice and providential intention, which, according to Vargish, was of thematic importance to the Victorian novel:

A major thematic occupation . . . lies in the reiterated formal assurance that virtue will be rewarded and vice punished. Such assurance may sometimes be ironic, sometimes parodic, sometimes unconvincing; but the collective emphasis of the major fiction during this period fosters a dominant expectation of poetically just resolutions in a divinely ordered cosmos. When Charlotte Brontë began to write her serious fiction, English readers expected novels to show them that poetic justice and providential intention are one. (Vargish,57)

Evidently, Brontë not only catered to these expectations, but she herself maintained a "strong attachment to virtue which [resulted] in a wish to see the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper"(Winnifrith,50).

If Brontë provides readers with a similar sense of justice in Shirley, she simultaneously questions some Christian principles and certainties, particularly those regarding the role of women. Although the novel concludes with marriages, which parallel Jane's and Mr. Rochester's marriage in Jane Eyre, the reader's sense of closure or satisfaction is disturbed and unsettled. The reader is thus somewhat prepared for Villette's ambiguous and inconclusive conclusion, since poetic justice is withheld:

The novel drops the convention of poetic justice, but it steadily and with an admirably controlled increasing insistence evokes and maintains the workings of a providential intention . . . Villette is

constantly informed with portents and signs of a divine plan for the protagonist. These portents and signs, and the plan itself, are kept dark throughout--almost as if Charlotte Brontë had reversed the affirmations of Jane Eyre and then asked what had become of our idea of providence. (Vargish,73)

The suffering in Jane Eyre is seen, in religious terms, as purposeful; in both Jane Eyre and Shirley that anguish is reversed by the novels's conclusions. Although suffering in Villette is also portrayed as necessary, it is *not* compensated for later in life with temporal happiness--the reader becomes more conscious of the narrator's struggle to find coherence in a world which seems to make no sense. As Brontë makes clear in the unfair distribution of "rewards" Villette's conclusion, "in this life, in this world, the wicked inherit the earth"(Vargish,87).

The marked changes from her first to last novel suggest her own difficulties with the religious necessity of suffering "in a world from which the visible signs of divine mercy have been withdrawn"(Vargish,57-8). In Jane Eyre, Jane's presentiments, which initially lead her to make painful choices, can be trusted to eventually guide her into the "right" path of life(cf.JE,249); in Villette, Lucy professes that her presentiments are infallible, yet narrative events indicate quite the opposite(cf.Villette,565-66). By Brontë's final novel, characters no longer have inner divine promptings to provide them with direction. Although traces of divine mercy are obscured and poetic justice completely withheld in Villette--certainly a marked change from Jane Eyre--Charlotte herself never denies her faith. Indeed, when she reads "Letters on the Nature and Development of Man," she is appalled by expressions of atheism:

Sincerely, for my own part, do I wish to find and know the Truth; but if this be Truth, well may she guard herself with mysteries, and cover herself with a veil. If this be Truth, man or woman who beholds her can but curse the day he or she was born. (Gaskell,441)

Yet, Charlotte Brontë's last novel, which relinquishes "the aesthetic felicities and ethical prestige of poetic justice . . . without surrendering the authority of a providential intention at work in her text," is unconventional in approach(Vargish,74). As Vargish observes, novelists subsequent to Brontë will dispense with providence when they dispense with poetic justice: "Charlotte Brontë does not, and this makes Villette a kind of pivotal point, a transitional work of importance in the development of the English novel"(Vargish,74).

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