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The Nature of the Brontes

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The Nature of the Brontes

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ABSTRACT

A number of scholars have studied the Bronte sisters' (especially Charlotte and Emily's) treatment of nature separately, detailing the differences among them. The purpose of this work is to explore the similarities as well as the differences in underlying patterns of nature found in the novels and poetry of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte. Nature, as depicted by all of the Brontes offers their heroines a place free from the constraints and discrimination of Victorian society. At the same time, however, a close association with nature threatens not only the heroine's physical existence, but her individual identity as well. Thus, this analysis studies the ways in which the Brontes depict their heroines' positions between nature and culture.

INTRODUCTION

Nature, in the works of the Bronte sisters, becomes a place outside the constraints of society where heroines can have access to their individuality and emotions normally denied them. As young women surrounded by the strictures and codes of Victorian society, these heroines are subject to prejudice according to class, gender, race, and religion. In the natural world, however, all such distinctions are ignored and the heroines can freely assert their equality and self worth. Thus, the Brontes' heroines seek in nature relief from the rules imposed by society and view the natural world as the only nondiscriminatory environment available to them. As these women must live within the boundaries of society, their access to this liberating influence of nature is limited. In this manner, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte depict heroines caught between the restrictions of civilization and the freedom found in nature.

The freedom experienced in nature is of more value to the women of the Brontes' creations rather than to the men. Since the gender hierarchy during the Victorian period indisputably favored masculinity, the Brontes' heroes, with a few exceptions, have no need for the liberating influence of the natural world. Whereas society limits women's opportunities, it sanctions men's dominance; men already enjoy the autonomy that the Brontes' heroines seek. Accordingly, though many of the Brontes' male figures exhibit an affinity for the natural world, they never display the same intense love for nature as do the women. Nature is not an essential requirement for the men's personal fulfillment as it for the Brontes' heroines.

While women's gender makes them seek nature because of the constraints of Victorian society, it also makes nature a dangerous place for them. Nature itself has been traditionally defined as feminine and represented as an object (particularly in the works of the Romantic poets whom the Bronte sisters admired). Therefore, when a woman seeks escape from society in nature she risks losing her subjectivity in becoming an object. In her essay "Dreaming of Children: Literalization in Jane Eyre," Margaret Homans argues this point by stating, "The literal is historically associated with nature, and especially in and just after the romantic period, it is against identification with nature that women writers stage their ambivalent defenses against becoming identified with the literal and the object" (Homans, 84). Homans later asserts that, "The temptation to become part of a feminized nature, to become a feminized object like nature, amounts in Bronte's view to a temptation to die" (Homans, 99). The heroines in the Bronte novels are thus caught in a dilemma regarding their own identity. On the one hand, they are constrained from expressing their individual feelings in society and seek out nature to do so. Nature, however, threatens them with the loss of the very individuality they seek there. The Brontes solve this problem by positioning their heroines between nature and society. Through contact with mediated nature, the Brontes' heroines enjoy access to the natural world without sacrificing their selfhood.

In order to illustrate this woman positioned on the threshold between nature and culture, the Brontes often portray their heroines' relationships to nature as one of mediation. The heroines are unable to experience a total fusion with pure nature. Thus, each of the Brontes relies on figurative images of nature to reconcile their heroines in some

manner to the natural world. Although the heroines still remain separate from nature these images serve to strengthen the association between women and nature. Language itself provides the dominant base to many of the heroines' interactions with the natural world. Several heroines "read" nature and interpret various aspects of the landscape with words. Imposing language on nature translates it into a form the heroines can understand. In a similar manner, painting the landscape or scenes of the natural world transforms nature into a more humanly comprehensible state. Painting nature, much like reading it, is an indirect form of touching nature, but is the only option available to heroines surrounded by culture. Furthermore, most of the heroines' actual outdoor encounters occur in well-tended, cultivated gardens rather than on the wild moors or uninhabited wilderness. In his essay, "The Natural Heart: Jane Eyre's Romanticism," critic Richard J. Dunn comments on the enclosed gardens that surround Jane Eyre at Lowood School as proof of the school's attempts to control nature. While the gardens of Lowood School are certainly more restrictive than many others presented by the Brontes, these forms of controlled nature undoubtedly reflect culture's influence on the heroines' experiences in the natural world. Since the heroines are trapped within culture, these mediated forms of nature are the only options available to connect them to nature.

There are, however, a few experiences in wild, unmediated nature within the Brontes' works. In these scenes, nature most often manifests itself in entities such as storms, the moors, the sea, the wind, and the moon. Direct interaction with this unreclaimed form of nature can have negative as well as positive aspects. While the heroine may appreciate

and admire the beauty of the untouched natural world, she remains separate from it; encounters with untamed nature or attempts to become a part of it may result in a dangerous and sometimes life threatening experience. These consequences manifest themselves in forms such as shipwrecks and illness from storms. At the same time, this wild nature may present certain appeals to the woman writer. It represents a magnificent force that writers may strive to capture. An accurate representation of this pure nature would truly be an artistic triumph.

In addition to relationships with mediated nature and to those with pure nature, the Brontes also present experiences with a nature that has been obstructed by cultural barriers. In her essay "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre," Mary Poovey attributes Jane's vulnerability to Rochester within Thornfield to her social status as a governess. In this manner, society presents obstacles to relationships that could grow freely outside of society. Heroines who occupy virtually powerless positions on the social scale enjoy little freedom from the constraints of civilization. The overpowering presence of civilization may warp the heroine's ability both to enjoy the natural world and to express her own nature. While the Brontes' works most often portray heroines suspended between nature and culture, they also show the stifling effect that cultural immersion may have on the heroines by severing their relationships with nature.

All three of the Brontes deal with the concepts of nature in some form or another in their novels and poetry. A number of critics have discussed the importance of nature in both Charlotte and Emily's work. Of the sisters, Anne's representation of nature has been the least dealt with critically even though it is as interesting as those of Charlotte and

Emily. The limitations of these critics are that they tend to look at each of the Bronte sisters separately. Indeed, they tend, in the case of Charlotte Bronte, who wrote more novels than either of her sisters, to analyze her novels separately. The importance of The Nature of the Brontes is that it allows one to compare the treatment of nature by all three sisters and in the differing works of each.

In Chapter One, I examine Charlotte Bronte's presentation of characters who enjoy access, although it may be mediated by culture, to nature. In Charlotte's writing, nature becomes a stage for heroines to experience self-discovery and affirmation. In Jane Eyre, the heroine escapes her social status as a governess and also presents her spirited protest against the subjection of women underneath the free, open sky. In Shirley, both Caroline Helston and Shirley Keeldar find relief from social obligations in nature and Shirley, much like Jane, fiercely defends women from Milton's interpretation when she is surrounded by the English countryside. In Villette, Lucy Snowe, although further distanced from nature than Charlotte's other heroines, finds solace from her duties as teacher in the small garden behind the school. In Charlotte's novels, nature most often fulfills a benign, beneficent role, watching over the progression of the lovers' relationships.

There are instances, however, when Charlotte portrays nature as an ominous, threatening figure against which heroines must struggle to survive. When Charlotte's heroines become too close to nature, their lives are endangered. In this, Charlotte recognizes the threat becoming identified with nature as a mere object poses to women's self-identity. She therefore constructs a mediated form of nature for which her heroines to experience the natural world. By using figurative language

to describe her characters, and by staging key events in carefully cultivated courtyards, gardens, or calm countrysides, Charlotte links her characters to nature and allows them to enjoy the freedoms offered by nature without sacrificing their identity.

Emily resembles Charlotte in that she, too explores the disjunction between nature and civilization in her poetry and her novel. Both critics Dorothy Van Ghent and Terry Eagleton discuss this tension between the wild, unrestrained passion of the natural world and the controlled customs of society running through Wuthering Heights. Emily differs from Charlotte, however, in that Emily boldly embraces the possibilities of a union with wild nature. Of the sisters, Emily expresses the most fervent love for wildness in nature. We know from her biography that homesickness for the moors and land surrounding Haworth caused Emily to return home from school. Her love for nature may be seen in her poetry as well as in her life actions. While communion with nature entails no loss of self-identity for Emily as it does for Charlotte, it does occur at the cost of physical existence. From her poetry and her portrayal of Catherine Earnshaw, we gather that this sacrifice of the body entails freedom of the spirit, a state which Emily keenly desires. Although Emily too, like Charlotte, recognizes the dangers of a union with pure nature, she feels that bodily existence is a small price to pay for spiritual fulfillment.

Emily feels the appeal of wild nature in that it represents a power and force she strives to capture in her poetry. At the same time, she recognizes the limitations of her artistic abilities and of mere words to accurately represent nature. Emily therefore, avoids any descriptions of literal nature in Wuthering Heights. Like Charlotte, she depends on

figurative images of the natural world to suffuse her novel with a sense of nature. By not attempting to describe and confine nature to words, Emily Bronte acknowledges nature's priority over language. The absence of direct representations of nature in Wuthering Heights emerges as a tribute to the dominance of nature over words and only strengthens Emily's theory that pure nature may never be contained or restricted.

While Charlotte shows us a form of mediated nature, and Emily explores the appeals of wild nature, Anne Bronte presents in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Agnes Grey, the various cultural barriers found in civilization that intrude between the self and nature. With Helen Graham and Agnes Grey, Anne creates heroines who hold very little, if any, power on the social hierarchy of Victorian culture. Helen is reduced to a slave-like status within the walls of Grassdale, trapped and abused in a loveless marriage. Agnes Grey, as a governess, holds no authority over her charges and is subject to the will of the young children and their parents. One repercussion of their low status is that Helen and Agnes enjoy relatively little freedom, even in nature, from the constraints of civilization. In this manner, Anne emphasizes the stifling effect that immersion in culture has on her heroines' relationships with nature.

Anne's treatment of nature is particularly interesting since her work has not been analyzed much by critics. She resembles her sisters in that she employs figurative language to link her characters to the natural world and shares a predilection with Charlotte to stage interactions between lovers outdoors. Anne differs from her sisters, however, in that while both Charlotte and Emily acknowledge the

inconstancy of nature in that it may be either dangerous or benevolent, neither emphasize the moment of change so much as Anne does. Anne employs images of lightness and darkness in nature to create her own style of representing the distinct aspects of nature.

Through their writing, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte all depict female characters somehow caught between culture and nature. An overall pattern develops in the works of the Bronte sisters in which the natural world comes to represent freedom for heroines from social oppression while culture symbolizes the forces that impose subjection on these heroines. This recurring theme may be read as a protest by the Bronte sisters against the unjust suppression of Victorian women. The writings of the three Bronte sisters suggest that Victorian women should be allowed the same equality and self-expression in society that is available to them in the indiscriminate world of nature.

CHAPTER ONE

CHARLOTTE BRONTE

In Charlotte Bronte's writing, the presence of the natural world connotes far more than a background setting. Nature is a place where it is possible to ignore all distinctions of class, gender, race, and religion and it therefore becomes a stage for heroines to experience self-discovery and affirmation. Only outside, free from the confines of society, are Charlotte's heroines able to express their true emotions and desires. Jane stages her spirited protest against the subjection of women underneath the free, open sky, while Shirley fiercely defends women from Milton's interpretation when she is surrounded by the English countryside.

Although the natural world surrounding Charlotte's characters most often functions as a peaceful, beneficent setting in which characters develop, there are times when nature acts as an ominous, threatening figure against which heroines must struggle to survive. While the heroine may appreciate and admire the beauty of the untouched natural world, she remains separate from it; any encounters with untamed nature or attempts to become a part of it result in a dangerous and sometimes life threatening experience. Margaret Homans addresses this issue by arguing that Jane avoids becoming a literal part of nature in her flight from Rochester because to do so would destroy Jane's individual identity. Homans argues that nineteenth-century writers typically identify nature as a feminized object, and, if Jane were to literally fuse with nature, she too, would lose her sense of self.

Charlotte Bronte therefore faces a complex dilemma in terms of her representations of nature. While Bronte needs to imagine a place outside the constraints of society where her heroines can have access to their individuality and emotions normally denied them, she must also avoid identifying her heroines too closely with nature for fear of risking their self identity. Bronte thus searches for a mediated relationship to nature that preserves her characters' identity while allowing contact with the natural world they love. She relies upon figurative language to link her characters to nature and stages key events in carefully cultivated courtyards, gardens, or calm countrysides. In this manner, her heroines enjoy the freedoms offered by nature without sacrificing their identity.

As a child, Jane employs nature to escape the inequalities of the Reed house. In hiding from the tyranny of John Reed, Jane seeks shelter in a windowseat that protects, but does not separate her from the outside. Drawing the curtain, Jane pursues Bewick's History of British Birds, an anthology of natural history.¹ Descriptions of the barren "haunts of sea-fowl" fascinate Jane as she states, "With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption" (41). This "interruption " comes all too soon as John Reed rudely forces Jane to emerge and provokes the confrontation that eventually leads to Jane's banishment to the red room. The windowpane along with the book of natural history form a type of sanctuary for Jane; removal of these nature-related experiences exposes Jane's low social rank to the harshness of the Reeds. Jane also finds escape in nature from the stringent regulations of Lowood School. Before the onslaught of the epidemic, the young girls are enclosed in

the school garden, "surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect" and are individually assigned grave-like plots for cultivating garden beds. Richard J. Dunn regards these details as proof that "the school operates on the premise that people must not conform to nature" (Dunn, 199) and points out that even naturally curly hair is quickly clipped in this restrictive environment. While disease and death strike the institution, however, "bright May shone unclouded over the bold hills and beautiful woodland out of doors," (108) and all healthy girls are allowed to enjoy fully the natural beauty of the wilderness. Of this time, Jane states, "I discovered, too that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden" (107). Throughout her life, Jane retains this "discovery" of the natural world and later relies on nature at Thornfield, as she does at Lowood, to escape the constrictions of society.

As a governess, Jane occupies a rather awkward position on the social scale, suspended somewhere beneath Rochester as a result of a disparity in wealth, and somewhere above other household servants because of her superior education and class background. The Victorian governess posed other problems as well. The governess was a familiar figure to middle-class Victorians as an employee responsible for educating children as well as providing a respectable example for her charges to follow. In her essay "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre," Mary Poovey states that because the governess performed this role of a middle-class mother, but earned the wages of a working-class woman or man, "the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres

threatened to collapse the difference between them" (Poovey, 127). For this reason, governesses were a source of tension and discomfort in Victorian society, with the young women usually being ostracized and overcome with loneliness. Much of Jane's quiet, withdrawn appearance at Thornfield may be attributed to her ambiguous status as governess within its walls. Nature, however, makes no distinction between classes, and Jane functions uninhibited in the natural world. Only beneath the free, open sky does Jane lose the social stigma of being a governess, and in doing so, emerges as an undiminished human being with a passionate soul.

After Jane's "calm introduction" (140) to Thornfield Hall, she settles into the monotonous routine of life as a governess. Although she enjoys the pleasant company of the "placid-tempered, kind-natured" (140) housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax, and seems "content" (140) with the society of her young pupil, Adele, she longs for greater stimulation and excitement than her tranquil surroundings offer. Jane calls herself "discontent" and states that, "I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes" (141). To assuage this intensity of emotion, Jane finds relief by taking long, solitary walks over the grounds of Thornfield or climbing to the third floor of the mansion where she reaches an open corridor overlooking the English countryside. After climbing the stairs and raising the attic trapdoor, Jane reaches the summit, and gazes "afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline" longing for "a power of vision which might overpass that limit" (141) to perceive more life and feeling than her actual existence contains. Only when surrounded by nature and the

open sky does Jane reveal the resentment she feels toward the suppression of women in her culture. She states:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action . . . Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex (141).

Never within the walls of Thornfield does Jane voice her desire for equality so clearly. Much like her experience during the Lowood School epidemic, Jane here discovers broader prospects and freedom from man-made constrictions in nature.

Jane's interactions with Rochester most strongly illustrate her intrepid spirit when surrounded by the natural world. According to Mary Poovey, "Jane is vulnerable to Rochester's advances because, as his employee, she lacks both social peers and the means to defend herself against her attractive, aggressive employer" (Poovey, 137). Confrontations between Jane and Rochester outside the grand walls of Thornfield, however, prove Jane equal to Rochester rather than vulnerable to him. Nature thus erases not just the class but also the gender distinctions prevalent in Victorian society. While taking a moonlit walk on the evening of her first meeting with Rochester, Jane listens to the "tinkle of the nearby streams," enjoying the utter solitude and beauty of the scene until "a rude noise broke out on these fine rippings and whisperings" (143) as Rochester approaches on his steed. The horse slips and Rochester is injured, placing Jane in the

position of being able to aid him.² In this manner, Jane wields power over Rochester as he is unable to mount his steed without her assistance. In nature, the Victorian male-dominated gender hierarchy can be ignored because there Jane can be placed in a position of control. After this incident, Jane lingers on the lawns of Thornfield, gazing at the stars. She states, "They made my heart tremble, my veins glow when I viewed them," (148) but, as the clock strikes in the hall, Jane is forced to return to society. She turns reluctantly toward the mansion, confessing, "I did not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation . . . to slip again over my faculties the viewless fetters of a uniform and too still existence" (147). By entering the walls of Thornfield, Jane becomes merely a governess, suppressing her "true" personality and sacrificing any control she exercises over Rochester; in the world of society, both class and gender differences reassert themselves as the power transfers to Rochester, the upper class male employer.

This pattern persists throughout the novel. Separated by class and gender inequalities in society, Jane and Rochester may develop their relationship only in nature. As Jane returns from Mrs. Reed's funeral, the sky "was as such promised well for the future" and during sunset, the western heavens "shone a golden redness" like "an altar burning behind its screen of marbled vapour" (271). Reuniting with Rochester in Thornfield's garden and surrounded by such a beautiful environment, Jane cannot contain her emotions, and impulsively exclaims, "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" (274). After this first revelation of tenderness, Jane and

Rochester move rapidly toward a confession of their love for one another. This sacred disclosure of Jane's soul occurs in the garden of Thornfield, during the gathering gloaming, among "sweet-brier and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose" (277). Jane sobs with grief at the idea of parting from Rochester, but as he deceives her about his intentions to marry Blanche Ingram, Jane rebels and passionately defends her equality:

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!--I have as much soul as you,--and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, or even of mortal flesh:--it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet equal,--as we are! (281)

Although Jane does possess as much heart and soul as Rochester, the world of society acknowledges merely wealth and rank to determine equality. Only amid the indiscriminate world of nature, free from the walls of Thornfield and her constrictive role as governess, may Jane escape any "custom" or "conventionalities" of Victorian society to claim Rochester as her peer. Rochester's final proposal to Jane, which leads to their long-awaited union, accordingly occurs outdoors among the "open air," "brilliantly green and cheerful fields," and underneath a "sparkling blue" sky (464). It is fitting that this relationship which commences and develops in nature should reach its climax in the natural world.

While in nature, Jane asserts her equality not only with Rochester, but also with St. John Rivers and gains an intensified self-awareness by resisting St. John's domination. Jane's cousin resembles the hypocritical proprietor of Lowood School, Brocklehurst, in the fact that he, too,

believes nature should be trained and subdued. Yet St. John differs from Brocklehurst in that he is sincere about his work and religion. Of her cousin, Jane observes, "I think that nature was not to him that treasury of delight it was to his sisters." Mary and Diana relate to nature as Jane does since the natural world favors women in erasing the established gender hierarchy. Although St. John perceives beauty in nature, "never did he seem to roam the moors for the sake of their soothing silence--never seek out or dwell upon the thousand peaceful delights they could yield" (378). As a male, St. John occupies the dominate position on the gender scale; he does not need nature's neutralizing influence. St. John lacks the love of nature so vital to Jane's soul, and this remains a vast, irreconcilable disparity between the two. It is ironic that St. John attempts to force such an unnatural union amid so much natural beauty. He takes Jane for a walk across "a soft turf, mossy fine and emerald green, minutely enamelled with a tiny white flower, and spangled with a star-like yellow blossom" and decides to rest near some rocks, beyond which rushed a waterfall, "and where, still a little further, the mountain shook off turf and flower, had only heath for raiment and crag for gem--where it exaggerated the wild to the savage" (426). It seems strange that St. John would ask Jane to submit her passionate soul in such a landscape of "savage" beauty. He might as well ask the distant mountain to throw off the wild heath and deep crag that defines it.

While asking Jane to marry him, St. John essentially asks her to stifle her natural inclinations with reason and intellect. In his essay, "The Natural Heart: Jane Eyre's Romanticism," Richard J. Dunn writes that St. John's proposal comes to Jane as "the final challenge to her

selfhood, and, in ironic reversal of his intended effect, causes her to best understand herself" (Dunn, 203). Before rejecting St. John's proposal to accompany him to India, Jane meditates:

As his curate, his comrade, all would be right . . . I should suffer often, no doubt, attached to him only in this capacity: my body would be under rather a stringent yoke, but my heart and mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to: my natural unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness . . . But as his wife--at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked--forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital--this would be unendurable (433).

While willing to sacrifice her body for St. John and his religion, Jane refuses to submit her heart and soul. She realizes that to marry St. John would be to destroy the essence of her spirit. Surrounded by the natural beauty of the English countryside, Jane finds the courage to resist St. John's domination and to assert her individuality. Throughout this encounter, nature exerts a benign, propitious, influence on Jane by erasing class and gender distinctions, thereby allowing her to express her true emotions, to defend her individuality, and to assert her equality with St. John, as she did earlier with Rochester.

In times of emotional turmoil and indecision, nature (usually in the form of the moon), extends this benign influence and seems to function as a sort of mother figure or comforter for Jane; this is especially interesting since Jane herself is an orphan. The most evident example of this occurs when Jane decides to leave Rochester. As she lies in her bed that night, Jane gazes at the moon with "the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk." As Jane watches, "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" (346). Nature becomes animated as this apparition whispers to Jane's heart as one would to a daughter, urging her to flee temptation. Many of Jane's encounters with Rochester occur under the moonlight, emphasizing this image of the moon as a guardian spirit. After Rochester first proposes to Jane, she in turn, asks him to face the moonlight so that she may read his countenance. Under the beneficent light, Jane will be able to determine the sincerity of his offer. The moon is again present as Jane decides to return to Rochester. The room from which she hears his anguished cries over the moors is full of moonlight and as Jane receives no warning this time, she may return to her love freely.

It is important to note, however, that Jane's relationship to this beneficent nature is based entirely on language. As Rochester asks Jane to be his wife, she depends on the moonlight to "read" his visage to determine the earnestness of his proposal. After learning of Rochester's betrayal, Jane regards the moon anxiously, expecting some "word of doom" to be "written" on its surface. Jane's human state separates her from nature, and she may only experience true nature if mediated through language. Thus Jane escapes the iniquities of the Reed household by reading about nature in Bewick's History of British Birds, and first grows to love nature at Lowood School, an institution that promotes literacy. As long as Jane communicates with nature through language only, this nature assumes a protective, auspicious role in Jane's life. It is when Jane attempts to become a part of nature without the mediation of language that the natural world assumes an ominous aspect and threatens Jane's survival.

Jane's flight from Rochester and Thornfield Hall is one such instance in which Jane forsakes language and attempts to merge with nature, nearly dying in the process. During the first night, settling in warm heath under a clear sky, Jane feels, "Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was" (350). As night gently falls on the first evening, Jane seeks refuge in the natural world; she attempts to become a part of the landscape. Lying down beside a crag amid an abundant growth of heath, Jane is surrounded "high on each side" and almost "buried" (350) in the vegetation. In her essay, "Dreaming of Children: Literalization in Jane Eyre," Margaret Homans acknowledges the danger Jane exposes herself to in attempting to become a literal part of nature. Homans states that "the literal is historically associated with nature, and especially in and just after the romantic period, it is against identification with nature that women writers stage their ambivalent defenses against becoming identified with the literal and the object" (Homans, 84). Charlotte's choice of a feminine pronoun to describe nature proves that woman is already identified with nature. If Jane were indeed to become a part of the landscape, she would become a mere object instead of an individual. Homans argues that Jane realizes this threat and eventually relies on figurative language to save her from literal nature and the ensuing transformation of self into object. As Jane hopelessly views the barren, unvarying wilderness before her, which Homans terms "the extreme form of all the novel's literalizations," she glimpses a dim light and immediately bestows upon it all sorts of figurative meanings, such as an "ignis fatuus," a "bonfire," and "my star" of "hope" (Homans, 97). In doing so, Jane

imparts numerous meanings to the light and reverses the process of literalization to save her own life.

Although Jane wants to avoid becoming a part of nature in order to avoid becoming a literalized object, her human state actually renders such a union with natural wilderness impossible. This may explain Jane's opening statement in the novel, "I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes" (39). As a human, Jane lacks the ability to adapt to the different forces of nature. In this case, she is vulnerable to the cold wind of the moor. Jane may experience nature through words and language; any attempt to become one with such a wild nature as the English moors is fatal. As the first morning breaks, Jane views the world around her thinking, "I wished I could live in it and on it . . . I would fain at the moment have become bee or lizard, that I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here" (351). As a human, however, Jane may never become a part of the natural world and she soon feels the detrimental effects of exposure to the elements. Jane describes her second night as "wretched" with cold air, damp ground, and broken rest (355) as she reaches a near starvation level. Nature is indifferent to her needs and Jane survives this extreme hunger and exhaustion only with aid from civilization, her cousins. Although Jane may appreciate the beauty of the natural world, as a human she is unable to survive in wild, uncultivated nature.

In order to accomodate Jane's need for a natural setting with her inability to survive in nature's wilderness, Bronte creates a form of cultivated nature in which Jane may act freely. Therefore, Jane's

interactions with Rochester and St. John occur either in well-trimmed, tame gardens or on English countrysides already inhabited. In these controlled environments, Jane may still enjoy her love for nature without jeopardizing her life. Language referring to nature in Jane Eyre functions in much the same manner. As the gardens provide a safe link between Jane and nature, figurative language functions as a controlled medium allowing connection between Jane and nature despite her inability to become a part of nature. Before Rochester's final proposal, he refers to Jane as a bird. He calls her his "skylark" and implores her, "Come to me. You are not gone, not vanished? I heard one of your kind an hour ago, singing high over the wood; but its song had no music for me . . . All melody on earth is concentrated in my Jane's tongue to my ear (464). Rochester again links Jane to nature when he compares his broken physical appearance to the old, gnarled chesnut-tree which was struck by lightning the night he first proposed to Jane and associates Jane with a budding woodbine that would cover his decay with her freshness. Obviously, Jane is neither a skylark nor a budding woodbine; she is human. While becoming part of nature is impossible for Jane in her human state, it is appropriate that a character so finely tuned to the natural world as Jane be associated with nature through such figurative images and metaphors.

With Shirley, Charlotte Bronte moves away from the full access to nature available to Jane and depicts heroines with a more limited experience in the natural world. There are no encounters with unknown wilderness in Shirley as there are in Jane Eyre. The heroines of this novel traverse only calm countrysides, the well-known Stillbro' Moor, and the Hollow. Moreover, because of their elevated class status, both

Shirley and Caroline are more susceptible to the demands of Victorian society than Jane. Furthermore, there is a slight anxiety running throughout the novel about the destruction of nature by civilization. Despite this undercurrent of tension, the natural world continues to fascinate Shirley and Caroline as it does Jane.

As with her treatment of Jane, Bronte closely associates the two heroines both literally and figuratively with nature. We first view Shirley entering from the garden with "her little silk apron full of flowers" (150) to greet Caroline and Mr. Helstone. She then gives Caroline a "little bouquet of one brilliant and two or three delicate flowers" as a friendship offering. At the conclusion of this pleasant introduction, Shirley waves farewell with a hand as "white as a lily" (155). We later realize Shirley's exquisite beauty in the particular scene in which she wears a silk dress whose shining folds are as brilliant as "the hue on a pheasant's neck" and her complexion looks as "fine as the bloom of a red wild-flower" (187). In viewing Shirley, Louis Moore writes in his journal, "I said she was lovelier than ever: she is. A fine rose, not deep but delicate opens on her cheek" (567). Shirley, like Jane is repeatedly associated with wild birds, particularly a spirited eagle. Caroline once refers to Shirley's "clear, strong, she-eagle eye" (236) and in a later instance, after Shirley passionately sings at a dinner party, the other ladies look upon her, "as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis, or any other strange fowl" (508). Bronte creates an interesting contrast to these vibrant images of nature with her portrait of Caroline. While Shirley resembles bright wildflowers, Louis Moore compares Caroline to a "lilly of the valley, untinted, needing no tint" (490). As Shirley's spirit reminds one of a young eagle, Robert

Moore describes Caroline's gentle temper by comparing her to a dove (595). With these figurative images of nature, Bronte may clearly draw distinctions between the separate personalities of the heroines. Her use of metaphor and simile to link Caroline and Shirley with nature is consistent with the fact that although both girls may be closely associated with nature, neither may become a literal part of the natural world.

In Shirley, as in Bronte's other novels, nature offers freedom from the constrictions of Victorian society. While in a certain indolent mood, Shirley is content to "spend a sunny afternoon in lying stirless on the turf, at the foot of some tree of friendly umbrage: no society did she need but that of Caroline . . ." (237). In the Victorian era, however, this freedom from social duties is almost impossible. As the family from De Walden Hall, the Wynnes, drops in unexpectedly for a social call, Shirley must tidy "her dark hair that had been more than once dishevelled by the morning wind that day" (441) and straighten the shawl that she wore in careless folds in the garden that morning before greeting the visitors. While Shirley would much prefer remaining in a comfortable state that is appropriate for the natural world, the rules of society dictate otherwise. The clergyman, Mr. Hall, whose name itself suggests buildings, advises Shirley on proper behavior despite her protestations, "You must go, and behave courteously, too. You owe many duties to society. It is not permitted you to please only yourself" (442). Shirley has no choice but to reluctantly depart to pay the required courtesies. She expresses her personal discontent with the female society of the area by hypothesizing that if she were a gentleman, "there was not a single fair one in this and the two

neighbouring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor" (156). Bronte immediately juxtaposes this statement with a scene of Shirley gazing longingly out the windows upon nature, chirruping to a bird. This implies that Shirley realizes freedom from social constraints may be found only in the natural world.

While the only governess figure in this Shirley is a minor character, she resembles Jane Eyre in enjoying personal freedom in the natural world. Mrs. Pryor enjoys this freedom from social constraint found in nature. As Jane escapes her position as governess only among the natural world, so does Mrs. Pryor. The same woman who appears shy, timid, and easily flustered within the walls of Shirley's home, transforms into a cheerful, confident, and wise individual in the Hollow. When Mrs. Pryor "got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of Nature, a propitious change seemed to steal over her mind and beam in her countenance" (361). In the forest, Mrs. Pryor is no longer a governess suppressed by society, but a woman expressing her true personality.

Both Shirley and Caroline agree on society's possible corrupting influence on nature. As the two girls plan a picnic lunch in the Hollow, Caroline enthusiastically states, "I know all the pleasantest spots: I know where we could get nuts in nutting time; I know where the wild strawberries abound: I know groups of trees that ravish the eye with their perfect, picture-like effects" (159). When Shirley asks if Caroline would not be bored with her company alone, Caroline responds, "I should not. I think we should suit: and what third person is there whose presence would not spoil our pleasures?" (159) Shirley agrees,

and states that with unwanted persons, "of the wrong sort, like your Malones, and your young Sykes, and Wynnes, irritation takes the place of serenity" (160). Charlotte Bronte earlier describes Malone as not being the sort of man "given to close observation of Nature . . . he could walk miles on the most varying April day, and never see the beautiful dallying of ear and heaven; never mark when a sunbeam kissed the hilltops" (12). Much like St. John, Malone possesses the dominant position of masculinity in the gender hierarchy; as he already enjoys priority in society, nature does not have for him the same liberating influence it holds for Shirley and Caroline. In the presence of such unsatisfactory society as Malone, both Caroline and Shirley agree that "We forget Nature, imprimis" and "then Nature forgets us" (160). Both young girls, so close to nature, are miserable when burdened by society's impositions.

There is no conflict between a wild, untamed nature and one of controlled cultivation in Shirley as there is in Jane Eyre. Shirley and Caroline only fantasize about wild nature rather than attempting to merge with it. Speaking of their trip to the seaside, Caroline states, "I will fancy seals lying in the sunshine on solitary shores, where neither fisherman nor hunter ever come," (248) while Shirley speaks of seeing a haunting mermaid with a "preternatural lure in its wily glance" (249). Of this mermaid's charms and beckonings, Shirley asserts that "being women, we stand safe, though not dreadless" (249). This form of wild nature poses no real threat or temptation to the heroines since it is fantasy. Shirley and Caroline's actual interactions with nature occur on land within view of civilization or on familiar ground such as the Hollow, Stilbro' moor, and the land surrounding the girls' homes. While neither

Shirley nor Caroline attempt to merge with wild nature, as do Jane and Lucy, both girls reveal their true emotions when surrounded by the natural world. The two characters' differing priorities reveal the unique personality each girl possesses.

The lovesick Caroline daydreams of Robert with images that are unfaillingly staged outdoors. Her thoughts are:

Divine vignettes of mild spring or mellow autumn moments, when she had sat at his side in Hollow's Copse, listening to the call of the May cuckoo, or sharing the September treasure of nuts and ripe blackberries . . . a wild dessert which was her afternoon's delight to administer to Moore, berry by berry, and nut by nut, like a bird feeding its fledgling (132).

Her evening walks always lead her toward the Hollow where Robert lives. Although she never descends the hill to visit her cousin, she approaches the brink of the hill "at twilight almost as regularly as the stars rose over the hill-crest" (142) hoping to catch a mere glimpse of his lighted window. When Robert visits Caroline one evening after their long separation, the young girl's hopes for matrimony are again awakened and strengthened under the light of the moon. When Caroline returns to her chamber following his departure, "it was to meet the memory of Robert" (195), She gazes for hours down upon the old garden, church, and graveyard, these objects appearing "clear in moonlight" and during these moments, "she was with Moore, in spirit: she heard his voice" and her hand "rested warm in his fingers" (195) much like Jane's moonlight memories of Rochester during their separation.

Although Shirley does not daydream about a lover outside, she does feel most comfortable and expresses her true emotions when surrounded by the natural world. Much like Jane, Shirley stages her

spirited defense of women outside rather than within some man-made structure. The evening of the church festival is "still and warm" and "round the descending sun the clouds glowed purple; summer tints, rather Indian than English, suffused the horizon, and cast rosy reflections on hill-side, house-front, tree-bole" (241). As the two girls descend the fields toward church, Shirley voices her reluctance to enter the building and to endure the "dreary long speech" of the clergyman (241). She prefers to revere nature's ministries, stating, "Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills . . . Caroline, I see her! and I will tell you what she is like: she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth" (241). Beneath the setting sun, Shirley vehemently denies Milton's Eve to be the first woman. She states, "Milton was great; but was he good? His brain was right: but how was his heart? Milton tried to see the first woman: but, Cary, he saw her not" (241). Shirley firmly believes that "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" (242). Shirley proceeds to describe her image of God's first daughter, "a woman-Titan" with a "veil as white as an avalanche" and steady, clear eyes that are "lifted and full of worship" and "tremble with the softness of love and lustre of prayer" (242). As was the case with Jane Eyre, here too, Shirley engages in reading or transcribing nature as she presents her interpretation of woman based on natural objects. In using these powerfully pure images to describe Eve, Shirley asserts the strength of women while defending womankind from the blame of this world's first evil.

Since Shirley and Caroline employ nature mainly as a setting to express their emotions rather than attempting to become a literal part of nature, both girls enjoy the benign, favorable influence of nature. This is most evident in Caroline's relationship with Robert Moore and Shirley's with his brother, Louis. Robert takes advantage of the moonlit starry nights to escort Caroline across the moor and to develop their relationship further. Robert finally proposes to Caroline on a warm summer evening, underneath a twinkling "silver point--the Star of Love" (593). Although most of Shirley and Louis's interactions occur within the schoolroom, the building is usually suffused with bright, streaming sunlight. In a similar situation, Louis obtains Shirley's final consent in the "moon-lit hall" (585) of Fieldhead. In both instances, nature seems to approve of the match by suffusing the couples with her benignant light.

There is however, an uneasiness in the final chapter concerning the destruction of nature by civilization. In his future plans for the Hollow, Robert Moore states:

I can line yonder barren Holow with lines of cottages, and rows of cottage gardens--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 . . . (597)

Although Caroline is shocked by these predictions, she acknowledges the benefits civilization offers for the homeless, starving, and unemployed by eventually smiling up in Robert's face. It seems as though even Caroline approves, although reluctantly, of these advances at the cost of nature. After these changes are implemented, the narrator's housewife speaks of the disappearance of fairies from the Hollow:

I can tell, one summer-evening, fifty years syne, my mother

coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying, she had seen a fairy in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairy that ever was seen on this countryside. A lone-some spot it was--and a bonnie spot--full of oak trees and nut trees. It is altered now" (599).

As Bronte repeatedly links Caroline and Shirley with images of fairies throughout the novel, there exists a direct relationship between Caroline's acceptance of civilization over nature and the vanished spirits of the Hollow. With the exodus of the fairies, Charlotte Bronte hints of an inevitable progress of civilization in a rapidly growing world concomitant to a destruction of the natural world.

The rise of civilization over nature may be seen most clearly in Villette. Of all Charlotte's heroines, Lucy Snowe experiences the least access to nature. This may be attributed to the oppressively domestic environment in which she exists. The boarding school where Lucy lives and works is located within the structure of a foreign city, distant from the English moors and countryside available to Jane, Shirley, and Caroline. While Bronte's other heroines may easily step into the natural world, Lucy must traverse several miles to exceed the city limits of Villette. Although this may be one explanation for Lucy's comparative separation from nature, there are hints that she may prefer it this way. As Lucy visits London early in her narrative, she states that "elation and pleasure were in my heart: to walk alone in London seemed of itself an adventure . . . Since those days, I have seen the West-end, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the city far better . . . in the city you are deeply excited" (109). While Jane and Shirley long for the freedom of nature as they gaze outdoors through panes of glass, Lucy regards Monsieur Paul with the same longings through the glass windows of the school. She also prefers to give Monsieur Paul and

engraved box for his birthday instead of the traditional bouquet of flowers. During Monsieur Paul's journey, Lucy cultivates some plants, but only "out of love for him," rather than for her own pleasure and goes on to state clearly, "I was naturally no florist" (595). Never in Villette does Charlotte compare Lucy to states of nature as she does with Jane, Shirley, and Caroline; this serves to further distance Lucy from nature in comparison to the other heroines. Nature just does not seem to be as vital to Lucy's existence as it is to the other heroines, perhaps because Lucy has never had much opportunity to explore the natural world. As Lucy is often seen as the most repressed of Bronte's heroines, this distance from nature may simply be a denial of Lucy's feelings linked to the natural world.

Despite Lucy's distance from the natural world, nature in Villette is portrayed in ways similar to those of Jane Eyre. Like Jane, Lucy experiences relief from her duties as teacher in the small garden behind the school as Jane enjoys freedom from her position as governess among the grounds of Thornfield. Of that garden, Lucy reminisces:

That old garden had its charms. On summer mornings I used to rise early, to enjoy them alone; on summer evenings, to linger solitary, to keep tryste with the rising moon,, or taste one kiss of the evening breeze, or fancy rather than feel the freshness of dew descending. The turf was verdant, the gravelled walks were white; sun-bright nasturtiums clustered beautiful about the roots of the doddered orchard giants (173).

Although Lucy avoids visiting the garden during the "broad, vulgar middle of the day" when students run rampant through its grounds, she states that "at sunset or the hour of salut, when the externes were gone home, and the boarders quiet at their studies; pleasant was it then to stray down the peaceful alleys" (173). Lucy prefers a narrow, secluded walk of the garden in which to spend the majority of her time.

In this alley, "neglected shrubs were grown very thick and close on each side, weaving overhead a roof of branch and leaf which the sun's rays penetrated but in rare chequers . . . (174). Since the sun is typically associated with male gender, perhaps Lucy's slight avoidance to the sun's presence hints at her future misfortunes with Graham and Monsieur Paul. All of these details also emphasize that nature represents the opposite of society, or a means to escape society. In any case, Lucy's predilection for a quiet, solitary alley corresponds to her temperament, and it is not surprising that she feels most comfortable in the privacy of this location.

The garden also functions as a type of sanctuary for Lucy to hide personal secrets. In order to protect her treasured letters from the prying eyes of Madame Beck, Lucy resorts to burying them in the "gray, gaunt, and stripped" pear tree, Methusaleh (379). Hidden within the indifferent old tree, Lucy's letters are protected from curious eyes. As both Jane and Shirley base their contact with nature on words, on a type of "reading" nature, Lucy's burial of her letters signifies the stifling of her potential relationship with nature.

As in Jane Eyre, the natural world of Villette does not recognize class, racial, or gender hierarchies. In spite of Madame Beck's resistance to Lucy as a young schoolteacher establishing an intimate relationship with the older and more wealthy Professor Emmanuel, the emotional involvement of the two flourishes among the flowers and trees in the garden.³ Nature ignores racial distinctions as well, as the englishwoman and frenchman fall in love. While in the garden, Monsieur Paul first erases the tension between the two by asking to hold Lucy's hand as his face shone with "a generous kindliness" (227). He gently urges,

"Come, we will not be rivals, we will be friends . . . We will be friends: do you agree?" (227)

Later, as Lucy and Monsieur become closer friends, he tells her one evening while walking in the alley:

I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike--there is affinity . . . I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star . . . where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle (457).

During another encounter in the alley, Lucy experiences the hope of something more than mere friendship existing between herself and Monsieur Paul. As Monsieur Paul takes her hand and softly calls her his "petite amie," Lucy wonders, "Through his touch, and with his words, a new feeling and a strange thought found a course. Could it be that he was becoming more than a friend or brother? Did his look speak a kindness beyond fraternity or amity?" (538)

Bronte associates Monsieur Paul, as she does Rochester, Robert and Louis Moore with an appreciation for the wonders of the natural world. In this manner, each of these suitors becomes an appropriate match for the heroines and Monsieur Paul is no exception. According to Lucy, "Monsieur Emanuel had a taste for gardening; he liked to tend and foster plants" (505). Much like Bronte's heroines, Monsieur Paul employs nature as an environment in which to vent his emotions. On various occasions in the garden, "he would dig thus in frozen snow on the coldest winter day, when urged inwardly by painful emotion, whether of nervous excitation, or sad thought, or self-reproach" (509). Monsieur Paul obviously holds nature in high esteem as he gives Lucy a sincere offering of friendship with a bunch of violets and takes his

students for walks in the springtime English countryside only as a special treat.

Lucy's hopes are ultimately fulfilled and her happiness complete when Monsieur finally proposes to her one evening. Just as Jane and Rochester's relationship matures and finally culminates outdoors, so does the love between Lucy and Monsieur Paul. Just before Monsieur Paul speaks, Lucy describes their surroundings by stating, "The air was still, mild, and fresh. Above the poplars, the laurels, the cypresses, and the roses, looked up a moon so lovely and so halcyon, the heart trembled under her smile; a star shone subject beside her, with the unemulous ray of pure love" (588). Even Monsieur Paul's voice blends with the surrounding nature. To Lucy, "His voice was so modulated that it mixed harmonious with the silver whisper, the gush, the musical sigh, in which light breeze, fountain, and foliage intoned their lulling vesper" (588). After Lucy's acceptance, she and Monsieur Paul walk back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight, "such moonlight as fell on Eden" and moonlight that "gilded a path glorious" for the two lovers (591).

Nature in Villette, as in Jane Eyre, may fulfill a type of protective, watchful role over the kinless Lucy Snowe. The moon peacefully presides over Lucy's encounters with Monsieur Paul in the garden and over his eventual proposal of marriage. Sitting in her secluded alley one evening, Lucy views the moon through a space in the boughs above as memories of her childhood in England rush upon her. Of the moon, Lucy states, "She and the star, visible beside her, were no strangers where all else was strange: my childhood knew them" (175). The feminine pronoun again emphasizes the prevalence of associating female gender with nature. Lucy thinks of her home in England,

remembering that she "had seen that golden sign with the dark globe in its curve leaning back on azure, beside an old thorn at the top of an old field, in Old England" (175). Here, she reveals that nature has indeed been an important part of her life since childhood. Much as Jane receives the inspiration to flee Rochester and seek a new life from a seemingly supernatural intervention of nature, Lucy experiences a similar occurrence. As Miss Marchmont's death leaves Lucy destitute, this friendless young woman receives and acts upon advice heard in nature. As Lucy walks in the clear, frosty night, contemplating her homeless dilemma, she notices the Aurora Borealis. In reference to this natural phenomenon, Lucy states, "This solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it" (104). On the wind, Lucy seems to hear a voice which advises her, "Leave this wilderness, and go out hence" (104). Lucy accordingly travels to London and from there, traverses the English Channel to the continent where she finds employment, lost friends, and for a short period, love.

As in Jane Eyre, nature in Villette shows a dangerous side when Lucy ventures too close to it. During the final weeks of Lucy's solitude during the long school vacation, the weather changed from "hot, fair, and dry" to "tempestuous and wet." Lucy states that the storms made a "cruel impression" on her and that the raging storm and beating rain crushed her with a "deadlier paralysis" than that she had experienced in the previous weeks of quiet boredom (229). Lucy's confinement and solitude drive her to an almost delirious state so that she visits the

Catholic church to seek comfort from her oppressed state of mind. After leaving the church, Lucy struggles against a furious rainstorm. Of the storm, Lucy states the wind brought rain that was "a sharp hail like shot; it was cold and pierced me to the vitals. I bent my head to meet it, but it beat me back." This defeat does not dishearten Lucy; she only wishes she possessed wings to ascend the gale and "sweep where it swept." Lucy immediately realizes her human inadequacies in becoming a part of the fierce gale and states, "while wishing this, I suddenly felt colder where before I was cold, and more powerless where before I was weak" (236). While sharing with Jane the desire to become one with the natural world, Lucy quickly recognizes her inability to do so and subsequently collapses, only to be revived by other humans. The untamed nature of the sea also provides a threat to Lucy's survival as she becomes seasick in crossing the English Channel. More importantly, however, Lucy most likely loses her fiancé, Monsieur Paul to the indifferent wilderness of the sea. It is this wild, uncultivated nature which will not tolerate human presence. Lucy recognizes her separation from true, untamed nature and accordingly restricts her nature experiences to the controlled, walled-in garden or the quiet English countryside.

While in each of her novels, Charlotte Brontë depicts heroines caught between civilization and nature, the chronological order develops a sequence of the heroine's increasing isolation from nature. Charlotte moves from a heroine who enjoys free access to the natural world in Jane Eyre to an expression of anxiety over the disappearing natural world at the conclusion of Shirley. Her final novel, Villette, depicts a heroine whose relationship to the natural world is almost completely

repressed. This may be a representation of the changes in culture during Charlotte Bronte's lifetime, such as the spread of industry and cities. This pattern may also be a reflection of Charlotte's personal development. Jane Eyre was written when she was youngest; as she matures, Charlotte may realize a greater need for the repression of natural feeling. Hence, she creates the most repressed of her heroines in Lucy Snowe as Villette is her final novel.

CHAPTER TWO

EMILY BRONTE

In her work, Emily Bronte shows us, as does Charlotte, heroines caught between nature and culture. For Emily, this is an issue not only for the characters in Wuthering Heights, but also for the speaker of her poetry whom we may take to be a representation of Emily herself. Although like Charlotte, Emily fully recognizes the dangers posed to her characters from contact with the unreclaimed wilderness, she is much more interested in the freedom offered by this state of nature than that which is found in the civilized form of nature we see in Charlotte's novels. Emily's poems and novel show the appeal that the wildness of nature holds for the woman writer; through her work, Emily wants to capture the power and magnificence of nature. Her artistic limitations, however, present obstacles to attaining this ultimate fulfillment. As expressed in her poetry, Emily is unable to truly represent nature with her language. Therefore either she turns to figurative images to inform her novel with the presence of nature, or more often, she completely excludes any references to direct nature. In this manner, Emily Bronte acknowledges nature's priority over her own creations. The absence of direct representations of actual nature in Wuthering Heights emerges as a tribute to the dominance of nature over words and only strengthens the theory that pure nature may never be contained or constructed.

Of her sister, Charlotte Bronte once wrote, "My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a livid hillside her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear

delights, and not the least and best loved was--liberty" (Hatfield, 12).

In her poem, "I'm Happiest When Most Away," Emily records her personal love for this freedom as she writes:

I'm happiest when most away
I can bear my soul from its home of clay
On a windy night when the moon is bright
And the eye can wander through worlds of light--

When I am not and none beside--
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky--
But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity.

Here, Emily expresses her desire for her soul's release from the confines of her physical body. The state most conducive to such freedom is pure nature; only when Emily is alone on a "windy night" under moonlight is her spirit able to wander "wide through infinite immensity." Emily writes again of nature's liberating effect in an untitled poem:

High waving heather, 'neath stormy blasts bending,
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars;
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending,
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending,
Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending,
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars.

Much as the natural world frees Emily's spirit from its "home of clay," it also sends the human spirit away from its "drear dungeon." As she constructs herself in her poetry, Emily resembles the heroines of her sisters' novels. The protagonists of both Charlotte and Anne's creations function in an uninhibited manner and express their emotions most freely outdoors. Through Emily's poetry we realize that her soul also enjoys release only in the natural world.

Despite her love for nature, Emily recognizes her artistic limitations in transcribing her emotions and reaction to the natural world. In one of her untitled poem, Emily writes:

Alone I sat; the summer day
Had died in smiling light away;
I saw it die, I watched it fade
From misty hill and breezeless glade;

And thoughts in my soul were gushing,
And my heart bowed beneath their power;
And tears within my eyes were rushing
Because I could not speak the feeling,
The solemn joy around me stealing
In that divine, untroubled hour.

I asked myself, "O why has heaven
Denied the precious gift to me,
The glorious gift to many given
To speak their thoughts in poetry?"

"Dreams have encircled me," I said,
"From careless childhood's sunny time;
Visions by ardent fancy fed
Since life was in its morning prime."

But now, when I had hoped to sing,
My fingers strike a tuneless string;
And still the burden of the strain
Is "Strive no more; 'tis all in vain."

As Emily sits alone watching the fading evening sun, she is overcome with nature's beauty, but is also extremely disappointed in her words' inability to recreate the scene and to express her emotions. She again addresses language's inadequacy in describing the wonders of nature as she writes on viewing the moors:

What language can utter the feeling
That rose when, in exile afar,
On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling
I saw the brown heath growing there.

In cases such as these, Emily obviously feels language to be insufficient to capture the magnificence of the natural world. Whereas Charlotte employs language as a means to "read" nature, Emily sees language as an extension of culture and an obstacle to her enjoyment of pure nature. She carries this attitude over to Wuthering Heights; instances in which Emily appears to ignore the natural world surrounding the

Heights are in actuality, opportunities for her to acknowledge the superiority of the natural world over mere language. In Emily's mind, language may never accurately record the wondrous state of nature.

Wuthering Heights is like Emily's poetry in that it shows her love of nature and her difficulty in representing nature directly. Margaret Homans argues that writing creates an order of priority and asserts that "Both Bronte and her Cathy avoid description of nature or of events in nature because there is no way to name nature without making it secondary" (Homans, 11). In her diary fragment, Catherine writes, "I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes; but my compainion is impatient, and proposes that we should appropriate the dairry woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter" (18). Catherine and Heathcliff accordingly do so, and Catherine acknowledges the primacy of nature over language by going outside on the moors instead of writing in her diary. Her daughter Cathy also values nature over words. As a child, Cathy climbs trees and lies in her "breeze-rocked" cradle all day watching the birds. During such instances, Nelly describes Cathy as being "happier than words can express" (211). By not attempting to describe and confine nature to mere words, Emily Bronte, along with her two heroines, maintains nature's priority over language.

Thus, the absence of literal nature in Wuthering Heights soon becomes conspicuous. Margaret Homans points out that although the reader leaves the novel with the sensation of having experienced a realistic portrayal of the Yorkshire landscape, there are in fact, very few scenes in the novel that are set outdoors. With a few exceptions, the key events occur in either one or the other house (Homans, 9).

While both Charlotte and Anne fill their novels with descriptions of the natural environment surrounding their heroines, Emily, in describing the Heights, writes only a few lines of the strong wind, "stunted firs," and "range of gaunt thorns" around the house (Bronte, 2). Though Charlotte and Anne share a common predilection to stage interactions of lovers outdoors, in Emily's Wuthering Heights we know that Catherine and Heathcliff on the moors, but we never see them there in the environment most in tune with their personalities. Similarly, the relationship between young Cathy and Hareton progresses from hostility to friendship to love all within the walls of the Heights rather than underneath open skies.

In spite of the absence of literal nature in Wuthering Heights, Emily manages nevertheless to suffuse her novel with elements of nature. Like Charlotte, Emily turns to figurative language to inform her novel with the presence of nature and avoids directly representing the natural landscape. It is not one certain natural occurrence such as a thunderstorm, wind, or spring bloom that is significant in this story, but the mirror of such phenomena shown by the characters. Often the outer features of her characters imitate a natural season or event. In one such instance, Emily differentiates the scowling countenance of Heathcliff from the refined one of Edgar Linton. As young Heathcliff leaves Catherine and as Edgar approaches, "the contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly coal country for a beautiful fertile valley" (63). While Cathy laments her father's illness, Emily compares the young daughter's face to another landscape with "--shadows and sunshine flitting over it in rapid succession; but the shadows rested longer, and the sunshine was more transient" (243).

Not only does Emily associate physical appearances with nature but she also uses figurative images of nature to represent the characters' personalities. Referring to Catherine's relationship with Edgar and Isabella, Nelly states, "It was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn" (83). In a similar manner, Heathcliff figuratively compares Catherine's lost vitality to that of an oak tree as he scornfully speaks of Linton's attendances on her, "He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares!" (141). Hareton is another character whom Emily parallels with the environment. Nelly, who raised him, compliments his potential goodness by stating he has "evidence of a wealthy soil, that might yield luxuriant crops under other and favourable circumstances" (180).

Emily Bronte also uses figurative nature to reflect the souls' desires of her characters. Catherine clearly demonstrates this as she describes her love for Heathcliff. Catherine believes her love for Linton to be "like the foliage in the woods" that will change with time while her love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath" (73). She states emphatically that she and Heathcliff share the same soul while Edgar's is as different from hers as "a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire" (73). Her daughter also employs images of nature to express her emotions. Young Cathy's lively and vibrant soul contrasts sharply with that of her lethargic cousin, Linton, as they discuss their separate ideas of paradise. He believes a relaxed, peaceful day of lying in the heath on the moor to be complete happiness while Cathy prefers "rocking in a rustling green tree" with the wind blowing, a chorus of birds singing, and "the whole world awake and wild with joy" (227). By

counterposing these preferred moods of nature, Emily allows us a glimpse into each child's character. As Margaret Homans points out, Heathcliff also renders the landscape symbolic of his desires as he sees Catherine's image in the nature around him (Homans, 14). Days before his death, Heathcliff exclaims, "In every cloud, in every tree--filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day I am surrounded wither image!" (296). In this manner, Heathcliff uses nature as a symbol for Catherine, his soul's only desire.

The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is the closest representation to true nature that Bronte allows in her novel. Critic Dorothy Van Ghent defines Catherine and Heathcliff as "children of rock and heath and tempest" (Van Ghent, 191) while Terry Eagleton points out the similarity between Heathcliff and the eternal rocks beneath the woods; Heathcliff is "both lowly and natural" (Eagleton, 103) as are the rocks. Although Catherine chooses the socially acceptable, highly refined Edgar for a mate, her true desire remains with Heathcliff, the man she terms an "unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation: an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (93). Eagleton argues that in loving Heathcliff, "Catherine is taken outside the family and society into an opposing realm which can be adequately imaged only as 'Nature'" (Eagleton, 103). Catherine's love for the untouched natural world and for Heathcliff are inextricably bound together.

Since Catherine's passion for Heathcliff is linked to the unreclaimed natural world, her choice of Edgar over Heathcliff symbolizes a choice of civilization over nature. Both Van Ghent and Eagleton point out this conflict running throughout Wuthering Heights between wild, unrestrained passion and the natural world with cultivated

society and customs. In choosing Edgar and opting for a life of civilization, Catherine guarantees her own misery by depriving her soul of communion with the natural world. Eagleton terms this decision the "pivotal event of the novel, the decisive catalyst of the tragedy" (Eagleton, 101). Catherine's first experience with civilization at the Grange, however, hints at the final outcome of her decision.⁴ Venturing near the Grange one evening, Catherine and Heathcliff glimpse light from the windows and move closer to observe the inmates. As Heathcliff describes the view, "ah! It was beautiful--a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glassdrops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers" (42). After their capture, Catherine is brought into this new, civilized environment while Heathcliff remains in the wilderness and returns home across the moors, leaving her "as merry as she could be" (45). Catherine soon grows accustomed to civilization and when she returns to the Heights, Nelly relates that "instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person" (48). Catherine now regards Heathcliff differently as she gazes "concernedly" at his "dusky fingers," fearful of dirtying her new clothes with his contact. After Catherine's introduction and capitulation to the appeal of civilization, her relationship to Heathcliff and to nature as well, changes; her acceptance of civilization, in the form of Edgar Linton, separates her from both.

It seems strange that although Catherine recognizes the intensity of her emotions for Heathcliff, she nevertheless chooses Edgar. There

is, however, an explanation for this. In her essay, "On Wuthering Heights," Van Ghent argues that the novel presents two types of reality: "the raw, inhuman reality of anonymous natural energies, and the restrictive reality of civilized habits, manners, and codes" (Van Ghent, 191). By selecting Edgar, Catherine suppresses her natural energies, her love for Heathcliff, in preference for civilized manners. Any union between Catherine and Heathcliff in their mortal states would be nearly impossible; society cannot accommodate such a savagely wild alliance. On this issue, both Van Ghent and Eagleton argue that the love between Heathcliff and Catherine exists outside the norms of society. Their love is a "vision of a reality radically alien from the human" (Van Ghent) and their relationship "articulates a depth inexpressible in routine social practice, transcendent of available social languages" (Eagleton, 108). Terry Eagleton further adds, "The love between Heathcliff and Catherine is an intuitive intimacy raised to cosmic status, by-passing the mediation of the 'social'" (Eagleton, 108). Only an environment as unrestrained and lawless as the moors can contain the fierce intensity of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship. As mortals, the lovers may not exist in this barren landscape; they must transcend their human condition to fulfill their relationship. Thus, as the young boy sees the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff on the moors, it is only after death that the two lovers may truly be together.

Despite Catherine's intense love for the uncultivated moors, this unreclaimed environment poses a threat to Catherine's life. As the wilderness endangers Charlotte's heroines, Catherine Earnshaw's encounters with real nature are also dangerous. In Wuthering Heights, however, nature becomes threatening only after Catherine first feels the

appeal of civilization. Nelly relates that as young children, one of Catherine and Heathcliff's "chief amusements was to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day" (41). During Catherine's illness, she reminisces about these days as a child roaming in nature, "half savage and hardy, and free" (115). These experiences, however, end abruptly after Catherine's exposure to civilization at Thrushcross Grange. Once Catherine experiences civilization, her relationship with the natural world becomes tainted with its presence. Like Charlotte's heroines, Catherine may no longer safely enjoy unmediated contact with wild nature. After Heathcliff's disappearance when he overhears her rejection of him, a violent thunderstorm sweeps over the Heights. Rather than seeking shelter, Catherine exposes herself to the elements while anxiously watching for Heathcliff's return. This direct contact with nature nearly kills Catherine as she soon afterwards falls deliriously ill with fever. In a sense, this exposure to the elements may be traced as the original cause of Catherine's death as her later and fatal illness is diagnosed to be a severe recurrence of this first delirium.

During this relapse, however, Catherine still expresses her fervent desire to become a part of the natural world despite her experiences in civilization. Remembering her childhood, Catherine exclaims, "I wish I were out of doors! . . . I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills" (115). She feverishly implores Nelly to allow her the chance to feel the cool wind coming off the moors. When the domestic Nelly recognizes the danger posed to Catherine from contact with the natural world and refuses for fear of giving Catherine her "death of cold," Catherine responds by stating, "You won't give me a

chance of life, you mean," (115) and proceeds to throw the windows open herself and to lean out in the cold night air. Here, Catherine is unlike Charlotte's heroines in that she recognizes the dangers of a union with nature, yet insists on becoming a part of it. Catherine resembles the speaker of Emily's poetry in that both Catherine and this speaker recognize the appeal of wild nature and are willing to sacrifice life itself for communion with nature. Of her death Catherine demands to be buried "not among the Lintons, mind, under the chapel-roof, but in the open air" and to Edgar she exclaims "my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again" (Bronte, 117). After her burial, Catherine's grave eventually fuses with the landscape. According to Nelly, the grave "was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat mould almost buries it" (154). In her mortal state Catherine may never join the wilderness she loves; only through her death may she become a part of the landscape.

Young Cathy most resembles her mother in that she too, evinces a strong love for nature. The nature Cathy enjoys however, consists not of the wild moors or fierce winds that her mother so passionately loved, but rather, the cultivated, tame nature of Thrushcross Park. Unlike her mother who ran wild across the moors with Heathcliff as a child, Cathy never leaves the boundaries of the park until she reaches age thirteen. Although she desperately wishes to explore Penistone Crag, the authority of her father and Nelly never allow her to do so. Later, when she resides unwillingly at the Heights, Cathy is forbidden to move out of the garden even though this "fretted her sadly to be confined to its

narrow bounds" (284). She is not allowed the uninhibited contact with the natural environment that her mother once enjoyed.

As Cathy matures, her relationship with nature further differs from that of her mother's with the natural world. While Catherine Earnshaw finally embraces a union with wild nature, her daughter prefers a contact with nature mediated by cultivation and in this manner, she resembles Charlotte's heroines. In a sense, she domesticates the wilderness of the Heights by persuading Hareton to join her in transplanting a garden from Thrushcross Grange to replace the untended plants surrounding the Heights. Lockwood acknowledges the change as he returns to the abode after his absence, noticing "a fragrance of stocks and wall flowers, wafted on the air, from amongst the homely fruit trees" (280). Cathy further resembles Charlotte's heroines in her relationship to language. While Catherine abandons her diary in favor of experiencing nature, young Cathy brings her books from the Grange and uses them to procure Hareton's friendship. This education of Hareton may be interpreted as a type of civilization of the wilderness as Hareton, described earlier in figurative terms of nature, may be taken as an emblem of nature. Thus, young Cathy is more like a Charlotte heroine than her mother in that Cathy's relationship to nature is mediated by cultivation and language while Catherine Earnshaw embraces wild, unrestrained nature.

With her poetry and her novel, Emily Bronte explores, more fully than Charlotte, the attractions that wild nature holds for a writer. In her poetry, Emily strives to capture the force of nature in her work, but acknowledges the limitations of her artistic ability to do so. She realizes that words may never truly express the wonders of the natural

world. In Wuthering Heights, Emily attempts once again to acknowledge the power of wild nature, but is still frustrated. The absence of literal nature in Wuthering Heights therefore emerges as a tribute to nature's primacy over language. In refusing to describe nature directly, Emily acknowledges nature's superiority over her own creations. Moreover, Emily Bronte can only imagine her heroine's full union with nature through death; as in her poetry, Emily here sees bodily existence as an impediment to the soul's freedom. With her portrayal of the younger Cathy, however, Emily moves more toward a Charlotte-like heroine--one whose relationship to the natural world is mediated by civilization and language.

CHAPTER THREE

ANNE BRONTE

While Anne Bronte shares with Charlotte and Emily an interest in depicting characters caught between nature and culture, both The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Agnes Grey emphasize the stifling effect that immersion in culture has on the heroines' relationships with nature. Anne's heroines occupy virtually powerless positions on the social scale and therefore enjoy little freedom from the constraints of civilization. The overpowering presence of civilization in each young woman's life warps her enjoyment of the natural world. Because of this, nature has slight opportunities to exert a favorable or benign influence in either Helen or Agnes's lives. In this manner, Anne shows us, in more detail than either of her two sisters, the various barriers found in civilization that intrude between the self and nature.

While both Charlotte and Anne depict the contrasting effects of civilization and nature on their characters, Helen Graham enjoys much less contact with the natural world than do either Jane or Shirley. While Jane vents her emotions on the open walkway of Thornfield's third story, Helen seeks the library or nursery for the same purpose. As Arthur's wife, Helen confines her ramblings to the grounds of Grassdale. During Arthur's prolonged absences, the threat of encountering the officious Hargrave presents an even greater restriction on her experiencing the natural world by sometimes forcing her to remain indoors. Even Helen's sanctuary, Wildfell Hall, is characterized by "thick stone mullions and little latticed panes" and its garden "enclosed by stone walls, and entered by an iron gate with large balls of grey

granite" (19). Neither of these abodes provides much prospect for freely encountering nature.

During Helen's seclusion at Wildfell Hall, she accompanies Gilbert and the other party members to a picnic near the oceanside. On gaining the summit of the rocky hills, Helen gazes down over the "deep violet blue" water with "an aspect of subdued exhilaration" in her face (63). This incident accurately illustrates Helen's general relationship to the natural world. The misery and bondage of her marriage to Arthur pervade every aspect of her life so that it "subdues" or stifles her relationship with nature. Despite Arthur's abusive and contemptible behavior toward Helen, her married state prevents any escape from his tyranny. Because of the patriarchal structure of Victorian society, Arthur wields inexorable control over his wife; powerless in the trappings of civilization and caught in this state of subjugation, Helen is denied access to the social equality the heroines of her sisters' novels find in the world of nature.

As Helen gradually acknowledges the discrepancy between her morals and those of her degenerate husband, nature loses any charm it has previously held for her. During one of Arthur's numerous desertions, Helen gazes out an open window upon the summer evening and admits the foolishness of her vain hopes to teach her husband the "pure delights of nature" (224). Looking at the glorious landscape, Helen experiences only regret that Arthur does not share her appreciation of its beauty. She states, "I too often shame that glorious scene with tears of thankless misery, because he cannot feel its freshening influence," and later adds, "the greater the happiness that nature sets before me, the more I lament that he is not here to taste it"

(225). In this manner, Helen's feelings for Arthur interfere with her enjoyment of nature. Arthur exhibits no interest in nature, for like many of Charlotte's male characters, the natural world promises him no freedom from social restrictions. As a male, Arthur occupies the dominant position in society's gender hierarchy. Nature's indiscriminate atmosphere does not hold for him the same appeal it does for women.

As the unnatural union between Arthur and Helen rapidly disintegrates, Grassdale Manor embodies the social strictures that force Helen to remain with Arthur, separating her from nature. Whereas in the natural world there is no discrimination based on sex, Helen's status as a woman in Victorian civilized society reduces her to a servile position. Of her situation within the walls of Grassdale, Helen repeatedly states, "I am a slave--a prisoner" (373) and acknowledges its "stifling" atmosphere (389). As Arthur's wife, she must relinquish all rights to personal property when he confiscates her paintings, money, and jewelry for his own selfish means. Destitute of any material resources, Helen is forced to remain within the bounds of Grassdale despite her desperate desire to escape. While she and Lowborough discuss their spouses' common betrayals, Helen points out the advantage Lowborough has as a male figure. She comforts him by stating, "two years hence you will be as calm as I am now,--and far, far happier, I trust, for you are a man, and free to act as you please" (347). Typical of this male-dominated society, Helen flees Grassdale only with the aid of her brother. Outside the gates of Grassdale, however, she eagerly regards the open road before her, and writes, "Oh, what delight it was to be thus seated aloft, rumbling along the broad, sunshiny road, with the fresh morning breeze in my face, surrounded by an unknown

country all smiling--cheerfully, gloriously, smiling in the yellow lustre of those early beams" (395). Entering this environment, Helen leaves behind "a prison and despair," and anticipates "freedom and hope" for her future (395). In this manner, nature represents the opposite of society for Helen--freedom rather than slavery.

Helen's liberty after leaving Grassdale, however, is not complete; society still interferes with her experience of nature. Although hidden from Arthur, Helen must accomodate the parish society by maintaining proper etiquette to dispel rumors that may eventually lead to her discovery. These formalities, so distasteful to Helen's personality, are rarely evaded. She has few opportunities, when weary of trivial conversation, to leave parties and gatherings for the quiet solitude found only in nature. During the seaside picnic, Helen abandons the assembled party and walks toward "a loftier, more precipitous eminence at some distance" (63) where she may enjoy the scenery in peace. Helen employs a similar strategy at Mrs. Markham's gathering when, impatient of society, she retreats to the quiet garden. Of the party's conversation, Helen states, "I kept up my attention, on this occasion, as long as I could, but when my powers were exhausted, I stole away, to seek a few minutes' repose in this quiet walk. I hate talking where there is no exchange of ideas or sentiments, and no good given or received" (82). In this manner, Helen resembles Charlotte's heroines in that she too, views nature as a refuge from detested social obligations.

As Charlotte's characters receive comfort and advice from nature during times of strife, so does Helen. On the eve of discovering Arthur's affair with Annabella Lowborough, Helen seeks cover in the shrubbery so that she may hear their conversation undetected.

Convinced of her husband's adultery, Helen sinks to her knees among the damp weeds and brushwood (304), overcome with misery. She remains in this posture until, as she relates:

. . . a gust of wind swept over me, which, while it scattered the dead leaves, like blighted hopes, around, cooled my forehead, and seemed a little to revive my sinking frame. Then, while I lifted up my soul in speechless, earnest supplication, some heavenly influence seemed to strengthen me within: I breathed more freely; my vision cleared; I saw distinctly the pure moon shining on, and the light clouds skimming the clear, dark sky; I knew their God was mine, and He was strong to save and swift to hear. 'I will never leave thee, or forsake thee,' seemed whispered from their myriad orbs" (305).

Here, Helen equates nature with divine inspiration as a source of comfort and strength. This incident, especially with its reference to the moon's supportive presence, resembles similar scenes in Charlotte's work except that Anne immediately rewrites the natural experience in explicitly Christian terms. After Helen enters Grassdale and shuts out nature's "fresh wind" and "glorious sky," she writes, "everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart" and confesses that "much of my newborn strength and courage forsook me" (305). Closing the door on nature, seeing the furniture and structure of the hall and hearing the social sounds of talk and laughter remind Helen of her hopeless entrapment within this world of civilization and renders the comfort she receives from nature ephemeral.

After Arthur confiscates the remainder of Helen's fortune, she is thrown upon her own resources to earn a living. She accordingly relies upon her paintings and sketches of natural landscapes to procure an income. This forced relationship to nature, however, blights the charms offered by the natural world; it is necessity rather than pure love for nature that causes Helen to so carefully observe the natural world.

Helen may never enjoy nature for the simple pleasure it offers. She confides in Gilbert that she sometimes wishes she were not a painter and states her reason that "instead of delivering myself up to the full enjoyment of them as others do, I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvass; and as that can never be done, it is mere vanity and vexation of spirit" (83). In this manner, Helen may be linked to Emily Bronte's frustration with her poetry. As Helen is unable to accurately represent nature with her painting, so Emily cannot transcribe the power of nature to words.

It is significant, therefore, that Helen's landscape paintings are characterized by "glimpses of dark low hills and autumnal fields," "dull beclouded skies" and "dark cloudy evenings" (43). Gilbert notices one striking portrait of "a child brooding with looks of silent, but deep and sorrowful regret, over a handful of withered flowers" (43) that may symbolize Helen's own view of her situation respecting the natural world. She is separate from nature because of her need to implement it as means of profit. In a sense, it is civilization that concedes Arthur's dominion over Helen and authorizes his exploitation of her monetary resources. As a connected result, Helen's frustrated relationship to nature, the need to paint it rather than experience it, is a further corruptive effect of civilization.

The overall effect of Helen's paintings, moreover, is that they illustrate the inconstancy of nature. The majority of Helen's sketches are of the landscape surrounding Wildfell Hall under varying shades of lightness and darkness. Helen portrays the old Hall "basking in the sunny haze of a quiet summer afternoon," under a "moonlight night," on a "dark cloudy evening," and she intends to paint it again on a "snowy

winter's day" (43). Under these different hues, the same landscape may appear at once cheerful and forbidding. While both Charlotte and Emily show the changes of nature in that they recognize nature may be dangerous as well as benevolent, neither emphasize the moment of change so much as Anne does here. This emphasis on lightness and darkness in nature becomes characteristic of Anne as she develops her own set of images to represent the distinct aspects of nature.

Anne resembles her sisters, however in that she too, relies on figurative language to reconcile her heroine in some manner to the natural world. As Helen realizes how little "real sympathy" (244) exists between herself and Arthur, she writes of "how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried--doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil!" (244). As Gilbert learns of Helen's secret, he anticipates clearing her name from slander and states, "The Millwards and the Wilsons should see with their own eyes, the bright sun bursting from the cloud--and they should be scorched and dazzled by its beams" (443). In confessing her love for Gilbert, Helen throws open the window to pick a beautiful half-blown Christmas rose, saying:

This rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of them could bear: the cold rain of winter has sufficed to nourish it, and its faint sun to warm it; the bleak winds have not blanched it, or broken its stem, and the keen frost has not blighted it (492).

She asks Gilbert if he will accept her offering and admits that the rose she has given him is an "emblem of her heart" (493). In these passages, Anne Bronte employs images of nature to form a bridge that

connects her heroine to the natural world despite Helen's imprisonment in civilization.

Helen's choice of Gilbert is significant in the fact that he too, is separate from the natural world. Gilbert, at his father's dying wish, continues in the traditional family avocation of a gentleman farmer. He plainly expresses discontent with the agricultural lifestyle, however, as he writes of his introduction to farm life, "I, by his express desire, succeeded him in the same quiet occupation, not very willingly, for ambition urged me to higher aims, and self-conceit assured me that, in disregarding its voice, I was burying my talent in the earth, and hiding my light under a bushel" (7). Gilbert clearly feels a lifestyle geared toward nature is suited neither toward his aspirations nor his predilections. When surrounded by the wonders of the natural world, moreover, Gilbert thinks only of Helen. After the lovers agree to separate for a time, Gilbert rushes to the woods and spends many hours in the lonely valley, "with the eternal music in my ears, of the west wind rushing through the over-shadowing trees, and the brook babbling and gurgling along its stony bed" (412). Gilbert, however, notices none of this as his "heart was away up the hill" with Helen (412). After Arthur's death, the lovers are finally united as Helen accepts Gilbert's proposal. She then leads him to her aunt's winter garden and as Gilbert views the "beautiful conservatory, plentifully furnished with flowers," he confesses that despite their charms, he had "little attention to spare" the blooms as he concentrates all his affections on Helen (496). Although Gilbert's dissociation from nature occurs voluntarily, while Helen's is forced, the lovers are complementary to each other in their mutual separation from the natural world.

Anne's heroine in Agnes Grey resembles Helen Graham in that Agnes too, is forced by civilization to enter a situation that withdraws her from nature. After the family's financial well-being sinks with the ill-fated vessel containing Mr. Grey's investment, Anne undertakes the job of governess to alleviate the financial stress. In doing so, she confronts the class code of Victorian society that is so dissimilar from the equality of the natural world. Just before her departure, Agnes bids a sad farewell not only to her family, but to the moors, garden, and lands surrounding her home. She bestows upon her pet pigeons farewell strokes and tenderly kisses her favorites as they crowd upon her lap. As Charlotte shows a predilection to link her heroines with birds, so too does Anne when Agnes strokes the "soft bright fur" as she explains, " with a feeling of sadness I could not easily disguise" (21). In becoming a governess, Agnes must part with these denizens of nature she loves so dearly.

Moreover, both of Agnes's journeys toward her stations are characterized by foul weather, as though nature resists her arrival at her employers' manors. As she leaves the parsonage, only a "sickly ray" of sunshine lights the "sombre shade" and "gloomy shadows" of the landscape (22). Here again Anne shows the changeable characteristics of nature as Agnes hastily turns away from this brief glimpse of weak sunlight and carefully avoids another glance, lest the second time, she should see the landscape in shadow (22). Agnes describes the "heavy clouds and strong north-easterly wind" combining to render the day "extremely cold and dreary" (22). The rugged hills cause the horse to slow down so that it merely "crawls" up the hills and "creeps" downward (23). The outset of her second journey begins

on a "wild, tempestuous day" (55) and Agnes relates that the heavy snow throws such "impediments" in the way of the horses that "the few miles' space between O----- and Horton Lodge seem a long and formidable passage" (56). She must struggle through the "superincumbent snowdrift" to gain the front door of the lodge. It seems as though nature has redoubled its attempts to keep Agnes from her restrictive role as governess.

It is during Agnes's two stations of governess that the stark contrast between civilization and nature becomes most apparent. The adults as well as the children of the Bloomfield family exercise a total disrespect for nature. Young Tom especially exerts an abusive influence over elements of nature despite Agnes's attempts to dissuade him from doing so. As he demonstrates to her how "manfully he used his whip and spurs" on the toy rocking horse, Agnes admonishes him from using such techniques on a real horse. Tom enthusiastically affirms that he will, exclaiming, "I'll cut into him like smoke! Eeh! my word! but he shall sweat for it" (26). After Agnes discovers Tom's bird traps, she again attempts to instill some type of respect for nature in the young reprobate. She scolds him saying, "But don't you know it is extremely wicked to do such things. Remember, the birds can feel as well as you; and think, how would you like it yourself" (27). (In this, Agnes resembles Emily's Catherine Earnshaw who keeps Heathcliff from setting traps over birdnests that prevent the mothers from coming back to their young). While Agnes genuinely relates to nature, Tom never can as he responds, "Oh, that's nothing! I'm not a bird, and I can't feel what I do to them" (27). On top of this, the corruptive influence of Mr. Bloomfield, Mrs. Bloomfield, and Uncle Robson undermine any authority

Agnes holds over Tom as all three adults encourage the young boy's behavior. Of this predicament Agnes states, "I flattered myself I had partly shown the children the evil of this pastime, and hoped, in time, to bring them to some general sense of justice and humanity; but ten minutes' bird-nesting with Uncle Robson was sufficient at once to destroy the effect of my whole elaborate course of reasoning and persuasion" (46). Agnes's social position as a governess deprives her of any authority over the children; she is unable to make them appreciate nature. As a result, Agnes herself must kill the young hatchlings caught by Tom to preserve them from a more cruel means of death. In her powerless position as governess, Agnes's only option to protect nature from greater harm is to destroy it. Like Helen, Agnes is virtually forced into a negative relationship with nature.

During her second station at Horton Lodge, Agnes experiences a similar, although not so intense separation from nature. Awakening on her first morning at Horton Lodge, Agnes states that she feels "like a thistle-seed borne on the wind to some strange nook of uncongenial soil, where it must lie long enough before it can take root and germinate, extracting nourishment from what appears so alien to its nature" (58). Here Anne employs figurative language to link her character with nature, while creating an accurate view of Agnes's discomfort with her social status. Viewing the grounds of the Horton Lodge, Agnes acknowledges their beauty, but also expresses regret at their difference from the nature she has loved at home. Of the landscape she states, "The surrounding country itself was pleasant . . . but it was depressingly flat to one born and nurtured among the rugged hills of ----" (65). While riding in the carriage with Rosalie and Matilda, these

young charges repeatedly force Agnes to sit "crushed into the corner farthest from the open window," a position which always makes her sick (65). With the Murrays, Agnes is never again forced to destroy nature in order to save it, yet, as a governess, she becomes trapped in civilization with little access to the natural world. With this in mind, it is ironic that Agnes uses figurative terms of nature to describe her idealistic view of being a governess. Prior to beginning either job, Agnes expresses her naive view of her future position by anticipating how delightful it will be "to train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day" (20). In actuality, the job of governess restricts Agnes's contact with the natural world and may never be described in terms of nature.

Agnes's slight contacts with nature, however, exert a favorable influence in her life. As Agnes enjoys one of her precious moments of freedom in nature, "her spirit of misanthropy began to melt away beneath the soft, pure air and genial sunshine" (94). Agnes also grows more comfortable with Mr. Weston outdoors. In this manner, Anne shares with Charlotte the predilection for staging interaction between lovers in nature. While in Nancy's cottage or Mrs. Grey's home, Agnes remains shy and withdrawn from the young curate, but loses this timidity when she encounters him on the English countryside. On one particular walk, Agnes longs "intensely for some familiar flower that might recall the woody dales or green hill-sides of home" (94). Looking between the twisted roots of an oak tree, Agnes discovers "three lovely primroses" that "peeped so sweetly from their hiding-place" they brought tears of homesickness to her eyes (94). Agnes, however, is unable to reach them and is startled by the voice of Mr. Weston behind

her offering his assistance. He accordingly presents them to her and Agnes later confesses the importance she attaches to those flowers as she states, "As for the primroses, I kept two of them in a glass in my room until they were completely withered . . . and the petals of the other I pressed between the leaves of my Bible--I have them still, and mean to keep them always" (98). After a long separation, Mr. Weston and Agnes meet, again in the countryside, and he offers Agnes more flowers, "a cluster of beautiful bluebells," showing that "he had not forgotten that bluebells were numbered" among her favorite flowers (132). Their relationship continues to blossom and eventually Mr. Weston proposes to Agnes while surrounded by the "unspeakable purity and freshness" of the seacoast (156). In reference to this wonderful occurrence, Anne states:

I shall never forget that glorious summer evening, and always remember with delight that steep hill, and the edge of the precipice where we stood together, watching the splendid sunset mirrored in the restless world of waters at our feet--with hearts filled with gratitude to Heaven, and happiness, and love--almost too full for speech (164).

Only in nature may Agnes experience such elation and complete happiness.

With her novels, Anne Bronte, like her two sisters, recognizes the disjunction between civilization and nature. Despite their intense love for nature and the liberating effect it holds for them, the Brontes' heroines are separated from the natural world by the influence of culture. This undercurrent of tension runs throughout all of the Brontes' novels. While Charlotte tends to develop characters who are somewhat constrained by civilization but may still enjoy freedom in nature, and Emily boldly confronts the power and liberty found in the

unreclaimed wilderness, Anne portrays characters whose relationships to nature are negated by the overwhelming influence of civilization. In this manner, Anne investigates in much more detail than either of her sisters, the various barriers existing between the self and nature.

NOTES

¹According to critic L. Duin Kelly, these images of bleak shores and icy regions affect Jane so profoundly that Bewick's History of British Birds becomes "a source for both the atmosphere and imagery" of Jane's later enigmatic water colors painted at Lowood School (Kelly, 232). The isolated mood in Jane's paintings of a drowned corpse, the Evening Star, and the colossal head resting against an iceberg mirror the desolate landscape described in Bewick's text.

²In "A Dialogue Of Self And Soul: Jane Eyre," Gilbert and Gubar discuss this incident in great length, asserting that although in one sense Jane and Rochester begin their relationship as master and servant, in another they begin as spiritual equals (352).

³Graham's attraction to Paulina like Monsieur Paul's to Lucy is associated with the love of nature. Graham notices that Paulina has "neck and hands veined finely like the petals of a flower," (346) a voice as "naturally liquid as a lark's," (463) and her personal charm is likened to the perfume of a white violet (359).

⁴In "Looking Oppositely: Emily Bronte's Bible of Hell," Gilbert and Gubar argue that Catherine's entrance into the world of Thrushcross Grange is forced and violent; in a sense, she is "seized" by the ferocious bulldog. Within the Grange, Catherine must learn to repress her own impulses, and girdle her own energies with the iron stays of reason; she must become a civilized lady (274).

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