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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STRUCTURAL IMAGERY IN ANNE BRONTË'S FICTION

by

ELIZABETH HOLLIS BERRY

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine Anne Brontë's fictional works, with particular reference to her use of imagery. The initial considerations are to establish that she has been critically undervalued and that her work is worth reading for its combination of societal analysis and the poetical embodiment of feeling.

In two major chapters, one on each of Anne Brontë's novels, the examination of her method focuses on antithetical imagery which pertains to social structures and their inherent dichotomies. Her analyses of contemporary society explore the problems of inequality, isolation, infidelity and alcoholism through recognisable structural images which connect external setting with internal reality. Anne Brontë's strategy is to use linked images of enclosed and open spaces to realise emotional states and to trace the psychological and spiritual development of character.

Although the stated purpose of her novels is didactic, her use of imagery exploits the complexities of language as an instrument for depicting and re-defining the human condition. The subtle redefinitions within Anne Brontë's texts are advanced by her use of structural imagery, which with its reference to contrasting seasons and settings, and its implied comparisons of inner and outer worlds, builds thematic patterns and gives her work its organic unity.

A close study of Anne Brontë's novels reveals the heuristic vigour and penetrating authenticity of her work and establishes the strength of her unique contribution to fictional narrative.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I saw that they were sundered now.
The trees that at the root were one:
They yet might mingle leaf and bough,
But still the stems must stand alone.[1]

The memorable image of a "sundered" tree is central to Anne Brontë's autobiographical poem "Self-Communion." It is an image which she uses to assert her own identity as something separate from that of her two sisters. Although their creative activity "yet might mingle leaf and bough," she points out that "the stems must stand alone."[2]

The symbolic tree is doubly useful. In addition to providing an example of Anne Brontë's effective use of imagery to define character development, it also makes a plea for the first step in establishing a critical reappraisal of her work: she must be allowed to stand alone.

If one accepts Edward Chitham's claim that this poem is a crucial record of Anne Brontë's development, then it is curious that his final comment still maintains the sense of conditional approval which has so often been reserved for the youngest of the Brontë sisters: he refers to her as "one who might have been able to contribute material of high value if she had lived."[3] The implication that she had not yet written material of high value may be true of her poetry but her fiction is another matter.

The early death of any writer leads to speculation about great works of art which might have been, and, in Anne Brontë's case, there are

not only those sorts of reductive, speculative comments to contend with, but also unfavourable comparisons with the "bright twin stars" of her sisters. Against their brilliance one short-sighted reviewer saw Anne Brontë swimming into view as a "third mild-shining star of the tenth magnitude, which otherwise would have remained invisible."[4] Certainly, Anne Brontë's death at the age of twenty-nine, leaving a modest literary legacy of only two novels and fifty-nine lyric poems, must prompt tantalising questions about unrealised potential. However, despite many critics' statements to the contrary, her artistic skill and vision were not unproven. Her achievement, albeit small in quantity, is manifestly substantial in quality. She is not merely one of the legion of Great-artists-who-might-have-been (although she has often been relegated to their silent ranks). In reality she has left solid proof of her accomplishment in her two novels, Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.

From the outset confusion was rife about which of the "Bells" wrote which novels. The confusion about the pseudonymous brothers Bell was worsened significantly by the efforts of Emily and Anne's unscrupulous publisher, Thomas Newby. Newby, whom Charlotte later dubbed "needy as well as tricky,"[5] boldly attempted to capitalise on the success of Charlotte's Jane Eyre by offering the American rights of The Tenant to a New York firm, claiming that it was yet another work by the same Currer Bell who had coincidentally been the author of Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, having changed his name slightly as work progressed.[6]

When Newby had originally published Agnes Grey, its comparatively slim size (at least by Victorian standards) allowed him to append it as a third volume to the two volumes of Wuthering Heights. The novels were

inevitably compared--to the detriment of the former. The reviewer from The Atlas felt that Agnes Grey lacked "the power and originality of Wuthering Heights" and that it "leaves no painful impression on the mind --some may think it leaves no impression at all."[7] An unsigned notice by G. H. Lewes in the Westminster Review of January 1848 judged Jane Eyre as "decidedly the best novel of the season," and the tendency to perceive Acton as the least powerful of the Bell brothers became established.[8] To the present day this view of Anne Brontë as a diminution of her brilliant sisters remains the standard yardstick by which to measure her work.

In one of Anne Brontë's rare letters there is a self-revelatory phrase which may give some insight into the differing roles adopted by the sisters. In a letter to Charlotte's friend Ellen Nussey, Anne Brontë pictures herself as someone who is "deficient" in her "organ of language," and about to be "engulphed in a letter of Charlotte's."[9] This amusing remark sums up what ultimately happened to obscure her talent: she was somehow "engulphed" by her sisters' literary reputation. This was not, however, because her "organ of language" was in any way deficient: if anything it was fully proficient, but it was of a different order.

It is a moot point whether one need look no further than this same sister Charlotte to find what Derek Stanford calls the "evil fairy" in the story of Anne Brontë's literary reputation.[10] Charlotte Brontë's own comments provide evidence that she did indeed initiate a luke-warm response to her younger sister's work. Writing to W. S. Williams in 1847 and 1848, she uses such phrases as "simple pathos" and "quiet description" to describe the novel Agnes Grey, whereas Emily Brontë's work merits the much stronger epithets "vigorous" and "original."[11] After Anne Brontë's death, it was Charlotte who vetoed the publication of The Tenant because,

as she wrote again to W. S. Williams at Smith, Elder & Co., "Wildfell Hall it hardly appears to me desirable to preserve. . . ."[12] Whatever the reasons, this decision of Charlotte Brontë's resulted in a kind of literary banishment for the effectively silenced younger sister.

Adopting what became the commonly-held, dismissive approach, T. W. Reid wrote in 1877 (in his monograph on Charlotte) that neither of Anne Brontë's novels "will really repay perusal."[13] In the marketplace of literary economy, he suggests, Anne Brontë is worthless currency; such a statement would guarantee her product a dearth of interest, especially in the context of Victorian obsessions with the idea of reward for effort. As George Moore later pointed out, Anne Brontë then became the "Cinderella" of the Bronte sisters.[14] In "leaving Anne in the kitchen," as Moore puts it, what the critics missed was the possibility that her novels might "repay perusal" tenfold if treated to a more impartial reading of the text. Anne Brontë's novels demand that the reader determinedly put aside critical preconceptions of "weakness" and "lack of colour"[15] and focus on the narrative strength and analytical tone of her fiction. Her penetrating story-telling technique builds a recognisable world of images which both describe an existing order and seek to redefine it.

Both Agnes Grey and The Tenant contain compelling analyses of contemporary society and suggest possible responses to the problems of inequality, infidelity, isolation and alcoholism. My view is that the subtle re-definitions within Anne Brontë's texts are advanced by her use of structural imagery, which, with its reference to contrasting seasons and settings, and its implied comparisons of inner and outer worlds, builds thematic patterns and gives her work its organic unity.

The "sundered" tree image, which I quoted at the outset, is one example of nature imagery which Anne Brontë uses in her fiction (no less than in her poetry) to trace the psychological and social development of character. Throughout her novels much of the narrative tension is created by the juxtaposition of two major image clusters: images of the natural order (or natural structures) and images of the social order (or social structures). The movement between these separate and often opposing areas of nature and society emphasises thematic concerns which centre on the pull of opposites and the co-existence of dualities--restraint with freedom, creativity with stultification, and acceptance with rejection.

Anne Bronte's method, then, although frequently antithetical, is not merely that of the morality play. To see Arthur Huntingdon in The Tenant as Vice personified, or Agnes Grey as Charity, would be to trivialise the content of both novels.[16] In contrasting, say, the unfriendly hearth of the "grand ladies" up at the manor, with the warmth of poor Nancy Brown's cottage fire in Agnes Grey, or the traditional glow of the fireplace at cosy Linden Car with the empty grate at lonely Wildfell Hall in The Tenant, Anne Brontë indicates not only broad social differences, but also the dilemma inherent in reconciling personal needs with social expectations. Her use of metaphorical contrasts and cross-referenced images involves the reader in a complex personal enquiry, rather than simply offering (as some critics would maintain) a bald moral tract. Although, as Inga-Stina Ewbank points out, there is a definite moral purpose in Anne Brontë's novels, it is the way in which she employs image to shape and refine the narrative which elevates her fiction above the level of writing such as that of Hannah More's Cheap Repository Tracts.[17]

As she describes the sometimes great, sometimes subtle, differences between images of light and darkness, rock and sand, land and sea, colour and pallor, enclosed buildings and open vistas, craggy moorland and cultivated parkland, Anne Brontë simultaneously reveals the stresses and resolutions beneath the changing face of society as a whole and her characters in particular. Because of the often oblique way in which these both contrasting and parallel images (and the spiritual and social dualities which they imply) are incorporated into the organic structure of her fiction, Anne Brontë is ultimately gesturing beyond apparent conflict or inequality towards understanding and reconciliation. What she succeeds in presenting to the reader is an articulation of the concept of holistic balance: a human order which mirrors the openness and creative power of the natural order.

The imagery of field and fell, house and hearth, flowers, seasons and weather, defines character and suggests interrelationships. The surface realism of Anne Brontë's novels is structurally underpinned by these interlocking symbolical elements. Her use of imagery is poetic. In focusing on her image patterns one sees how the images stand as (in Agnes Grey's words) "pillars of witness set up, in travelling through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences" (Agnes Grey, 161).[18] Agnes's reference to the reconciliatory, consoling function of poetry contains a timely metaphorical comment on the process of writing as an attempt to reconcile spirit with experience:

> I still preserve those relics of past sufferings and experience set up, in travelling through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences.
>
> The footsteps are obliterated now; the face of the country may be changed, but the pillar is still there to remind me how all things were when it was reared. (Agnes Grey, 161)

Anne Brontë's use of imagery performs a similar function in reconciling the illusory evanescent spirit world with the "pillars" of experience.

My approach is to concentrate on these major image clusters which I have called 'structural imagery' for two reasons. Firstly, Anne Brontë's use of iterative images establishes the societal and natural structures of a 'real' world in which her characters move and grow. Secondly, this 'real' world exists simultaneously with a symbolical world on which the spiritual dimensions of the text are structured. Anne Bronte's imagery, then, both offers a psychological structure and provides an artistic structure for her novels.

NOTES

[1]Anne Brontë, "Self-Communion," in Edward Chitham, The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 157, ll. 204-07. All further references to the poems are taken from Chitham and appear in the text.

[2]In an exemplary piece of scholarship on the poems, Chitham recommends the study of "Self-Communion" in particular, and his recommendation points to a critical approach which has only infrequently been applied to Anne Brontë's work: "What Anne says in this poem ought to be studied with microscopic interest if we have any intention of arriving at a balanced view of her." Close study of her texts shows her on an equal footing with her sisters, although clearly separate from them in her approach. Chitham, p. 3.

[3]Chitham, p. 194.

[4]Angus Mason MacKay, The Brontës: Fact and Fiction (London: Service & Paton, 1897; New York: AMS Press, 1973), Reprint of the 1897 edition, p. 21.

[5]Letter from Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, September 13, 1850. Reprinted in The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, in 2 volumes, ed., T. J. Wise and A. J. Symington (Oxford: The Shakesperae Head Press, 1980), Vol. II, p. 157. All further references to the letters are taken from this text and are cited as Letters.

[6]The controversy about the "brothers Bell" caused more than a ripple in the literary world, particularly in North America where, interestingly enough, Anne Brontë's powerful ability was discerned in all three sisters' works when her identity remained unknown. One E. P. Whipple, writing for the North American Review in 1848, exemplifies the confusion about the Bell "firm." He refers to "Acton Bell [sic], the author of Wuthering Heights, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, and, if we mistake not, of certain offensive but powerful portions of Jane Eyre. Acton, when left together to his imaginations, seems to take a morose satisfaction in developing a full and complete science of human brutality." One cannot avoid the suspicion that Anne Brontë's literary reputation would have been altogether better if she had remained cloaked in the guise of brutal Acton and had never emerged as the gentle Anne. E. P. Whipple, from "Novels of the Season," North American Review, October 1848, cxli, 354-69. Reprinted in The Brontës: The Critical Heritage, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 247. Cited hereafter as The Critical Heritage.

[7]From an unsigned review, Atlas, 22 January 1848, 59. Reprinted in The Critical Heritage, pp. 232-33.

[8]Unsigned notice by G. H. Lewes; Westminster Review, January 1848, xlvii, 581-85. Reprinted in The Critical Heritage, p. 87.

[9]Letter from Anne Brontë to Ellen Nussey, January 4, 1848, Letters, I, p. 175.

[10]Ada Harrison and Derek Stanford, Anne Brontë: Her Life and Work (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 241.

[11]Letters to W. S. Williams, December 14, 1847, and July 31, 1848, Letters, I, pp. 162, 241.

[12]September 5, 1850, Letters, p. 156.

[13]The Critical Heritage, pp. 402-03.

[14]George Moore, Conversations in Ebury Street (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), pp. 260-61.

[15]One Will T. Hale of Bloomington, Indiana, wrote of Agnes Grey: "the barest sort of story, without colour and without humour." Clearly, the comic subtleties of Anne Brontë's clever reproduction of what Moore calls Yorkshire "patter" are lost on the unfamiliar ear of Mr. Hale, whose scholarly opinion on the dialogue in Agnes Grey is astoundingly dim: "Every one uses big words and sentences that are too stiffly articulated." Will T. Hale, Anne Brontë: Her Life and Writings (Bloomington: Indiana, 1929), p. 30.

[16]Inga-Stina Ewbank links Agnes Grey with the Morality play, but her insights into Anne Brontë's fiction are far from trivial. "These themes are developed by simple contrasts, as clear-cut as those in a Morality play." Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 64. Agnes refers to herself as someone who aims for "that charity which 'suffereth long and is kind, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, endureth all things.'" Although she is long-suffering, her humanity is never really in doubt. Agnes, like Helen, strives towards the ideal (charity, patience, reforming the profligate), but Anne Brontë demonstrates that both characters are essentially flawed and both are given a confessional voice which allows for a closer study of their emotional and psychological development. Agnes Grey, VII, p. 78.

[17]Ewbank (as above), p. 49.

[18]I have used the standard edition of Anne Brontë's novels Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, in The Shakespeare Head Brontë, ed. T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1931), 19 vols. (limited edition), Agnes Grey, Vol. 8, The Tenant, Vols. 9-10. All further references appear in the text.

CHAPTER II

AGNES GREY: "PILLARS OF WITNESS" IN "THE VALE OF LIFE"

"All true histories contain instruction," reads the opening sentence of Agnes Grey. This direct reference to truth and history suggests a didacticism which, as Anne Brontë is careful to demonstrate at the outset, is tempered with an "entertaining" (1) or witty analysis of social structures. She addresses the reader directly in the opening paragraph, referring to the "kernel" of truth contained in the "nut" of her "history": a history which she thinks "might prove useful to some, and entertaining to others" (1). In this way Anne Brontë sets up the authentic base for her story and indicates a cogently defined balance between art and moral utility.

The cryptic suggestiveness of the opening "nut" image works well in securing the reader's attention, and it immediately becomes clear that the self-styled honesty or directness of her writing is not to be mistaken for simplistic moralising or lack of conceptual depth. There is more to Agnes Grey than a simple moral tale.

After illustrating Anne Brontë's controlled style and intellectual purpose in the reference to the "instruction" contained in "true histories," the first sentence continues: "though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity that the dry, shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut" (1). This use of the nut symbol automatically establishes that the imagistic "treasure" in Agnes Grey will be anything

but "dry" or "shrivelled." Evidently Anne Brontë's use of imagery is vital to her statement, and a significant part of her social and moral observations promises to be contained in the shell of images which she constructs.

Within the image patterns of her narrative are subtly intertwined thematic motifs which operate cumulatively in the reader's mind and create progressively deeper shades of meaning. It is in this use of imagery that the poetic aspect of Anne Brontë's writing lies, and here her work shares certain similarities with that of Emily Brontë. But Agnes Grey and The Tenant differ from Wuthering Heights in their detailing of a spiritual passage towards a moral end.[1] Anne Brontë is painstakingly careful to point out immediately in the first lines of Agnes Grey that her illustrations of this particular pilgrim's progress have an instructional purpose. Yet, at the same time as she presents fiction as an instructional tool, she clearly exploits the complex allusiveness of imagistic language and its embodiment of feeling. The combined expressive and structural function of her imagery simultaneously gives her fiction moral and poetical qualities.

Anne Brontë's interest in the poetical aspects of language is clear from her collection of lyric poems, and, at a climactic point in Agnes Grey's spiritual development, she emphasises the mediational value of poetry when "long oppressed by any powerful feelings which we must keep to ourselves . . . and which, yet, we cannot, or will not wholly crush" (161). In the chapter appropriately entitled "Confessions" Agnes describes poetry as both "penetrating and sympathetic" and explains how she uses it as an experiential analysis, to recognise and cope with life's changing patterns:

> Before this time, at Wellwood House and here [at Horton Lodge], when suffering from home-sick melancholy, I had sought relief twice or thrice at this secret source of consolation; and now I flew to it again, with greater avidity than ever, because I seemed to need it more. I still preserve those relics of past sufferings and experience, like pillars of witness set up, in travelling through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences. (161)

The "vale of life" through which Agnes travels on her journey to self-discovery is described by the images of different houses and the spaces between them. These images of enclosed or open spaces are the metaphorical "pillars of witness" which are "set up" to mark her progress as she moves from the "old grey parsonage" (14) of home to the grander establishments of Wellwood House and Horton Lodge, and, finally, "a respectable looking house" (207) by the sea. The landscapes and elements which form the open spaces between the houses create the emotional atmosphere of her passage and mark the psychological and spiritual significance of each step along the way.

As Anne Brontë maps out the particular "vale of life" through which Agnes travels, the imagistic "pillars of witness" which are used to chart her progress give greater insight into the individual psyche than was common in other works of the governess type.[2] Unlike other protagonists, Agnes Grey is not a stereotype: she expresses an egalitarian individualism which is, like the landscape of her native hills and "woody dales" (118), roundly defined. In discriminating between Agnes's vigorous enthusiasm for the freedom of the seashore and her sense of "petrifying" (108) in the dark recesses of her employers' great houses, Anne Brontë refers to natural topography and seasonal change to illustrate a major thematic concern with the boundaries and limits imposed on the captive spirit by the social structures. Anne Brontë identifies herself

as a "captive dove" in the poem of the same name and her two fictional heroines are equally represented as captives until they escape from the drudgery of a soulless existence.[3]

Characters and relationships are repeatedly given definition, then, by a system of reference to features of external setting. The choice of weather imagery for this purpose is one which Anne Brontë shares with her sisters, particularly Emily, and, as in Wuthering Heights, weather patterns are carefully schematised throughout Agnes Grey and The Tenant.[4]

Agnes's relationship with her employers and with Edward Weston can be charted according to clearly linked weather images. Upon arrival at the Murrays' house the weather assures Agnes of a severely limiting, ice-bound experience. She is shown rising "with some difficulty from under the super-incumbent snowdrift," which has been deposited on her by a "most bewildering storm" (62-63). The heavy load of the snow points to the bewildering and heavily-taxing experiences which await her at Horton Lodge. Agnes is trapped by her social inferiority in the Murray household just as she is restricted in her movements by the freezing snow.

The varying intensity of Agnes's relationship with Weston is also indicated by the weather. From the "bright sunshine and balmy air" (118) which sets the mood for their happy encounter over the primroses, the weather changes to "one of the gloomiest of April days, a day of thick, dark clouds, and heavy showers" (147) when Rosalie Murray determines to "fix that man" (145), and seems to be securing Weston's interest. Significantly, towards the close of the novel the mounting apprehension and emotional "heat" which Agnes feels when she and Weston re-discover each other is displayed in the reference to "the heat of the

weather" (214). The emotional tension of their reunion is then appropriately released as both the weather and Weston's silence break. His explanatory statement, "it was not my way to flatter and talk soft nonsense" (218) and his confession of love for Agnes both take place on a day when a "thunder-shower had certainly had a most beneficial effect upon the weather" (217). Agnes's growing inner sense of calm resolution is correlated with the change in the weather: "a heavy and protracted thunder shower during the afternoon had almost destroyed my hopes of seeing him that day; but now the storm was over, and the sun was shining brightly" (217). In this concluding chapter Anne Brontë recreates a sunny calm after the storm and her use of weather imagery to this end presents the sort of reconciliatory solution to life's problems which is not to be found in Emily Brontë's novel.

Wind imagery is also used in Agnes Grey for the delineation of character. Images of a wind which blows both hot and cold define an imbalance in certain characters and often do so by indicating methods of communication. When Agnes arrives at the Bloomfield residence the weather is unseasonably cold and windy for September. The implication is that winter has begun early and, in emotional terms, the wintry mood accords with Agnes's new experience. Although her spirits are high with expectation, the miserable weather makes the journey noticeably longer and harder to bear: "the heavy clouds, and strong north-easterly wind combined to render the day extremely cold and dreary, and the journey seemed a very long one" (15). The image of a cold, biting wind serves to underline Mrs. Bloomfield's bitterly unwelcoming reception of the new governess. Mrs. Bloomfield's way of speaking to Agnes is expressed in imagery which describes an emotional winter. She is "chilly in her

manner" (16) and to her newly-arrived governess she directs "a succession of commonplace remarks, expressed with frigid formality" (17).

Agnes's exposure to the "bitter wind" has left her hands numb and "almost palsied" (17). She is shown to be blighted on more than one level: by the actual physical cold without and the emotional cold within --a cold which freezes her faculty of speech and reduces her to an inarticulate nonentity. Agnes later recalls that the little she did say was "spoken in the tone of one half-dead, or half-asleep" (16). Her description of her impaired function emphasises the numbing effect of her passage to this alien place: "My hands are so benumbed with the cold that I can scarcely handle my knife and fork" (17). Mrs. Bloomfield's reply maintains the icy imagery: "'I dare say you would find it cold,' replied she with a cool, immutable gravity that did not serve to reassure me" (17).

There is a wry humour in the forced ceremony of this scene, in which Agnes, "sensible that the awful lady was a spectator to the whole transaction," feebly attempts to cut the tough meat (17). Anne Brontë's choice of formal language in the use of such words as "spectator" and "transaction" suggests that there are two disparate levels which create a touching parody in this passage. On one level sits Agnes with a fork in her fists, "like a child of two years old," grappling with her dinner; on the other stands the "awful lady" growing increasingly grandiose as she witnesses the pitiful "transaction" (17). It is largely through her use of winter imagery that Anne Brontë is able to keep the humorous aspect firmly contained within the context of oppression.

Agnes's "palsied" (17) hands and inability to converse refer symbolically to the recurring theme of freedom versus restraint. The

power of self-expression is taken away from Agnes, and her active self is held in check, prevented from any freedom of expressive action by the deadening bonds of social tyranny. Her hope of encouraging growth through reasoned communication with her pupils is likewise thwarted from the outset: "I talked to my little pupils as well as I could, and tried to render myself agreeable: but with little success I feared, for their mother's presence kept me under an unpleasant restraint" (18).

Images of a stormy wind are used to indicate the ill-placed, destructive energies present in some characters. Those who have a wild, ungoverned tendency to verbal excess of one sort or another (such as Mr. Murray and Rector Hatfield) are also those who exhibit moral shallowness or spiritual paucity. Thus Mr. Murray is described as a "blustering, roystering country squire" (66) and Hatfield is pictured "sailing up the aisle" and "sweeping along like a whirlwind" (90). Both men are caught up in the pursuit of materialism and have little or no time for the "hapless dependents" (67) who look to them for social or spiritual guidance.

In their case wind imagery is employed to suggest the harsh tones of a meaner consciousness. Anne Bronte's poem "The Three Guides," written in the same year as Agnes Grey, refers to the spirit of Earth, which is, like Murray and Hatfield, locked in the "stony-hearted grasp" (i, Chitham, 144) of materialism. Its voice is identified as "harsh" and "droning" as it drowns out the flight of the poet's soul on its heavenward path:

> If, to the breezes wandering near,
> I listened eagerly,
> And deemed an angel's voice to hear
> That whispered hope to me,

That heavenly music would be drowned
In thy harsh, droning voice,
Nor inward thought, nor sight, nor sound
Might my sad soul rejoice. (vi, Chitham, 145)

Within the image scheme she has set up, Anne Brontë consistently presents the divine message as the "still, small voice of Heaven" (l. 50, Chitham, 145) which cannot be picked up by the dulled senses of the materialist. Mr. Murray, Mr. Hatfield and Mrs. Bloomfield are thus associated with cold or stormy winds and harsh, materialist voices, rather than the gentle breezes of the poem, which carry a spiritual "angel's voice." Derek Stanford suggests that Anne Brontë is critical of excessive "output" in these terms: "Anne criticises this view of life also for its want of an interior sense. It is all external action, all bustle and 'output.'"[5]

The way in which certain characters communicate (or blow hot and cold, like the wind) is an open indication of their inherent distance from, or proximity to, a golden mean of spiritual balance. Terence Hawkes points to the discoveries of semiotics in the designation of man's role as "quintessentially one of communication."[6] At least to some degree one feels that Anne Brontë came to a similar realisation, notably in her analysis of the way different characters communicate. Encoded in the way they speak or maintain silence is a wealth of information about role, power, gender and intellect. While Mr. Murray, a red-faced and "hearty bon-vivant" (66), blusters and puffs away stoutly at one extreme, he is, at the other extreme, almost devoid of expression when it comes to addressing a lowly female minion such as Agnes. Hatfield, too, is all energy and presence as he comes "flying from the pulpit in such eager haste to shake hands with the squire" (89), or "sweeping along like a

whirlwind, with his rich silk gown flying behind him, and rustling against the pew doors" (90), but he has barely a word of comfort for the family of his dying parishioner "poor Jem" or for a sadly troubled Nancy Brown (106-07).

Mr. Murray's inability to communicate in any way other than by extremes suggests both his limits as a man and his position at the head of the squirearchy. His taciturn greeting reserved for Agnes barely acknowledges her existence and represents a form of silent dismissal for that female sub-species, the governess. His "'Morning Miss Grey,' or some such brief salutation," is delivered with an "unceremonious nod" (67), whereas his "blustering" personality is one which Agnes knows only from other sources and from the sound of his raucous laughter in the distance or his voluble and frequent blaspheming against the hapless male servants. Agnes remarks that she never sees him "except on Sundays" (66) when he goes to church. The irony that these two uncaring figures are regular churchgoers and highly-respected members of the community cannot be missed.

Mr. Murray, like Arthur Huntingdon in The Tenant, is a representation of what Juliet McMaster refers to as "the masculine ethos of the Regency"[7] and, as such, it is appropriate that Anne Brontë shows his lack of dialogue with the earnest governess offset by the rough hostility of his speech with the male servants. It is not simply a question of Agnes's being culturally unworthy of his conversation: what Anne Brontë implies is, rather, a socio-intellectual dysfunction on the part of the Murrays which prevents dialogue. This cultural inability to speak the same language as their employee places them firmly in the old order, whereas the enlightened governess, with her concepts of equality

and moral integrity, heralds a new era which is altogether foreign to the Murrays and their ilk. Thus the only sounds which penetrate Agnes's isolated world echo an intemperate brutality which violates the gentle humanitarian values she holds dear. In Agnes Grey, then, the lack of real dialogue between master and servant, mistress and governess, indicates the "hireling's" (69) supposed insignificance: it demonstrates the voicelessness of those who do not signify within an unbalanced social structure.

Another external manifestation of inner being is explored through the visual imagery of facial colouring. Anne Brontë's examination of facial colouring is closely linked to the analysis of communication using wind and weather imagery. Just as the cold wind or winter weather suggests an emotional frigidity, fire in the countenance indicates something of the fire within and vice versa. Again, this use of imagery points to thematic emphasis on the need to balance excess with restraint according to a divinely ordained natural order.

Those who cheat in this game of personal interaction may well hide their feelings, as Rosalie Murray does with practised ease, but as Anne Brontë's instructive images show, there is a price to be paid for extravagant show or artifice of any kind. Rosalie says of her rejected suitor, Hatfield: "He looked me full in the face; but I kept my countenance so well that he could not imagine that I was saying anything more than the actual truth" (134). Hatfield's hot and misguided pursuit of Rosalie has ended disastrously and the first indication of his pain is in his loss of colour, which implies his loss of face, in contrast to the coquette's controlled dissimulation. Rosalie recounts: "You should have seen how his countenance fell! He went perfectly white in the face" (133).

There are, of course, many such images of facial colouring in literature. Yet, Anne Brontë is giving a slight twist to the symbolic link between warm colouring or fire and the life force. In these characters who exert an unnatural or ungodly control over others, the heightened colour of their faces, at certain points, is an indication of imbalance or unhealthy excess. Mary Ann Bloomfield, who is prone to excessively violent passions and "insensate stubbornness" (33), is identified by the "high colour in her cheeks" (18). When Rosalie first rushes to meet Agnes with the news of her deceitful conquest, it is with "buoyant step, flushed cheek, and radiant smiles shewing that she, too, was happy, in her own way" (132). We are immediately made aware by that qualifying phrase "in her own way" that the flush of Rosalie's cheek is similar to the unhealthy flush of "distemper" which colours Eve's cheek after she has eaten the fruit in Paradise Lost.[8]

At this early stage in the game of dissimulation, Rosalie has the upper hand, but, as the changing visual images show, this misuse of power costs her both strength and happiness. Her ultimate loss of vitality is reflected in her loss of facial colour. Anne Brontë also indicates the lack of vigour which results from a life of debauchery when she paints an unflattering portrait of Rosalie's ill-chosen husband, whose face is "pale, but somewhat blotchy, and disagreeably red about the eye-lids" (202). Her choice of language illustrates that their destructive marriage has had the effect of diminishing the young bride, by "reducing the plumpness of her form, the freshness of her complexion, the vivacity of her movements, and the exuberance of her spirits" (193). This list of Rosalie's former glories, preceded by the word "reducing," has the effect of a flashback and demonstrates, within the structure of

the text, a visible modification of her earlier self. Rosalie (like Eve) is finally seen as a woman who has been cut down. Although this study leaves the character of Rosalie in a relatively sympathetic light, the continued imagistic pointers to her materialism unobtrusively inform the reader about the value of a thinking woman (Agnes) set against the dubious worth of one who is frivolous and unprincipled.

With equal subtlety Anne Brontë uses an image of heat to suggest a moral gulf--this time between two men: Weston and Murray. She makes instructive use of the fire image to reveal a social paradox. Mr. Weston, the ideal of manhood, whose character, as Winifred Gérin says, "emphasises the silent worth of a deeply charitable nature,"[9] exemplifies (as does Agnes) the thematic interest in balance. With more than a hint of irony, Anne Brontë describes Weston's fiery defence of Nancy Brown's lost cat in the face of the angry squire Murray and his gamekeeper. Weston, supposing that Mr. Murray is "accustomed to use rather strong language when he's heated" (114), explains his confrontation with the greedy landowner in words which imply that his warmth is of an altogether different genus than that of the hot-tempered Murray:

> 'Miss Grey,' said he . . . 'I wish you would make my peace with the squire, when you see him. He was by when I rescued Nancy's cat, and did not quite approve of the deed. I told him I thought he might better spare all his rabbits than she her cat, for which audacious assertion, he treated me to some rather ungentlemanly language, and, I fear, I retorted a trifle too warmly.' (113-14)

Taken in context, the heat image becomes more than an indication of temperament: it takes on far more widely reaching social and moral implications. Clearly Murray's heat has nothing to do with the warmth of concern for fellow beings of the kind evinced by the three characters who

sit discussing the incident in the warm glow of Nancy's cottage fire. It is, instead, the unbalanced heat of a choleric and unreasonable tyrant, a sign of his excess in contrast to the harmonious gesture of one who would make his peace. Weston is the sort of character whose life is blameless as opposed to those in the Murray family, whose unjust use of wealth and position demand more than an apology. Weston's egalitarian mentality will allow the possibility of conciliation, but the squire's extreme nature and position will not. Weston has the final comment: "then with a peculiar half-smile, he added, 'But never mind; in my opinion the squire has more to apologise for than I.' And left the cottage" (114).

Central to this middle chapter (XII) is the archetypal symbol of the hearth or fireplace. From its obviously pivotal situation in the narrative, it is fair to assume that the hearth is a key image in Agnes Grey, just as it is in The Tenant. The hearth recurrently defines not only the importance of family within Anne Brontë's scheme, but it also serves as a focus for her ethical inquiry into the contradictions of this society which houses the frigid, over-indulged "superiors" better than the caring, disenfranchised workers.

Early in the novel, the warmth of loving devotion which fuels Agnes Grey's exemplary family is suggested in the reference to her parents' bond: "if she would but consent to embellish his humble hearth, he should be happy to take her on any terms" (2). The mutual respect expressed in her parents' marriage is of prime importance in enabling them to deal with misfortune, when the hearth would indeed be humbled to the point of emptiness. Agnes recalls the family's united response to a period of ill-fortune:

> . . . then we sat with our feet on the fender, scraping the perishing embers together from time to time, and occasionally adding a slight scattering of the dust and fragments of coal, just to keep them alive. (7)

Although short of physical heat, Agnes's family is rich in emotional warmth and the close family ties are in some way heightened by their meagre rations. In the Grey family the valued commodity of warmth is "carefully husbanded" (7) and because they look after the fire (as they look after each other) the "perishing embers" (7) of family life are kept alive.

The warm farewells of these loving people she has left at home add even greater emphasis to the bleakness of Agnes's reception at Wellwood. Her "bright hopes, and ardent expectations" (12) are abruptly shattered by the rude discovery that Mrs. Bloomfield is not the "kind, motherly woman" (16) she hopes will meet her. Her employer is as cold and dreary as the autumn weather. Again, when she arrives at Horton Lodge in the snow storm, Agnes discovers icy desolation. The "kind and hospitable reception" which she is naively hoping for is not forthcoming (63). The imagery stresses that this pilgrim has a cold and "formidable passage" (62) from place to place, and her movements are not eased by any nurturing warmth from the establishment.

The harsh reality of the governess's enforced isolation and lowly status is immediately brought home to Agnes by the distant situation of her allotted living quarters. They are placed away from the warm core of the house: "up the back stairs, a long, steep, double flight, and through a long narrow passage" (63). Even more woefully suggestive of her reduced circumstances is the "small, smouldering fire" (64): there is no great blaze of warm comfort to greet the solitary

traveller. What awaits her is a disturbingly lifeless "wide, white wilderness" of the "alien" unknown (65), and a cold little room, where Agnes's spirit must smoulder like the fire until it is released, and given the freedom to burn brightly.

Mrs. Murray's attitude and stance implicitly exclude Agnes from any vestige of warm acceptance. She is pictured standing by the fire and commenting tersely on the weather and the "rather rough" (67) journey of the previous day. Anne Brontë gives us the visual impression of the mistress standing between her "new servant girl" (67) and the fireplace. Agnes points out that it would be perfectly possible and reasonable to offer comfort or welcome to the newcomer, as her own mother (also a "lady") would have done: "my mother would have seen her immediately after her arrival . . . and given her some words of comfort" (67). Within the compass of Anne Brontë's tale, however, the comfort never comes from the rich: the gentlefolk are absent when a poor family needs help. It takes the offices of a poor curate to provide the consumptive labourer "poor Jem" with the life-sustaining warmth of a good fire. Hatfield offers no help other than "some harsh rebuke to the afflicted wife," or "heartless observation," but Weston reacts with thoughtful generosity: "when he seed how poor Jem shivered wi' cold an' what pitiful fires we kept . . . he sent us a sack of coals the next day; an' we've had good fires ever sin'" (106-07).

From Anne Brontë's differentiation between the cottages' honest warmth and the frigidly "proper" (40) households of the ill-bred rich emerges a strident dialectic which runs beneath the surface of her apparently quiet narrative. Contained in these images of the hearth and fireplace is a discussion about an inherent division in the mainstream of

Victorian sensibility. Contemporary belief systems incorporated a strong sense of moral endeavour within an apparently incompatible stress on material gain. The fireplace stood at the core of the Victorian home, and became a popular symbol for the sort of solid virtues and lofty idealism which are noticeable by their absence from the rich houses of Agnes Grey. The sustaining warmth and strength associated with the hearth are more likely to be found in the humble cottages of characters such as Nancy Brown, than in the 'great' houses of the Murrays or the Bloomfields. Whereas the cottage fireside is closed to nobody, only a privileged inner circle is invited to share the establishment hearth.

Implicit in Anne Brontë's variations on the hearth motif is a recognition of society's failure to reconcile two s utually exclusive propositions as that of loving one's neighbours and then exploiting them either for personal gain or in the name of maintaining the established order. The Evangelical emphasis on duty, which was so stringent a part of Anne Brontë's consciousness, led to an awareness of the need to conform socially. Yet, a mind and heart attuned to the egalitarian doctrines of non-conformist theology could not avoid the troubling conclusion that the existing structure was dangerously riven. The hearth, as the functional heart of family life, is an effective focus for the examination of social and spiritual divisions.

Denied the nurturing warmth of the family hearth, of acceptance as an equal, or even of companionship, it is no small wonder that Agnes experiences an inner death and begins to fear for her soul under the savage influence of the system:

> Already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting, and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last beneath the baneful influence of such a mode of life. (108-09)

Speaking as it does of "petrifying," "contracting," and "deteriorating," this language suggests the sort of factual observations which might be used for scientific purposes to record the inexorable destruction of life by the "baneful influence" of blind external forces. The statement is not simply that growth is inhibited in the absence of warmth or light: what makes the imagery memorable is that these objective terms are applied to something as intensely subjective as the internal anguish of a soul in torment.

Anne Brontë does, however, make it clear that there is relief and sustenance for the "soul contracting" (108) in the living glow of Nancy Brown's kitchen fire, where "there's room for all" (112). It offers a comforting respite from the artificial restraints of Agnes's "deadened" (109) existence in the frigid environment of the mansion house. By juxtaposition, Anne Brontë is able to demonstrate how Agnes's cry from the heart she fears is "petrifying," receives an immediate answer in the spiritual and moral reassurance of the heartwarming scene where Nancy's cat is restored to her by Mr. Weston. Both Agnes's and Weston's commitment to a truly benevolent ideal of service takes them to the very heart of Nancy's predicament and to a fireside which welcomes all--regardless of rank. The conviction that all are entitled to share the fire is born out in a series of concerned protestations from Nancy's "Won't you come to th' fire, miss?" to Weston's "But it strikes me I'm keeping your visitor away from the fire" (113). This love of the fireside

(specifically mentioned in Thackeray's definition of a "gentleman")[10] identifies the happy trio seated by Nancy's humble fire as closer to the lofty ideals of well-bred gentility than anything evinced by the "angels of light" up at the manor.

Rosalie Murray's hunger for a title shapes a significant part of the narrative and Anne Brontë comments quite scathingly on the ignoble practices of those who, like Rosalie, would wish to be ennobled. The largesse distributed by the "grand ladies" is entirely devoid of Agnes's genuine benevolence: their charity is cold indeed.

> I could see that the people were often hurt and annoyed by such conduct, though their fear of the "grand ladies" prevented them from testifying any resentment; but they never perceived it. They thought that, as these cottagers were poor and untaught, they must be stupid and brutish; and as long as they, their superiors, condescended to talk to them and to give them shillings and half-crowns, or articles of clothing, they had a right to amuse themselves, even at their expense; and the people must adore them as angels of light, condescending to minister to their necessities, and enlighten their humble dwellings. (95)

Anne Brontë adroitly emphasises the glaring absence of fine qualities in her ladies and gentlemen by her technique of ironic signifying. The irony gains its bite from the realisation that behind the commonly understood image ("angels of light") lies a reference to the hurtful reality of hypocrisy which is neither angelic nor does it bring light. The ideal of humility is rewritten in an instance of humiliation. For these ladies and gentlemen, then, the hearth is not the hub of solidly virtuous, Christian family life. Instead, we see it in Anne Brontë's terms, as a focal point for the realisation that behind the condescending mask of virtue lurks a material beast.

It is not an unexpected move on Anne Brontë's part to use animal imagery as a method of referring to the beastly or brutal aspects

of the 'gentlefolks'' ways. But there are two aspects to her interpretation of the word 'animal': she shows human brutality as animal-like, yet at the same time she also allows for the acceptance of all animals as God's "creatures" (86). In one system (the natural order) all are worthy; in the other (the social order) only the powerful or the beautiful signify. From the debased value system of a class which prizes external appearance above all else comes young Master Bloomfield's classification of species with its built-in endorsement of cruelty: "it's a pity to kill the pretty singing birds, but the naughty sparrows and mice and rats I may do what I like with" (22). Anne Brontë, then, divides her animal imagery to illustrate two separate elements in her thinking: the general admission that all God's creatures are worthwhile, set against the inhuman beastliness of some human behaviour. Agnes makes this distinction in her comments on Matilda Murray: "As an animal, Matilda was all right . . . as an intelligent human being she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless and irrational" (72).

The roots of a disastrous social structure are suggested in the picture of ruthlessly destructive behaviour which Anne Brontë presents through her references to animals. Little Fanny Bloomfield is hopelessly over-indulged that she spits in the faces of thos[illegible] her and bellows "like a bull" (35) when she is not humoured [illegible] is "as rough as a young bear" (73) to the extent that he pro[illegible] "unteachable--at least for a governess under his mother's eye" (73). That last, almost parenthetical, comment says everything about the problems Agnes encounters with her charges and signifies the imbalance in society. The parents pass on their debased values to their children, who, in turn, pass them on to all they meet. Tom Bloomfield's father plays an

instructive role in his son's brutal treatment of the young sparrows. When young Bloomfield pulls off "their legs and wings and heads," his father's only comment is that "they were nasty things, and I must not let them soil my trousers" (21).

The stress of the animal imagery moves towards the culminating sense that these unprincipled materialists are really more like predatory animals than civilised beings. The scene at the Bloomfield house is curiously redolent of a den of wolves; when visitors arrive, the children clamber over them like a litter of cubs. As Agnes observes, "they would indecently and clamorously interrupt the conversation of their elders, roughly collar the gentlemen, climb their knees uninvited, hang about their shoulders, or rifle their pockets, pull the ladies' gowns, disorder their hair, tumble their collars and importunately beg for their trinkets" (52). Agnes refers to her pupils' antics in precisely this animal terminology when she sees them "quarreling over their victuals like a set of tiger's cubs" (43). Although the figure of Uncle Robson has a comic touch with his "foppery of stays," it is also suggested that there is something sinister and bestial about his "little grey eyes, frequently half-closed" (47). In the manner of a predator, he brings his bird-nesting "spoils" to the children, who in turn run hungrily "to beg each a bird for themselves" (49).

It falls to Rosalie Murray to demonstrate the contrasting usage of the words "beast" and "creature," in the course of her prattle, as she crudely assesses the comparative worth of the men present at the "odious" Sir Thomas Ashby's ball. In the space of two sentences she is able to refer to Agnes with one breath as a "good creature" and to Sir Thomas as "young, rich, and gay, but an ugly beast nevertheless" (86). For Rosalie

herself Anne Brontë reserves the most unpleasant animal metaphor to express the nasty way in which she, for the sake of alleviating her boredom, callously determines to "fix" Weston, once Agnes's devotion to him is clear. Agnes falls victim to a society which keeps her powerless while Rosalie, indulging in "excessive vanity," relishes the freedom to be cruel. Through the eyes of painful frustration Agnes sees Rosalie take on the animal shape of Tennyson's "nature, red in tooth and claw."[11] Her bitter observations place Rosalie at the level of a greedy, gloating dog:

> I could only conclude that excessive vanity, like drunkenness, hardens the heart, enslaves the faculties, and perverts the feelings; and that dogs are not the only creatures which, when gorged to the throat, will yet gloat over what they cannot devour, and grudge the smallest morsel to a starving brother. (157)

By juxtaposition, Anne Brontë illustrates that Rosalie's fascination with pedigree has more to do with Matilda's "shocking" reference to her "fine blood mare" than it does with womanhood. Although Rosalie insists that her sister's use of the word "mare" is "so inconceivably shocking!" (83), in the same instant she launches into an inventory of the noble pedigrees present at her ball: "two noblemen, three baronets and five titled ladies!" (84). The implication in Anne Brontë's positioning of these images of "breeding and pedigree" (83) is clearly that Rosalie's chosen path will be that of a brood mare, wedded to the most prestigious sire.

Equally informative in the developing narrative is the emphasis given to the way people treat their animals. In total contrast to the harsh treatment meted out to the family pets of the Bloomfield and Murray families, the cherishing care given to Nancy Brown's cat is an exemplar

of domestic harmony and affection. In an expression of mindless barbarity, Uncle Robson's favourite dogs are dealt with "brutally" (48) and Miss Murray inflicts upon her erstwhile pet Snap "many a harsh word and many a spiteful kick and pinch" (124). Even Mr. Hatfield's treatment of the hapless terrier is deplorable: "Mr. Hatfield, with his cane, administered a resounding thwack on the animal's skull, and sent it yelping back to me, with a clamorous outcry that afforded the reverend gentleman great amusement" (127). The irony in the use of the words "reverend" and "gentleman" is obvious to the reader, who is by now fully aware that his conduct throughout is neither gentlemanly nor worthy of reverence.

Nancy's cat, on the other hand, is her "gentle friend" (96) and the affectionate bond between them serves to confirm the gap in awareness which separates the poor cottager from her supposed moral and spiritual superiors. The animal, which is pictured "with her long tail half encircling her velvet paws, and her half-closed eyes dreamily gazing on the low, crooked fender" (96), appears in a far more sympathetic light than the man of the cloth, who unceremoniously knocks her off his knee, "like as it may be in scorn and anger" (102). There is a degree of ironic significance in Nancy's comment "you can't expect a cat to know manners like a Christian, you know, Miss Grey" (103), since the cat would appear at this moment to be more one of God's own creatures than the clergyman.

At the beginning of Agnes Grey two distinct images of enclosed space are established as opposing structures which outline the social tension within the narrative. The pull between the material confines of the large houses and the spiritual freedom to be found in humbler dwellings forms a major image base throughout the work. This use of setting is briefly touched upon in an unsigned review from the Christian

Remembrancer of 1857: Anne and Emily Brontë's kitchens are, it says, "low, and tell a tale."[12] Although it is clearly pejorative in intent, this little remark comes surprisingly close to defining Anne Brontë's method of fusing the outer setting with the inner world of her characters in order to advance the psychological process and "tell a tale." Early on in her tale she shows that Agnes's mother is pulled in one direction by the "elegant house," but the humble "cottage" (1) draws her in the opposite direction and wins: "An elegant house and spacious grounds were not to be despised: but she would rather live in a cottage with Richard Grey than in a palace with any other man in the world" (1).

Its placement at the beginning of the novel allows this glimpse of a 'good' woman who knows the value of a 'good' man to present, in miniature, a prominent set of images as a preview of things to come. It gives an indication of the novel's themes, and as such it speaks of the individual's need to be attuned to spiritual as well as material levels of being in order to achieve real growth. The superficial splendour promised for Rosalie's coming-out ball is immediately countered in the text by an image of a small house, a "quiet little vicarage, with an ivy-clad porch" (82), which, unlike the rich estate of her intended husband, offers more real likelihood of fulfilment. Anne Brontë makes it clear that the woman who develops as a whole person does so only on the basis of self-reliance. Agnes says of her mother: "A carriage and a lady's maid were great conveniences; but thank Heaven, she had feet to carry her, and hands to minister to her own necessities" (1). This is a metaphor which prefigures Agnes's own journey towards independence and selfhood. It is a salient point that the last glimpse she has of her home as she leaves for her new life is one which shows the solid "old

grey parsonage" and the "village spire" together, illuminated by a "slanting beam of sunshine" (14). This image, which shows the earthly structures linked to heaven by a beam of light, indicates the spiritual pathway ahead.

Interiors are not described in detail, but serve to delineate boundaries or limits on the corporeal if not the spiritual freedom of those who live within. The restraint on Agnes is real enough when she is shown to be kept a prisoner in the school-room. Although it is delivered with characteristic understatement, her comment on the deliberate curtailment of her free time registers a deeply frustrating position: "my kind pupil took care I should spend it neither there [with Nancy Brown] nor anywhere else beyond the limits of the school-room" (154). The ironic use of the words "kind" and "care" in that statement indicates a sense of bitterness without labouring the point about being held captive. By careful juxtaposition, Anne Brontë also points out that the physical liberty which the Murray sisters flaunt is illusory. Closely following the picture of Agnes's confinement to the school-room is a penetrating summary of what Rosalie expects from her "inauspicious match" (155) with Sir Thomas Ashby. Positive indications that Rosalie is "pleased with the thoughts of becoming mistress of Ashby Park" (154), and "elated with the prospect of the bridal ceremony and its attendant splendour and eclat, the honey moon spent abroad, and the subsequent gaieties she expected to enjoy in London and elsewhere" (154) (all material expressions of wealth and freedom) are undercut by the negative observations that "she seemed to shrink from the idea of being so soon united" (155) and "it seemed a horrible thing to hurry on the inauspicious match" (155). The use of words such as "horrified," "warnings," and

"evil" (155), following the reference to Rosalie's "thoughts" and "prospects" (154), shows the disparity between the spirit of "union" (155) and the dismal reality of the marriage market. In combination with the structural imagery, this judicious use of irony suggests that the Murrays are locked in to a system of self-seeking materialism which can only stifle any nascent spirit and must ultimately prove to be destructive.

Through the recurring imagery of paths, lanes, walls, and windows, Anne Brontë introduces the realisation that the Murrays' world is severely limited. "But why can't she read it in the park or garden?" asks an anxious Mrs. Murray, when her nubile daughter seems to be escaping the set bounds of her genteel existence by taking her book to the field, "like some poor neglected girl that has no park to walk in, and no friends to take care of her" (126). Of course, the reader is ultimately enlightened as to the contradiction in Mrs. Murray's peculiar brand of caring, which smacks more of strangulation. Agnes confesses, when considering the "inauspicious match" with ugly Sir Thomas Ashby, "I was amazed and horrified at Mrs. Murray's heartlessness, or want of thought for the real good of her child" (155).

Rosalie's flirtation with Hatfield and her persistent ramblings "in the fields and lanes that lay in the nearest proximity to the road" (130) are implicitly a flirtation with potential freedom and real life rather than social conformity. Since she rejects Hatfield, whom Agnes believes would be far better than the sinister Sir Thomas, it only remains for her ramblings to be curtailed within the confines of yet another, grander, park--Ashby Park--and an unhappy but "princely" home (206). "I'm bound hand and foot" (129), says Rosalie before her marriage,

lamenting the cessation of her flirtatious activities now that Sir Thomas is on the scene, and her remark is actually prophetic. Her seigneurial aspirations, however, plainly override any rational consideration of the dreadful consequences: "I must have Ashby Park, whoever shares it with me" (129).

The difference between Rosalie or Matilda's life and that of their governess is not just the difference between riches and poverty or between advantage and disadvantage. It is a far more subtle definition of individual initiative: Agnes takes charge of her own life and seizes her opportunity with gusto "to go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance" (10). As with Helen Huntingdon in The Tenant, Agnes's road to self-realisation has its "snares and pitfalls" (The Tenant, x).[13] She might be tied to the schoolroom by her demanding pupils or "crushed" into the corner of the carriage and constantly reminded of her inferior place in life. "Such a nasty, horrid place, Miss Grey; I wonder how you can bear it," says Rosalie of Agnes's place in the carriage (76). However, the restraints placed on the governess are (by dint of her integrity) less far-reaching than those placed on her pupils. Despite her boisterous ways, "full of life, vigour, and activity" (72), Miss Matilda's world is ultimately as narrow as her elder sister's, contained as it is within the boundaries of the park and the marriage market:

> Now also she was denied the solace which the companionship of the coachman, groom, horses, greyhounds and pointers might have afforded; for her mother, having notwithstanding the disadvantages of a country life so satisfactorily disposed of her elder daughter, the pride of her heart, had begun seriously to turn her attention to the younger. . . . (166)

It is hardly surprising that, in this closed world, the window represents some form of release. Mary Wollstonecraft had pointed to the promise of freedom evoked by an open window in The Wrongs of Woman in 1798, and Charlotte Brontë gave the window a powerful place in the imagery of Jane Eyre, where it serves not only to aid looking out but also to let strong, supernatural influences into Jane's world.[14]

When Agnes first arrives at Horton Lodge, it is through the window that she views the "unknown world--a wide, white wilderness" which symbolises the tabula rasa of her new existence upon which the marks of her future life are yet to be inscribed (65). Rosalie's acute frustration and awareness of her self-made shackles gain added, almost poignant, emphasis, as she looks "listlessly towards the window" (139). It is all too clear that she has thrown away her chance to live in a relatively fulfilled marriage and the promise of all the life that beckons outside is bound to make her days dreary: "There's no inducement to go out now; and nothing to look forward to" (139), she complains; and the reader knows that while she refuses to perceive the actuality of what lies beyond the window, there more than a grain of truth in her statement. Again, later in the narrative, when Agnes visits Rosalie--now Lady Ashby --freshly ensconced in her stately mansion, Agnes's seat by a "wide, open window" (195) puts her within sight of light and liberty as she looks out from a darkening and enclosed world: "I sat for a moment in silence, enjoying the still, pure air and the delightful prospect of the park, that lay before me, rich in verdure and foliage, and basking in yellow sunshine . . ." (195).

The implication is that whatever is seen through the window has a good deal to do with the mind of the viewer. Thus Agnes's description

of the view is suffused with a glow of living observation as opposed to the "languor and flatness" and "dull, soulless eyes" (203) of Sir Thomas Ashby or the "dreary composure" (203) of his bride who openly detests him. By contrast, Agnes is a thriving, growing individual who has gained vision and meaning from her experiences. This descriptive passage, and the longer one which follows, confirm the impression that there is life beyond the walls and light which is never quite extinguished for those who want to look out:

> The shadow of this wall soon took possession of the whole of the ground as far as I could see, forcing the golden sunlight to retreat inch by inch, and at last take refuge in the very tops of the trees. (199)

As Agnes sits by the window looking out from Rosalie Ashby's "elegant mansion" or prison, one can see that two major image clusters reveal the difference between Agnes's healthier outlook and Rosalie's limitations. Both of these prominent sets of imagery relate to the outdoors--one is light (which is paramount and which I shall deal with later) and the other is nature imagery.

The curative influence of nature and the restorative effects of being outdoors resound through the texts of Anne Brontë's work. Flowers, in particular, provide a focal point for some scenes of self-evaluation and healing. The floral images show a sound Victorian knowledge of the language of flowers and, at the same time, they are a generic representation of divine benevolence--a God-given source of strength and beauty. The poem "In Memory of a Happy Day in February" echoes this confirmation of a divine continuum which Anne Brontë identifies in nature as a whole. Specifically in her poem "The Bluebell" she points to flowers as individual reflections of personality:

> A fine and subtle spirit dwells
> In every little flower,
> Each one its own sweet feeling breathes
> With more or less of power. (ll. 1-4, Chitham; 73)

Here the bluebell offers a "silent eloquence" which speaks of Anne Brontë's own recollections of childhood freedom: "Those sunny days of merriment/ When heart and soul were free" (ll. 37-38, Chitham, 74). Similarly, in Agnes Grey flower and nature images are used to convey a "silent eloquence" (l. 5, Chitham, 73) which actually gives volumes of information about character and emotional state. Agnes might compare herself with a "thistle seed borne on the wind to some strange nook of uncongenial soil" (65), but what actually forms her character has more to do with the "rugged regions" (15) where she was born. Anne Brontë explores this concept of a rugged individualism, set against the "depressingly flat" (56) preserves of the conventional establishment, in her comparison of the landscapes surrounding the great houses where Agnes serves. While the Bloomfields' grounds are distinguished by a parvenu plot with "smooth-shaven lawn" and "grove of upstart poplars," the Murrays' park is less nouveau riche, but still "depressingly flat to one born and nurtured among the rugged hills of ---" (75).

It is in this grand but uncongenial setting that Agnes experiences the unnerving effects of unbalanced, elitist attitudes in the "tyranny and injustice" (78) of her young charges and the social isolation imposed on her by their unfeeling snobbery. Their refusal to acknowledge her presence is an attempt to de-humanise her, to reduce her to a "vacancy" (117). But Agnes resolutely refuses to accept her vacant status and finds confirmation of her own individual worth (and warmth) in the beauties of the hedgerows. She escapes from her enforced position of

servitude by concentrating on the flowers: "along the green banks and budding hedges . . . my spirit of misanthropy began to melt away beneath the soft, pure air and genial sunshine" (118).

Agnes's longing for some familiar visual link with her childhood--"some familiar flower that might recall the woody dales or green hill-sides of home" (118)--is gratified by the sight of the primroses: "At length I descried, high up between the twisted roots of an oak, three lovely primroses, peeping so sweetly from their hiding place that the tears already started at the sight" (118). The emotional response is a silent recognition of her own vitality and 'sweetness' which she is forced to suppress during her diurnal drudgery. It is also a tearful acknowledgement that the cheerful spring flower recalls a certain confidence and youthful promise which Agnes now feels is blighted. Mr. Weston's role in reaching up to gather the primroses is also deeply symbolic because in one gesture he is restoring to Agnes both her lost youth and her hope for the future.

According to Victorian flower lore, these dual symbols of Agnes's past and future--the oak tree and the primrose--represent strength, youth and love's doubts and fears. There is traditionally an element of doubt in the meaning of the primrose image. In her book entitled Flower Lore, a Miss Carruthers of Inverness [sic] wrote in 1879 that the primrose was associated with "modest unaffected pride."[15] She also quotes from The Winter's Tale, where Perdita speaks of "pale primroses,/ That die unmarried, ere they can behold/ Bright Phoebus in his strength . . ." and thus gives an interpretation of the primrose image with which Anne Brontë would have been familiar.[16] As far as Agnes Grey is concerned, the choice of image is particularly appropriate. The floral allusion to Perdita's

speech suggests Agnes's unrequited love for Weston and the reference to a flower which conveys both pride and modesty accords with the sense of dauntless tenacity which attends the primrose's (and Agnes's) ability to survive the more inhospitable reaches of icy heath and moorland.

Agnes's and Mr. Weston's express preference for wild flowers extends to their endorsement of the kind of independent qualities which make Agnes stand out from her self-indulgent pupils. This implication is born out again in flower language when Mr. Weston questions Agnes about violets (which, according to Miss Carruthers, mean "steadfastness").[17] Agnes, interestingly enough, denies having any connection with violets: "I have no particular associations connected with them, for there are no sweet violets among the hills and valleys round my home" (120). This statement conveys the message that Anne Brontë's heroine is no shrinking violet: she shows Agnes inclining towards autonomy and self-sufficiency once her obsession with Edward Weston is overcome.

Unlike her pupils, Agnes exhibits a plain unvarnished honesty (symbolised in her love of wild flowers) which counters the manipulative dishonesty indulged in by Rosalie Murray in the course of her amorous adventures. When Rosalie is playing her calculated game of dalliance with Mr. Hatfield she is shown holding a sprig of myrtle--traditionally carried as a symbol of love by a bride in her wedding bouquet. However, there is a twist to this use of the floral emblem because Rosalie appears to be unaware that there is any meaning attached to it other than an entirely frivolous one: "a graceful sprig of myrtle, which served her as a very pretty plaything" (127). The image indicates that love--in the sense of mutual respect and caring--has no place in the life of someone like Rosalie: it is just another piece of the power game whereby her

vanity can be gratified at the expense of others. What presents an even more blatant indication of her foolishness is Rosalie's final reaction to her pressing suitor--she impatiently gives the myrtle away with a toss of her head, implicitly tossing away the opportunity of loving reciprocity in a real marriage. Even though she recognises Hatfield's superior worth to the "ugly" rake Sir Thomas Ashby, she is adamant that "poor Mr. Hatfield" (128) could never be a serious contender for her "preference" because his income barely amounts to seven hundred a year: "I never should forget my rank and station for the most delightful man that ever breathed. . . . Love! I detest the word! as applied to one of our sex, I think it a perfect insult" (128).

The empty-headed Rosalie, of course, presents a perfect foil to the character of Agnes, who takes the idea of love (both in its broader and narrower senses) very seriously. As the representation of a caring, Christian person, Agnes is linked both to the ideal of receiving God's love and the responsibility of dispensing it. Anne Brontë makes specific use of light imagery to convey the awareness of a link with the higher ideal. The poem "In Memory of a Happy Day in February" echoes this confirmation of a "divine truth" which Anne Brontë identifies in light generally:

> It was a glimpse of truths divine
> Unto my spirit given
> Illumined by a ray of light
> That shone direct from Heaven! (l. 22, Chitham, 82)

Anne Brontë's use of light imagery to express love and hope is far from unusual in literature, but she does impart a compelling air of percipient life-force to the interplay of light and shade in her word pictures.

As the narrative develops, Agnes Grey's mind is so numbed by

isolation that she becomes unbalanced to the point where the light is almost extinguished: "the gross vapours of earth were gathering around me, and closing in upon my inward heaven" (109). In her troubled state Agnes is earthbound, and Anne Brontë shows that this preoccupation with her earthly love for Mr. Weston leans dangerously in the direction of an obsession: "And thus it was that Mr Weston rose at length upon me, appearing like the morning star in my horizon, to save me from the fear of utter darkness" (109).

When faced with the loss of her love towards the end of the novel, Agnes finds it hard to relinquish the spiritual sustenance she has derived from him. Weston has become the only "bright object" on a gloomy horizon: "How dreary to turn my eyes from the contemplation of that bright object and force them to dwell on the dull, grey, desolate prospect around: the joyless, hopeless, solitary path that lay before me" (163). However, she is intelligent enough to recognise that this desperate need--"a painful troubled pleasure, too near akin to anguish"--is unhealthy to the point of being "evil," for it hinders true development and effectively keeps her in "fetters" (162). She is also given the foresight to comprehend that she cannot progress until this "painful troubled pleasure" (162) is relinquished, allowing the total experience of a solitary life and the fullness of wisdom to intervene and guide her way: "It was an indulgence that a person of more wisdom or more experience would doubtless have denied herself" (163). Anne Brontë shows Agnes learning to walk "the solitary path" (163) that lay before her with joy and hope before she is finally enabled to join Mr. Weston.

Part of this learning process puts Agnes into the deeply contemplative state we see when she sits at Rosalie Ashby's window. The

dismal lethargy into which she has sunk calls forth one of the more purple passages in the novel and Anne Brontë's writing here carries an air of spiritual hiatus which is fitting at this point in her heroine's development. Again the light imagery is crucial:

> The shadow of this wall soon took possession of the whole of the ground as far as I could see, forcing the golden sunlight to retreat inch by inch, and at last take refuge in the very tops of the trees. At last, even they were left in shadow--the shadow of the distant hills, or of the earth itself; and, in sympathy for the busy citizens of the rookery, I regretted to see their habitation, so lately bathed in glorious light, reduced to the sombre, worky-day hue of the lower world, or of my own world within. For a moment, such birds as soared above the rest might still receive the lustre on their wings, which imparted to their sable plumage the hue and brilliance of deep red gold; at last, that too departed. (199)

What stands out in this passage, apart from a certain floridness of prose, is that the shadows of structures (such as walls and buildings) are shown to have taken "possession" of the open spaces and obliterated the sunlight. Agnes is "observing the slowly lengthening shadows from the window," in such a way as to suggest that her vision of social strictures is gaining increasing clarity. As the imagery here implies, the emphasis now is to move away from earthly entrapments and the danger of being "possessed" towards a higher, more spiritual plane.

The use of dramatic colouring or chiaroscuro in this tone picture succeeds in evoking Agnes's spiritual dilemma. Anne Brontë highlights the darker brush strokes (suggesting both Agnes's and Rosalie's blackened dreams) with lustrous touches which imply a stubborn spark of hope gleaming only in the eye of the believer. The elongated vowel sounds recall arcs of flight (Agnes's flights of fancy) and the encroaching shadows correspond with Agnes's increasing awareness that her dream of a life with Mr. Weston must be allowed to fade in the realism of "the

sombre, worky-day hue of the lower world."

Yet she still retains a glimpse of something "so lately bathed in glorious light" which promises a glimmer of hope for the future. As Anne Brontë shifts the focus from the contemplative person within to the busy scene without, she builds an impression of the tension between movement and inaction, introversion and extroversion, thought and deed. We are left with the suspicion that, unlike Rosalie Ashby, Agnes will not opt for a passive rôle: she will resolve her dilemma by actively stepping out of a "quiet, drab-colour life" (199), and reaching for the higher ideal like one of the birds which soars above the rest to catch the closing brilliance of the day.

Such a conviction accords with Anne Brontë's beliefs and it is predictable in the context of her religious philosophy that Agnes should make peace with her maker before she can progress much further. Yet the description of Agnes's apotheosis is not simply given in limited religious terms. Pantheist though she was, Anne Brontë gives us an inspirational view of more than the godhead revealed in nature. She also shows us selfhood discovered: Agnes is presented primarily as a person who is finally put in touch with all aspects of herself.

As in The Tenant, the image of the sea is used as a reflection of this limitless personal potential. The sea represents an agent of liberation for Agnes, who finds release in its ceaseless, unrestrained activity: "it was delightful to me at all times and seasons, but especially in the wild commotion of a rough sea breeze" (207). Agnes's expansive world with its sea breezes and freedom beyond time or season is a marked contrast to the incarceration of Lady Rosalie Ashby in her elegant mansion where the images speak of time passing and of death.

Within the "splendid house and grounds" which Rosalie coveted, "whatever price was to be paid for the title of mistress" (192), she is surrounded by "many elegant curiosities" (190) but is altogether lacking in love. She estimates her baby girl's place in all this as "only one degree better than devoting oneself to a dog" (205). Her blind obeisance to things ("Baubles" [195], as Agnes rather snortingly comments) shows her to be less the possessor than the possessed; she is owned by her own vapid materialism. The marble figures are metaphors for captive selves, captured in cold, white marble and the little timepiece and "little jewelled watch" (195) she shows Agnes with unknowing "animation" --all mark the empty passage of her wasted life. Her "melancholy sigh" signifies the fruitlessness of her materialistic existence "as if in consideration of the insufficiency of all such baubles to the happiness of the human heart, and their woeful inability to supply its insatiate demands" (195).

This sterile, soulless world offers a complete contrast to Agnes's now sunny, purposeful life. Juxtaposed against these latter scenes of Rosalie's suffocating union with a man she detests are Agnes's seaside escapades in which her healthy delight in her own autonomy identifies her as a woman free from the bondage of dependency. Unlike Rosalie Ashby, Agnes is no longer in need of a man to validate her existence; she becomes fully self-actualised. This is no more the "drab-colour life" (199) which oppresses Agnes at Ashby Park: the imagery here radiates light and colour. The entire scene on the sands is sparkling with sunlight and bursting with energy. "No language can describe," writes Anne Brontë, although she manages to do so with considerable success:

> . . . the effect of the deep, clear azure of the sky and ocean, the bright morning sunshine on the semi-circular barrier of craggy cliffs surmounted by green swelling hills, and on the smooth, wide sands, and the low rocks out at sea--looking, with their clothing of weeds and moss, like little grass-grown islands--and above all, on the brilliant, sparkling waves. (208)

All this energy creates a perfectly balanced environment: "Just enough heat to enhance the value of the breeze, and just enough wind to keep the whole sea in motion, to make the waves come bounding to the shore, foaming and sparkling as if wild with glee" (208). At this point one experiences the effervescent "glee" of someone who has finally broken free from her shackles and become a complete person in her own right. Appropriately, this transcendent state occurs when "nothing else was stirring--no living creature was visible besides myself" (208).

Anne Brontë shows Agnes recreated in the ancient pattern of an Aphrodite, born from the waves. The sense that the sea is a source of spiritual renewal for her is reinforced by the early morning setting, as Agnes steps forth on a pathway as yet untrod: "My footsteps were the first to press the firm, unbroken sands;--nothing before had trampled them since last night's flowing tide had obliterated the deepest marks of yesterday, and left it fair and even" (208).

At this point Agnes is not only physically refreshed but spiritually transfigured; feeling as if she had wings on her feet and "could go at least forty miles without fatigue" (208). The euphoria of her self-discovery brings courage to venture out on the slippery rocks where she is seen surrounded by a rising sea of living water. Again, when Edward Weston proposes to her, they are symbolically poised on the edge of a precipice from where they watch "the splendid sunset mirrored in the restless world of waters" at their feet (219). Their union,

unlike that of the ill-matched Ashbys, is demonstrably blessed when it is defined by all these positive images of fecundity and strength.

Anne Brontë's writing skills are exemplified in these contrasting scenes in which language evokes seasonal change, and image perfectly mirrors the psychological development of character. The correspondence between outer landscape and the inner life of her characters is of paramount importance. Throughout Agnes Grey imagery of nature and open spaces reflects the successive stages through which Agnes passes as she moves from the rugged hills of her childhood, through the "depressingly flat" spaces of her governess years, to the personal high point on that sea-cliff which affords a prospect of creative union in the fulfilment of marriage to her equal. The images which relate to nature and open spaces counter those of buildings and their contents and, together, they act as "pillars of witness," testifying to the actualisation of Agnes's escape from social degradation and the "indignities" (78) which limit her existence in the elaborately structured establishments where she serves.

Admittedly, Agnes Grey is restricted in focus, concerned as it is with the psychological development of one main character within a limited environment. Yet it has an intimate textual richness which could be identified as a peculiarly feminine grasp of "the intricacies of personal relationships" (as Ian Watt says in his analysis of the unparalleled supremacy enjoyed by the woman novelist) and places Anne Brontë firmly within Jane Austen's literary heritage.[18] It could equally well point to Anne Brontë's choice of a more advanced writing technique which reveals her as a writer who was ahead of her time. Robert Barnard's comparison of her writing with that of her sisters contains the

lucid observation that her work "looks forward," and places her at a literary crossroads.[19]

In Agnes Grey Anne Brontë's technical achievement lies in the creation of a closely-woven textual fabric, the apparent simplicity of which is deceptive. With this first novel she does not explore the more complex turns of plot or dramatic enigmas which shape her sisters' works and give the dimension[illegible] instructive parody to The Tenant.[20] The "instruction" which [illegible]ised to the reader is there in Agnes Grey, no less than in her lat[illegible], but the narrative development of Agnes Grey shows a straightforward approach which accords openly with its plainly stated moral purpose.

From the cryptic thoughtfulness of the opening nut metaphor to the succinct finality of its closing statement, "And now I think I have said sufficient" (220), Anne Brontë's writing in Agnes Grey combines an intentionally straightforward style with the use of key images, the purpose of which is both to instruct and entertain. In addition to setting the novel's boundaries of restraint, these two framing statements indicate the formal structure of the text and provide an ideal vehicle for the exploration of major themes of balance and imbalance, oppression and liberty, restraint and growth. Terry Eagleton quite rightly says that the final line of Agnes Grey "neatly captures the laconic modesty of the whole, the sense of a work attractively reserved in feeling without any loss of candid revelation."[21]

This reserve is both a stylistic and thematic feature of Anne Brontë's work. The apparent stillness of her writing, compared with that of her sisters, is not, however, the stillness of creative stagnation or inarticulation. One of the concluding images from the novel would make a

good metaphorical answer to the plethora of critical suggestions that her writing lacks power. It bears comparison with the calm, but not inactive, surface of the sea where Agnes stands on her "mossy promontory" (208), exulting in the contained power and unseen depths of the tidal water:

> I turned again to delight myself with the sight and sound of the sea dashing against my promontory--with no prodigious force, for the swell was broken by the tangled seaweed and the unseen rocks beneath; otherwise I should have been deluged with spray. (209)

The reader does not emerge from the sight and sound of Anne Brontë's narration "deluged with spray," but one is left with an abiding sense of its assiduous swell--of intertwined image patterns embedded beneath and controlling its surface movement.

The entire narrative process, framed as it is within the defining limits of those opening and closing sentences, points to Anne Brontë's realisation of what Inga-Stina Ewbank calls "a pragmatic and moral approach to the art of writing fiction."[22] However, these textual statements referring to form and content have a dual function. The self-reflexive comment mid-way through the narrative, "Had I seen it in a novel, I should have thought it unnatural" (157), together with repeated references in the text to the "benefit" (38) or "patience" (37, 75) of the "reader" (161, 89) and the "prolixity" (38, 161), "reflections" (154), or "design" (37, 154, 75) of the writer, combine to give a distancing effect which supports the novel's dialectic. But such comments also testify to an awareness of the writer's literary method and the careful underpinning of theme with image which is the structural base of her style. In Anne Brontë's ordering of thematic motifs within image patterns there is every sign of the unobtrusively crafted textual fabric which George Moore saw as "simple and beautiful as a muslin dress."[23]

NOTES

[1]Although I do not agree with Inga-Stina Ewbank that Anne Brontë is a "moralist first and a woman second," it is clear from the prefatory statements in both Agnes Grey (at the beginning of Chapter I) and The Tenant (in the preface to the second edition) that her purpose was to make moral sense of social problems. In response to suggestions that Wuthering Heights does not have a sense of good and evil, Ewbank emphasises that it is an exploration of the "human condition" and its characters are "in various ways, presented as moral beings." I believe that an equally strong case can be made for reading Anne Brontë's fiction as an exploration of the "human condition" which requires an unbiased and unsimplistic approach, no less than the work of her sister. Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 85, 96.

[2]One thing the other governess novels share is an emphasis on social inferiority. The governesses in Harriet Martineau's Deerbrook (1839) and Mrs. Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt (1835) fall into stereotypes of angelic self-sacrifice. Here I refer to Ewbank's survey of the novels.

[3]The dove in the poem is, like Agnes, confined within a prison-like structure and its awareness of what lies outside only serves to emphasise the "despair" of its imprisonment:

> In vain! In vain! Thou canst not rise--
> Thy prison roof confines thee there;
> Its slender wires delude thine eyes,
> And quench thy longing with despair.

Anne Brontë, "The Captive Dove," October 31st, 1843, The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary, ed. Edward Chitham (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 93.

[4]Chitham rightly comments that comparisons between Wuthering Heights and The Tenant suggest a strong similarity which is "of course a commonplace." He goes on to say that these similarities "stem from common Brontë preoccupations." Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith, Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 99. One such preoccupation was undoubtedly the weather and the wind, which appears as a major force in the letters of both Charlotte and Anne Brontë. Anne Brontë's poignant, cross-written letter (to Ellen Nussey) shortly before her death in 1849 makes particular mention of weather patterns: "You say May is a trying month, and so say others. The earlier part is often cold enough, I acknowledge, but, according to my experience, we are almost certain of some fine warm days in the latter half when the laburnums and lilacs are in bloom; whereas June is often cold and July generally wet." From a facsimile copied at The Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth. Letters, p. 321.

[5]Derek Stanford and Ada Harrison, Anne Brontë: Her Life and Works (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 194.

[6]Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 125.

[7]Juliet McMaster, "'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," Modern Language Quarterly, 43:4 (December 1982), 354.

[8]John Milton, Paradise Lost, in Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey, Bobbs-Merrill, 1981), Book IX, pp. 427, 430, 11. 887, 1036.

[9]Winifred Gérin, Anne Brontë: A Biography (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 145.

[10]William Makepeace Thackeray, The Four Georges, ed. Hannaford Bennett (London: John Long, 1923), p. 149.

[11]Tennyson, In Memoriam, in Poems of Tennyson (Oxford, 1921), LV, p. 349.

[12]From an unsigned review, Christian Remembrancer, July 1857, xcvii, 87-145. Reprinted in The Brontës: The Critical Heritage, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 369.

[13]Preface to the second edition of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, The Shakespeare Head Brontë, Vol. I, p. x.

[14]Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary; and The Wrongs of Woman, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford, 1980), p. 163. Mary Wollstonecraft shows Maria, "all soul," escaping in her imagination through the open window, whereas Jane Eyre is influenced by the moonlight which shines in on her through the window and warns her to "flee." Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, ed. Q. D. Leavis (London: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 235, 346.

[15]Carruthers, Miss [sic], Flower Lore (Belfast: McCaw, Stevenson & Orr [1879]). Reprint of the 1879 edition (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1972), pp. 197, 201.

[16]Miss Carruthers, p. 166.

[17]Miss Carruthers, p. 204.

[18]Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Pelican, 1972), pp. 337-40.

[19]Robert Barnard, "Anne Brontë: The Unknown Sister," Edda (1978), pp. 33-38.

[20]Edward Chitham argues convincingly that there are elements of parody in The Tenant. He points out that Anne Brontë's views are not necessarily conventional when compared with those of Emily, rather that "there is no parallel between the sisters in their unconventionality." Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith, Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems

(London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 104.

[21]Terry Eagleton, Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 126.

[22]Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 1966), p. 92.

[23]George Moore, Conversations in Ebury Street (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1942), p. 258.

CHAPTER III

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL: FROM HEARTH'S "DESPERATE CALMNESS" TO HEATH'S "LOFTIEST EMINENCE"

With characteristic bluntness, Anne Brontë declares in her preface to the second edition of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: "if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense" (I, ix). This decision to tell "a few wholesome truths" about such unwholesome subjects as infidelity, brutality, and drunkenness, and to do so in "unpalatable" (I, xi) detail was one which damaged Anne Brontë's reputation in the eyes of those she calls "the most fastidious" of her critics, not least of whom was her sister Charlotte.[1] Writing to W. S. Williams in July 1848, immediately after the novel's publication, Charlotte Brontë expressed stifling disapproval of its subject matter: "for my own part, I consider the subject matter unfortunately chosen--it was one the author was not qualified to handle at once vigorously and truthfully."[2] Charlotte Brontë's refusal to allow Smith, Elder & Co. to publish The Tenant after her younger sister's death temporarily silenced Anne Brontë's honest voice, but the truthfulness and vigour which Charlotte found lacking in The Tenant are the very qualities which have kept it alive.

Even at first sight the text of The Tenant resounds with heuristic vigour and penetrating authenticity. The discrepancy between Charlotte Brontë's opinion and the novel itself says more about the

sisters' approach to writing fiction than it does about their relationship. From the opening letter, which reflects on the business at hand--"story-telling" (I, 1)--Anne Brontë's deliberately controversial tale grips the imagination and presents a purposeful articulation of social and psychological conflict. The Tenant overturns the initial allusion to an "old world story" (I, 2) by offering in its place a searching reappraisal of orthodoxy.

The text of The Tenant maintains the same moral intent as that expressed in the opening of Agnes Grey, but the organisation of the material is more complex. Structural imagery has a similar function to that of the earlier novel, but it is developed to explore the broader scope of The Tenant. In order to tell her "honest" (I, x) story, and avoid lessening its impact with any "soft nonsense" (I, ix), Anne Brontë chose a direct, confessional method similar to that of Agnes Grey, but her use of the first-person narrative in The Tenant is incorporated into the more intricate tripartite structure, each part of which varies the narrative point of view. The text is set out in the epistolary form, but it is given an added dimension in the representation of the middle section as a diary, recorded (but not written) by the writer of the letters. After the relatively simple chronology and straightforward plan of Agnes Grey, this more expansive design certainly predicates Anne Brontë's artistic growth and willingness to experiment with her medium.

For the purposes of adding veracity and dramatic force to her narrative, Anne Brontë's choice of the epistolary framework, with its enclosed account of Helen Huntingdon's marriage (written from Helen's point of view) is psychologically effective. A curious lack of critical insight must have prompted George Moore to suggest that "almost any man

of letters"[3] would have redirected the author's path away from the use of the journal towards a more conventional exchange of confidences in "an entrancing scene"[4] of dialogue. For Anne Brontë, clearly, the facile painting of an "entrancing scene" would be at variance with her decision to tell "an unpalatable truth" (I, xi). Intellectually, she perceived a less obvious path than that offered by Moore: one which led her to break away from the patrimony of literary predictability.

Anne Brontë unerringly grasped the implications of allowing her heroine to speak for herself within the thoughtful confines of the written page. The limits of Helen's tale thus told intrinsically give it greater scope. More than any mere sentimental scene, the diary of a woman driven slowly but surely to desperation and flight makes potent reading and presents a searching analysis of submissive attitudes and authoritarian tactics. Clearly, in her choice of method Anne Brontë recognised the greater impact of revealing the disintegration of the marriage from the inside, as it occurs, in a varying range of observation and sensation. The 'woman of letters' clearly perceives the necessity of giving her heroine the more powerful tool of the pen rather than allowing her mere pretty speeches.[5]

Here the diary functions doubly as part of the narrative structure and an element of structural imagery. It suggests different levels of meaning: like Helen's painting it represents her urge for creativity within a closed environment, and, like the open spaces inscribed with paths and roads which lead away from Grass-dale to the windy heights of Wildfell, the written pages of the diary signify Helen's escape route. The image of the diary which Gilbert Markham reads by candlelight until dawn breaks contains an implicit statement about the

empowering process of authorship. It is an example of reflexive literary technique within the novel and illustrates the fusion of form with image, which gives The Tenant the psychological perspective or "depth beyond depth," identified by A. Craig Bell.[6]

It is largely through Anne Brontë's choice of dominant image patterns that this depth is defined. The Tenant is paradoxically held together by images of duality and the narrative tension is formed by pictures of opposites--light and shade, heaven and hell, heath and hearth --which are incorporated within the novel's structure. As in Agnes Grey, images of contrasting structures outline the different directions in which characters move and grow. In The Tenant the more controversial examinations of conflicting states such as fidelity and infidelity, sobriety and drunkenness, marital unity and estrangement, are given emphasis by the greater contrast between the buildings and their surrounding countryside. The situation of Wildfell Hall is an extreme example of isolation and elevation as it stands on the "wildest and loftiest eminence" (I, 16) in symbolic union with its tenant, who is a combination of wild unconventionality, lofty virtue, and eminent intelligence. Linden Car is tucked away safely in the valley and is described chiefly in references to its cosy social gatherings or the traditional "gleam of a bright red fire through the parlour window" (I, 4). The obvious distance between the two environments underlines the gulf between the estranged tenant and the unified social group which judges her by the very standards she questions. Although it is not directly connected with the picture of Helen's marriage, comfortable Linden Car sets a tone of conventional family unity which contrasts with the painful divisions and immorality which hold sway at Grass-dale.

The interplay of dualities can be seen throughout the text. In passages like the following, contradictory impulses work in unison to produce a figurative density which demonstrably repudiates Terry Eagleton's comment on "the slightness of her fiction."[7] Helen's first offering of a rose to Gilbert Markham in the chapter "A Contract and a Quarrel" (an appropriately antithetical heading) draws forth a rapid succession of contrasting images, creating, as it goes along, the sort of visual cross-referencing and emotional tension which is representative of the entire novel:

> Instead of taking it quietly, I likewise took the hand that offered it, and looked into her face. She let me hold it for a moment, and I saw a flash of extatic brilliance in her eye, a glow of glad excitement on her face--I thought my hour of victory was come--but instantly, a painful recollection seemed to flash upon her; a cloud of anguish darkened her brow, a marble paleness blanched her cheek and lip; there seemed a moment of inward conflict,--and with a sudden effort, she withdrew her hand, and retreated a step or two back.
>
> "Now Mr Markham," said she, with a kind of desperate calmness, "I must tell you plainly, that I cannot do with this." (I, 95-96)

To the extent that the oxymoron describes a pull in opposite directions, the use of the phrase "desperate calmness" to describe Helen's attitude is a holophrastic clue to the novel's controversiality. In her Preface Anne Brontë states both her desire "to give innocent pleasure" and her duty "to speak an unpalatable truth" (I, xi). The polemical basis of her intent is fully realised in her method of pitting images against each other: the "flash" and "brilliance" give way to "cloud" and "darkened"; the extended hand is countered by the withdrawn hand, and the colourful "glow of glad excitement on her face" is denied by "a marble paleness." This is not meant to be "entrancing": Anne Brontë's writing is intentionally seditious. There is a vigour to her

treatment of the literary canvas here which demonstrates a knowing application of chiaroscuro to achieve definition of the subject. The definition is both disturbing and revelatory.

Anne Brontë's characterisation has been slighted by Phyllis Bentley as "often either feeble or crude," but through the suggestive use of iterative image schemes, the characters in The Tenant evolve noticeably during the course of the narrative.[8] A. Craig Bell identifies a "time-sense" by which "unique" feature the major characters, Helen and Gilbert (to a lesser degree), "emerge from their emotional stresses and trials subtly different."[9] It seems to me that this continual process of redefinition is achieved in large part by variation in the metaphorical sub-structure.

With her use of an image scheme which switches angel and devil pictures from Helen to Huntingdon and back again, Anne Brontë plays on the irony of Helen's naive misconceptions about his goodness. She uses the angel/devil motif to call attention to what becomes a kind of pitched battle of souls. This is a major image scheme in the novel, and, combined with the contrasting settings and motifs of darkness and light, serves to create an undercurrent of spiritual and emotional conflict. Inga-Stina Ewbank states: "The relationship between Helen and Huntingdon gets its peculiar flavour and much of its interpretation by being developed against a tightly-woven tissue of religious references."[10] Much of this imagery is not simply "religious" but archetypal, and, as such, it questions entrenched sexual divisions and social hierarchies.

Helen's validation of a physical response in spiritual terms points to an imbalance which is painted in imagery of heaven and hell. The irrational confusion of her response is stressed by the breathless

exaggeration of the comparison between Wilmot and Huntingdon: "It was like turning from some purgatorial fiend to an angel of light, come to announce that the season of torment was past" (I, 159). The ironic use of such hyperbole only emphasises that the reverse is true: Huntingdon's arrival on the scene announces the beginning of torment. In Helen's psychomachia Passion clearly wins over Reason, and the more sinister side to Huntingdon's advances is recognised, but not acknowledged, when she says: "but I feared there was more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour" (I, 160). The visual image makes the narrative development clear. Underlying Helen's relationships with Huntingdon and Hargrave there is a vicious power struggle (the chess game with Hargrave exemplifies Anne Brontë's symbolic representation of this), but she adds a further dimension by frequent reminders of the inner battle which accompanies it. Bearing in mind this carefully laid groundwork, the sustained metaphorical and symbolical sub-structure which explores the interplay between "outward seeming" and "inward mind" (I, 133), the obvious pull between earthly and spiritual concerns, it is hard to see how Terry Eagleton reaches the barren conclusion: "Anne Brontë's work, by contrast [with that of her sisters] knows no such conflict between the flesh and the spirit."[11]

It is precisely this conflict between flesh and spirit which underlies the intense discussion between Helen and Aunt Maxwell in the chapter entitled "Persistence." Helen's persistent (and natural) emotional "flesh" prompts her to override the traditional spiritual guidance offered by her aunt. She is able to counter her aunt's warning question, "What fellowship hath light with darkness; or he that believeth with an infidel?" (I, 194) with her own misguided contention that beneath

Huntingdon's rakish exterior she recognises his true self "shining out in the unclouded light of his own genuine goodness" (I, 193). A more pragmatic rebuttal to Aunt Maxwell's reference to darkness and light comes through the dismissive reply: "he is not an infidel;--and I am not light, and he is not darkness, his worst and only vice is thoughtlessness" (I, 194). Rather than undermining the image, this comment emphasises the deeper differences between the two and gives credence to Helen's over-generous humanity.

Having thus indicated that she is dealing with humanity divided and not simply with opposing abstractions, Anne Brontë suggests by further use of this imagery that Helen and Huntingdon are heading in different directions. Aunt Maxwell's grim pronouncement that Huntingdon and his friends are running "down the headlong road, to the place prepared for the devil and his angels," and Helen's answer, "Then, I will save him from them" (I, 164), are combined later with ironic humour in an evocative symbol of conflict: "I made an effort to rise," says Helen, "but he was kneeling on my dress" (I, 185). A. Craig Bell points out that this is also a symbol of Helen's powerlessness, but it is not simply her lack of power over Huntingdon.[12] The image shows her attempting to stand free of something which holds her down--this proves to be her physical passion which, paradoxically, also allows a release of energy. Physical energy combines both positive and negative aspects, as Anne Brontë expresses through the image of darkness and light again. Passion can both inspire and delude: "the hovering cloud cast over me by my aunt's views . . . was lost in the bright effulgence of my own hopes and the too delightful consciousness of requited love" (I, 189).

There is every symbolic indication that the relationship is

doomed, and Anne Brontë gives definite clues to the reason for its failure by her use of the angel image. When Huntingdon addresses Helen as "angel" and "treasure," he is clearly not speaking to an equal; Helen, the stereotyped "saint," will be as fettered as if she were moulded in plaster, unable to rise beyond a kneeling position, trapped, emmarbled (I, 191). Clearly, Helen's fate is to be kept under his "roof" as an object, expected to display only those qualities of "sweet, attractive goodness" as serve to please on a purely superficial level (I, 190). As the angel motif is developed, it takes on the resonance of other image patterns connected with the stereotypes of women as submissive servants and mysterious, stony-hearted priestess figures: the connected symbols are those of hearth and home and the stone or rock image which serves as an objective correlative for Helen's emotional state.

It would be facile to say that Helen's angel is countered by Huntingdon's "devil," although there are satanic aspects to his character. Huntingdon's demonic tendencies are seen mainly in an ability to manipulate and undermine his wife. Helen's question to him, "And am I above all human sympathies?" is an ironic pointer to his inhuman treatment of her. It also points to the imbalance inherent in elevating anyone (as Huntingdon attempts to do in word only) "towards that saintly condition" (I, 226) which was reserved for women in the enforced role of "household deity" (II, 19) and a denial of their essential humanity (like Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House).[13] Anne Brontë shows this is a means of de-humanising Helen; when she is reduced to the saintly object, it is apparent that "human sympathies" have been subverted. The paradoxical splitting of the female figure into something at once divine and threatening is a concept which Jung later identified as an aspect of the

anima, and Anne Brontë's representation of an unhealthy twist in this regard is penetrating.[14] Entirely within the progression of connected symbols, the description of Huntingdon shows him as an inadequate figure who can see women only as types. His justification of infidelity is supported by the dubious reasoning that his mistress is "a daughter of Earth," while his wife is "an angel of heaven" (I, 264). The logic behind this statement is one of entrapment: Helen is locked into the household angel role as titular wife and housekeeper.

The realisation that death is near conjures up a bitterly twisted picture of the "immaculate angel" (which is his construct) looking "complacently on" as Huntingdon burns in hell: he has created his own unreal image of Helen, who, he believes, "would not so much as dip the tip of your finger in water to cool my tongue" (II, 225). Helen's reply, with its reference to the "great gulf over which I cannot pass," is another allegory of the difference between the new age and the old. Their personal differences represent what Juliet McMaster refers to as "the difference between Regency and Victorian mores," and she points out that Anne Brontë "uses the standard Victorian commentary on the excesses of the previous generation as a paradigm for the relationship between the sexes."[15] That there is indeed a "great gulf" between Helen and her unregenerate husband has been amply demonstrated by the use of antithetical imagery, but, as Ewbank indicates, the contrast between Huntingdon's fear of damnation and Helen's assurance of salvation is a major concern of Anne Brontë, who questions "the horror of a situation without consolation," as emphatically here as in her poem "A Word to the Elect."[16] The image content of her anti-Calvinist poem certainly bears comparison with image patterns in The Tenant:

> You may rejoice to think yourselves secure;
> You may be grateful for the gift divine--
> That grace unsought, which made your black hearts pure,
> And fits your earth-born souls in Heaven to shine.
> (Chitham, 89)

Anne Brontë's point is that it is the hope of salvation which gives light and life, the faith in a caring God who has planned egalitarian order and balance into the universe.

The chapters on Huntingdon's death (II, XLVI-L) indicate that Helen is not only released from her limited role as dutiful, ministering angel, but also given an opportunity to move forward and reclaim her personhood; it is the penultimate step in her realisation of her whole self. No longer constrained by duty to remain in a marriage which is itself moribund, she is finally released from a situation which is aptly symbolised by "the darkened room where the sick man lay" (II, 206), and Gilbert's reference to "that incessant and deleterious confinement beside a living corpse" (II, 231) describes a spiritual and emotional entombment which has now ended. Anne Brontë makes it clear that no matter how unselfishly concerned with his fate Helen might be, as long as Huntingdon lives, she cannot go on to lead a completely fulfilling life: "still while he lived she must be miserable" (II, 220).

The internecine strife of Helen's marriage is given spiritual depth and emotional veracity by repeated use of this angel/devil, darkness/light image scheme; and Anne Brontë continues the process by employing an identical series of images in another context. This confrontational undercurrent lends further scope to her study of Helen's beleaguered psyche as she traces the tortuous passage of her relationship with her would-be seducer, Walter Hargrave. Hargrave has a persuasive attitude not unlike that of Milton's serpent Satan, whose "fawning"

flattery and "fraudulent temptation" identify the same sort of "insinuating friendship" (I, 280) that Hargrave is so anxious to push upon Helen. In one of their earlier encounters, Hargrave is shown in an instructively symbolic position as the potential barrier to any remaining light in Helen's existence:

> The time that I met him alone was on a bright but not oppressively hot day in the beginning of July: I had taken little Arthur into the wood that skirts the park, and there seated him on the moss-cushioned roots of an old oak; and, having gathered a handful of bluebells and wild roses, I was kneeling before him . . . .

Into this picture of light and life, Hargrave is introduced as a sinister force, "when a shadow suddenly eclipsed the little space of sunshine on the grass before us; and, looking up, I beheld Walter Hargrave standing and gazing upon us" (I, 281). Anne Brontë uses the angel image to show how Hargrave attempts to manipulate Helen through flattery and "bold yet artful eloquence" (II, 89). Hargrave's argument is a twisted reversal of the situation as he appeals to Helen's "super-human purity" (II, 49) and her ability to raise "a devoted heart from purgatorial torments to a state of heavenly bliss" (II, 76). Helen, however, never loses sight of the fact that any liaison with him would have the reverse effect of bringing her down to a level of "purgatorial torment." His conclusion that she is only "half a woman" (II, 92) and his plea to her angelic potential to "save" him (by capitulating) is a covert appeal to the physical vulnerability of a lonely woman.

The impact of Helen's refusal to comply is expressed in images of darkness and desolation: he pressures her with a line about wasted potential, "my youth is wasting away: my prospects are darkened; my life is a desolate blank" (II, 96). His coup de grace, though, is remarkably

similar to the argument used by Satan in Paradise Lost. Hargrave argues for Helen's compromising her principles on the grounds that passion is among "the most godlike impulses of our nature" (II, 96). Just as the serpent promises Eve "and ye shall be as Gods"[18] if she will eat the fruit, so Hargrave contends with "powerful sophistries" (II, 97) that Helen is empowered to "raise two human beings from a state of actual suffering to such unspeakable beatitude as only generous, noble self-forgetting love can give" (II, 97).

Throughout Hargrave's many and varied attempts at seduction, Anne Brontë examines the shifting range of meaning behind the angelic symbol of purity (the angel in the house) which a masculine hegemony would use to subjugate and control women. When Hargrave's approaches have run the gamut of uses for the word "angel" from servile flattery to a quasi-religious fervour and blackmail, he can have recourse to the notion of their co-equal sanctity, which, in this case, sounds distinctly sacrilegious:

> "You have no reason now: you are flying in the face of heaven's decrees. God has designed me to be your comfort and protector --I feel it--I know it as certainly as if a voice from heaven declared 'Ye twain shall be one flesh'--and you spurn me from you"-- (II, 121)

The word picture which is painted here is an amalgam of symbolic reference to good and evil, power and powerlessness, reputation and infamy; each facet of the picture is interlinked to imply the psychological bombardment of Helen. As Hargrave glances at the window, a "gleam of malicious triumph lit up his countenance," and then Helen looks over her shoulder to see "a shadow just retiring round the corner" (II, 122): the "gleam" of negative energy and the ominous archetypal symbol of the "shadow" both

combine to signal Helen's precarious position. Then Hargrave's description of Grimsby (the grim "shadow" behind the corner) neatly sums up the threat which he himself poses; "He has no love for you, Mrs. Huntingdon --no reverence for your sex--no belief in virtue--no admiration for its image" (II, 122). Helen's retort that this coercion is an "insult" draws a desperate (but brief) repetition of the worshipping stance: "I do not insult you . . . I worship you. You are my angel--my divinity! I lay my powers at your feet--and you must and shall accept them!" (II, 122). Language and imagery combine here to work as ironic signifiers in the repeated references to a feigned submission which is the mask of dominance. With the closing contradiction of the submissive "lay my powers at your feet" and the imperatives "must and shall," the point is made that it is but a short step from such bogus veneration to subjugation. When all the manoeuvres have failed, Hargrave's bitter summary of Helen's character contains in essence what Anne Brontë has been illustrating all along. Stripped of its "bitter emphasis," what remains of Hargrave's statement "you are the most cold-hearted, unnatural, ungrateful woman," is that he is not (nor was he ever) dealing with an "angel" but with a woman, albeit a woman who has every reason to be "ungrateful" (II, 122).

This kind of literary cross-referencing, using the angel/devil and heaven/hell motifs with their allusion to the Fall and the Last Judgement, serves to create an atmosphere of deeply entrenched hostility and schism. As the narrative unfolds, an omnipresent pull between good and evil is revealed and it becomes apparent that the protagonist must find sanctuary from destructive forces. In the hostile environment Helen encounters, the most obvious place of sanctuary is not always the best. After one of Hargrave's early advances, she retreats "within the sanctum"

of her home (I, 282). But in The Tenant, even more than in Agnes Grey, the home and its hearth are a particular focus for the clash of values, the thematic oppositions--spirit against flesh, freedom against oppression --which dominate the entire novel. More than once, either Helen or Gilbert (even Huntingdon early in the marriage) is pictured leaning on the chimney breast, returning for sustenance, it would seem, to the heart of the home, the core of old values and old structures, to find solutions to seemingly impossible contradictions. Parallels inherent in the different fireside settings suggest comparison and contrast of different emotional states: the "faint red glow of the neglected fire" (I, 184) in the library when Huntingdon courts Helen is a portent of the faintness of his love for her and the neglect she suffers. As a woman (and for male purposes, an embodiment of the household deity), Helen is the keeper of the hearth: it symbolises her traditional role and her traditional strengths, such as compassion, nurturing, fortitude and patience. Just as the warmth of the blazing fire at Linden Car encompasses all the comfortable familiar values of the Markhams, so too the firesides at Grass-dale and Wildfell Hall reflect stages in their proprietor's departure from those standards.

The closely-knit, but comparatively rigid structures of the Markham household are indicated in the way the fireside image is articulated. Although Anne Brontë lets her readers know about the warmth of Gilbert's house, it becomes clear that the warmth is tempered by deeply ingrained suspicion towards anything remotely untraditional, especially when the unrepentant iconoclast is a single woman. When Gilbert arrives home after working on the farm "one cold, damp, cloudy evening" (I, 4), it is the welcome glow of the fire which cheers him,

under the doting matriarchal eye of its keeper, Mrs Markham. Anne Brontë lovingly sketches in the details of the room where tea is served as Mrs. Markham, "that honoured lady," sits and knits:

> She had swept the hearth, and made a bright blazing fire for our reception; the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy, from the cupboard in the black, oak sideboard, that shone like polished ebony, in the cheerful parlour twilight. (I, 5)

Everything in this setting is very neatly ordered: there is a place for everyone and everyone knows their place. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this is the room where Helen is judged and found wanting by local society because she clearly does not easily fit into place. The judgement is based partly on her lack of culinary skill, "all the little niceties of cookery, and such things that every lady ought to be familiar with" (I, 8) and partly on the fact that she takes the unprecedented step of discouraging her small son from drinking alcohol--she refuses to "make a man of him" (I, 26). Rose Markham, who fits so neatly into the fireside picture "producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy," predictably pronounces of Helen, "I don't know what to make of her, at all" (I, 47); and Mrs Markham is similarly nonplussed when she addresses the party of local notables gathered in her firelit parlour at Linden-Car, with a dismissive "we don't know what to make of her" (I, 37). When her guests learn of the "mistaken ideas and conduct" of that "very singular lady," even the vicar is moved to outright condemnation: "criminal, I should say--criminal!" (I, 39).

Anne Brontë lets the reader know [illegible] the outset that a single woman of such independent, almost anti-social persuasions is not to be admitted easily into the inner circle of fireside friends. Whereas the

interior of Linden-Car is comfortable and conventional, the inside of Wildfell Hall provides an austere contrast in keeping with the unconventional, rather problematic circumstances of its inhabitants. This image of the ruined Hall, a relic of a bygone age, serves to underline the fate of its tenant. As Gilbert relates, the hall stands defiantly on the "wildest and loftiest eminence in our neighbourhood," where only the toughest of plants survive the "war of wind and weather" (I, 16):

> Near the top of this hill, about two miles from Linden-Car, stood Wildfell Hall, a superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era, built of dark grey stone,--venerable and picturesque to look at, but, doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit, with its thick stone mullions and little latticed panes, its time-eaten air-holes, and its too lonely, too unsheltered situation,--only shielded from the war of wind and weather by a group of Scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms and looking as stern and gloomy as the Hall itself. (I, 17)

This description of the Hall which provides Helen refuge is a memorable symbol of the abused woman within, "unsheltered" and "too lonely," who has seen the glory of younger days and may rightly appear "stern and gloomy" but, as the narrative demonstrates, could stand fast against the blighting storms of opposition and retain a "venerable" integrity.

The cold isolation in which Helen must live is reinforced by the chill interior of her living quarters with their pointedly "empty grate" (I, 44). Unlike her distant neighbours at Linden-Car, Helen denies herself the warmth of a blazing fire or its associated invitation of community. After her official ostracism by the reverend Mr. Millward, Helen is visited by an outraged and fiercely protective She is revealed "slowly pacing up and down her lonely room" (I, 105), which Gilbert insists is "gloomy" for the want of a fire. If Helen's

external situation is "dismal" (I, 105), we are keenly aware that it reflects her inner discomfort. She has, of course, chosen to step out of the comfortable tradition of wifeliness and eschews all recommendations to revert to a set mode of behaviour she can well do without. "But we always have a fire in the evenings--if we can bear it," insists Gilbert, re-affirming the established order of his home, whereas Anne Brontë shows Helen's awareness that she is destined to depart from the comfortable norm:

> "Me comfortable!" repeated she, with a bitter laugh, as if there were something amusingly absurd in the idea. "It suits me better as it is," she added in a tone of mournful resignation. (I, 106)

Gilbert, however, would prefer to change the situation and within the extended range of the hearth symbol, it becomes clear that it is not just an interest in Helen's comfort which prompts his "fancy for a fire" (I, 106). Conflated in this fireside image is the lure of domesticity, the wish to construct a cosy refuge from external social pressures and a desire for possession of the loved one. It represents the fire of growing sexual response and, as the abused wife must anticipate, the violent possibility of entrapment and submission:

> In a little while we both relapsed into silence, and continued for several minutes gazing abstractedly into the fire--she intent upon her own sad thoughts, and I reflecting how delightful it would be to be seated thus beside her with no other presence to restrain our intercourse-- . . . . . (I, 107)

The fire, then, sums up all the heated intensity of feeling which Helen must avoid, the life force, which she must deny herself because it is inextricably caught up in a destructive status quo. A statement of Eagleton's regarding Charlotte's work seems peculiarly

relevant here, because it applies equally well to the process at hand, in which we see Anne Brontë's treatment of thematic concerns through varying and recurrent image clusters. Charlotte's novels, he says, "dramatise a conflict between 'morality' and 'society' but the two sets of values are subtly intertwined, so that to live well involves both eagerly embracing the world and firmly fending it off."[19]

It seems to me that this is precisely the kind of self-division generated by Helen's carefully authenticated marginal position. Her social and emotional self (symbolised above in the hearth) cannot be realised until her life has been stripped bare of all its 'social' trappings, re-evaluated (which requires "fending off" the world) and then re-constituted in a whole and healthy "embrace" which gestures beyond the limits of a purely moral self. In the words of Anne Brontë's poem to the Calvinists (which Ewbank has identified as an important basis to the "spiritual dimension" which permeates The Tenant),[20] "before their dross is purged away" (l. 43, Chitham, 90), neither Helen nor Huntingdon can move on to the next step. The allusion is generally taken to apply solely to the unrepentant sinner (such as Huntingdon), but it could equally well relate to Helen.[21]

As in Agnes Grey, the image of the fireside performs a double function: it serves to illustrate the traditional nexus of family life and it also reminds the reader that physical warmth is incomplete without emotional warmth and integrity. One of Anne Brontë's poems written the year before she was, as Pinion says, "busy at it" writing The Tenant,[22] uses the fireside image in a similar way, to realise the emotional state of dissociation. The poem is entitled simply "Monday Night May 11th 1846" and the fifth verse reveals the same sense of emptiness which both Gilbert

and Helen experience in the absence of love:

> The fire is burning in the grate
> As redly as it used to burn,
> But still the heart is desolate
> Till Mirth and Love with Peace return. (Chitham, 129)

Anne Brontë demonstrates the feeling of alienation in a series of comparable fireside settings, from Grass-dale to Staningly, illustrating the changing ratios of sexual dynamics. The emotional stance of the characters is figuratively displayed by their bodily stance in relation to the hearth. Gilbert stands with his back to the fire on his penultimate encounter with Helen in the first volume, and, as he surveys an unflinchingly righteous Helen, he expresses an exultant sense of power which is reminiscent of that enjoyed by Huntingdon, albeit for quite contrasting reasons. "'I can crush that bold spirit,' thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat" (I, 135). At this point Gilbert is turning his back on their union and rejecting all that potential domestic bliss which Helen stands for as far as he is concerned; he is turning against the feminine principle because it now threatens his integriy, it has betrayed him (or so he believes). Helen, by comparison, "leant against one end of the chimney piece, opposite that near which I was standing, with her chin resting on her closed hand" (I, 137). Her body registers the wearying stress which dogs her steps, while her eyes speak of the "restless excitement" (I, 137) which betrays both her intellect and her passion. Significantly, the description of Helen's physical stance comes from the "Encounter" chapter: Anne Brontë's chapter headings are important structural pointers. Arthur Huntingdon adopts a similarly ambiguous pose in the chapter entitled "First Quafrel." Huntingdon is shown "in an

attitude of undisguised dejection, leaning against the chimney-piece with his forehead sunk upon his arm" (I, 238). As in the earlier chapter, it is the eyes which belie the dejected stance; the stance which appeals to a forgiving, compassionate core, the heart of the home, symbolised by the hearth upon which he leans so demonstratively. His eyes, however, tell a contradictory story, revealing that all this penitence and submission is feigned for the purpose of manipulating Helen: "'Heart-broken!' he answered, with a rueful countenance--yet with a merry smile just lurking within his eyes and about the corners of his mouth" (I, 239). Once the manipulative tactics (which gain emphasis by comparison with Helen's genuine anguish in the previous fireside setting) pay their expected dividend--Helen's sympathetic response--then, the stance changes to one of arrant superiority, noticeably similar to Gilbert's confrontational stance described formerly: "He now turned round and stood facing me, with his back to the fire" (I, 238). As Huntingdon gains the upper hand, he does exactly what Gilbert was tempted to do in response to Helen's supposed duplicity: he reduces his "victim" to the level of plaything and asks, "Come then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?" (I, 238). In direct contrast to Gilbert, Huntingdon's motives are not coloured by love, and Helen's reaction to her husband's insincerity indicates that she is aware of this: "This sounded rather too arrogant, and the smile that accompanied it did not please me" (I, 239).

Anne Brontë works this image scheme consistently throughout the novel and when Helen and Gilbert finally "discuss the matter of eternal separation" (II, 173), the rent in the fabric of Helen's composure is keenly drawn, both in external gesture and the implicit symbolism of the empty fireplace. While Helen is a composite of antagonistic forces in her appearance, "the

constriction of her brow, the tight compression of her lips, and wringing of her hands," the empty fireplace economically signifies that, although "a violent conflict between reason and passion was silently passing within," her choice is made and reason has won (II, 172). Gilbert's gesture, leaning his head on a cold chimney in an echo of Huntingdon's earlier stance, is an appeal to a domestic deity which has moved on: "'End here!' echoed I; and approaching the high, carved chimney-piece, I leant my hand against its heavy mouldings, and dropped my forehead upon it in silent, sullen despondency" (II, 173). The parallels with that earlier marital fireplace provide a reference point by which to measure the progress of Anne Brontë's protagonist, and also serve to emphasise the contrast between Gilbert's heartfelt depth of feeling and Huntingdon's crass superficiality. By this stage, Helen has learned to operate as an autonomous being: no longer subservient in any way, she can demand an equal share of responsibility from Gilbert. She knows the meaning of egalitarian co-existence and can insist that her friend take his "own part in the struggle of right against passion," and not "leave all the burden to me" (II, 174).

Probably the most dramatic use of the hearth image is seen when the fire is used as an agent of violation in Helen's own inner sanctum--the library. She specifically identifies the library as a safe place: "Since Lord Lowborough's departure I had regarded the library as entirely my own, a secure retreat at all hours of the day" (II, 116). Huntingdon not only invades that inner sanctum, he also uses the light from the fire (her own fire) to read her diary, after she has attempted to protect her privacy by extinguishing the candles. Then, in an ultimate violation of her private self, he burns all her painting equipment, her sole remaining

means of independent expression. This is a symbolic burning of Helen's identity, and, as such, it stresses the terrible trick which is played on the obedient wife, who abides by the social code, only to discover that it is the very agent of her destruction. Here, the fire, which consumes her artistic efforts and her hopes of freedom, is a metaphorical pointer to the marriage itself: Helen is true to her calling and keeps the household flame burning at great personal cost, only to have it used against her. Her husband derives great pleasure in taunting her with her own decent sobriety and reminding her that she is trapped, while he is free to give his energetic concern to a demi-mondaine and deride the "gloomy ascetic" (II, 151) wife who stands by him. Anne Brontë's choice of chapter heading, "Dual Solitude," underlines the tension between the two characters. While Huntingdon frets over his "dear Annabella," Helen is scorned:

> . . . everything I did was wrong; I was cold-hearted, hard, insensate; my sour pale face was perfectly repulsive; my voice made him shudder; he knew not how he could live through the winter with me; I should kill him by inches. Again I proposed a separation, but it would not do: he was not going to be the talk of the neighbourhood . . .--no; he must contrive to bear with me. (II, 82)

Helen, then, is trapped in a loveless marriage, which is pointed in the reference to "winter" and is referred to as her "bondage" (II, 83). It is only the close communion with her son (as both parent and educatress) and her painting which keep Helen herself from being "killed by inches" (II, 82). Anne Brontë depicts the psychic devastation which results when one of those creative escapes from bondage is taken from her. The resulting state is shown as something evocative of death. Huntingdon's destruction of her worktools is an <u>avant la lettre</u> portrayal of psychotic

projection: not only does he see his own "cold-hearted" repulsiveness in her, he is also attempting to force his own mindlessness upon her, to quench her creative spirit forever and make her as he is. The death-like torpor which Anne Brontë describes in Helen is an entirely appropriate reaction: "I did not attempt to follow him, but remained seated in the arm-chair, speechless, tearless and almost motionless" (II, 132).

If the hearth imagery is an objective correlative for the social and emotional status of the characters, then so too is the imagery which relates to 'hardness' and 'softness,' as it further defines emotional and social interactions (and expectations). Anne Brontë is manifestly aware of the social requirements of womanhood and the soft, submissive "angel" type is unacceptable to her more egalitarian viewpoint.[23] In response to a discussion on educational discrimination between boys and girls, she refers deprecatingly to the practice of treating girls "tenderly and delicately . . . . like a hot-house plant--taught to cling to others for direction and support and guarded as much as possible from the very knowledge of evil" (I, 30). Anne Brontë's argument is that autonomy gives strength and self-reliance:

> I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power, or the will to watch and guard herself. (I, 31)

Having made the distinction between "wholesome truth" and "soft nonsense" in her Preface, Anne Brontë's exploration of the ambiguities contained in that social pre-requisite of 'softness' (for women at least) is an enlargement of the pre-stated contrast. Her entire exploration is imbued with the balanced conviction (also expressed in her preface) that what is

appropriate for a man should be equally appropriate for a woman.[24] During the course of her narrative, Anne Brontë's suggestive iteration of specifically related images prompts the reader to consider what may be publicly regarded as 'hardness' (Mr. Millward's verdict on a shockingly unconventional Helen is, "hardened" [I, 104]), as distinct from the private experience of hardness (through hardship, brutality, harsh experience) which can lead either to growth or to spiritual constriction. Anne Brontë's grasp of this underlying psychological variance is set out in the palimpsestic thought lines of her connected image schemes.

She remains true to her credo that hardship produces character and her discourse demonstrates, through the repeated juxtaposition of opposites, that softness is not a sign of excellence in woman. All too often, in the Victorian picture of womanhood, that softness is allied to dishonesty or deceit, of the kind which Coventry Patmore lauds with a certain sadomasochistic fervour in Angel in the House: he writes in the canto ominously titled "The Koh-i-Noor":

> And, evermore, for either's sake,
> To the sweet folly of the dove,
> She joins the cunning of the snake,
> To rivet and exalt his love.[25]

Anne Brontë's use of animal metaphor and rock or stone imagery is deployed to entirely different effect. Whereas Patmore connects the Koh-i-Noor diamond with the commerce in women, the sense of woman as merchandise--"A woman like the Koh-i-Noor,/ Mounts to the price that's put on her"[26]--Anne Brontë gestures towards a solid, healthier honesty in human relations. By conflating a far more instructive combination of meanings within her stone imagery, she re-defines the traditional symbolism to suggest that the hardness of experience and the independent

strength of maturity are interlocked.

In a significant juxtaposition early in the novel, Helen's features are compared with those of Eliza Millward. While Helen's lips are "a little too firmly compressed and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper" (I, 10), Eliza's features are distinguished by her eyes "diabolically wicked, or irresistibly bewitching--often both"--and her voice, which is:

> gentle and childish, her tread light and soft as that of a cat; --but her manners more frequently resembled those of a pretty, playful kitten, that is now pert and roguish, now timid and demure, according to its own sweet will. (I, 12)

Gilbert's observations on the two women reflect his original preferences. Helen, however, is described as quite a different animal by Huntingdon: "you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress" (I, 232) and Gilbert writes that her eyes are "full of soul" (I, 66). The contrast between Helen and Eliza is thus drawn by the use of contrasting animal imagery. Anne Brontë points out the comparative superiority of a woman like Helen who withdraws from all hints of flirtation; a mere smile from Gilbert initially brings forth her "proud, chilly look" and "a look of repellent scorn" (I, 20), while Eliza is the epitome of coquettishness as she flirts with Gilbert by means of "overwhelming her sister's pet [cat] with a shower of kisses," and giving Gilbert "one of her softest smiles and most bewitching glances" (I, 22). Although Gilbert first thinks Helen "too hard, too sharp, too bitter for my taste," it is not long before the "soft yet unrelenting sway" (I, 51) of Eliza begins to pall and Gilbert finds her "rather frivolous and even a little insipid, compared with the more mature and earnest Mrs. Graham" (I, 51). Eliza's "sorrowful tenderness", and "gentle melancholy" (I, 71)

are 'soft' veneers which cover an unpleasant harshness and malice; Gilbert's final perception of her is negative--he calls her "the little demon" (II, 196).

This volte face also occurs in Gilbert's perception of Helen, of course, but he is made aware that what appears to the undiscerning as 'hardness' is actually integrity, uncommon depth and force of character which has been forged through adversity. Anne Brontë refers to this theme with the oak tree analogy and, although she calls it a "trite simile" (I, 30), the self-conscious undercutting of her own prose serves to draw attention to a major thematic emphasis:

> Such experience, to him, (to use a trite simile,) will be like the storm to the oak, which, though it may scatter the leaves, and snap the smaller branches, serves but to rivet the roots, and to harden and condence the fibres of the tree. (I, 30-31)

The apparent contradiction here is that Helen is arguing against the kind of exposure to sordid reality which has strengthened her. In the case of her son (on whose behalf she argues against "practical acquaintance with forbidden things," I, 30), her prime concern is that the experience of 'seeing life' should not corrupt. This fear of corruption is seen in both Agnes Grey and The Tenant and in both novels Anne Brontë expresses it through the image of petrifaction. In deep despair at the unrelieved baseness of her husband's ways, Helen makes an anguished declaration that her heart is in a state of petrifaction: "I think the petrifaction is so completely effected at last, that nothing can melt me again" (II, 84). This echoes Agnes Grey's despair, "Already I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting" (Agnes Grey, 108-09). Ewbank explains that Agnes fears "that this kind of life is actually contaminating her."[27] Helen's words express the same fear:

"hence I must be, and I am, debased, contaminated by the union both in my own eyes and in the actual truth" (I, 12).

At some deeper level of awareness, Helen admits that her hardening is some necessary part of maturation. The petrifaction she laments is a conditioned response to the destructive anguish of being psychologically beaten: "It is a hard, embittering thing to have one's kind feelings and good intentions cast back in one's teeth" (II, 84). In an intriguing crossover of meaning, Anne Brontë shows Helen appropriating an image originally suggested by her husband; it is Huntingdon who first throws out the accusation that her heart has turned to stone:

> I believe he was much disappointed that I did not feel his offensive sayings more acutely, for when he had said anything particularly well calculated to hurt my feelings, he would stare me searchingly in the face, and then grumble against my "marble heart," or my "brutal insensibility." (II, 82)

This is doubly effective in that it illustrates the way in which Huntingdon has insinuated himself into her consciousness and destroyed her sense of self; it also demonstrates her hardening as a direct result of his brutality and indicates a mirroring of his own "brutal insensibility." This use of rock and stone imagery makes a point about the futility of feminine 'softness' in the face of overt (or even covert) sexual aggression. Nothing could be more removed from Patmore's morbid assertion that women love the "dear despot" and do so "for his mastering air": if Patmore's view was representative of Victorian mores, then Anne Brontë certainly stepped out of the mainstream on this point.[28] She is unequivocal in her portrayal of Huntingdon's despotism as morally repellent and emotionally ruinous:

> I was beginning to relent towards my wretched partner . . .--and what was the result? No answering spark of kindness--no awakening penitence, but an unappeasable ill-humour and a spirit of tyrannous exaction that increased with indulgence, and a lurking gleam of self-complacent triumph, at every detection of relenting softness in my manner, that congealed me to marble again as often as it recurred. (II, 84)

Rather than falling apart, Helen is shown to remain firmly intact and later recognises that the hardness is an essential part of her survival. The conclusion she reaches speaks of Anne Brontë's perceptible bias towards fortitude and earthbound grit as opposed to the airy fairy "soft nonsense" (I, ix) preached by those such as Patmore. The figure of Helen exemplifies the process and expresses the necessity of fortitude:

> And could I have imagined that I should have been able to endure it as calmly, and to repel their insults as firmly and as boldly as I had done? A hardness such as this, is taught by rough experience and despair alone. (II, 126)

Clearly, then, Anne Brontë would have her reader understand that Helen's "petrifaction" is a required withdrawal from the world as far as the affectionate, yielding side of her nature is concerned. At the same time, it shows her ability to stand up for herself and be strong in the event of an immoral onslaught. This "hardness" is of an altogether different origin from that evinced by Mrs. Hargrave. The statement on Mrs. Hargrave is plain speaking at its best: "I don't like Mrs. Hargrave; she is a hard, pretentious, worldly-minded woman" (II, 257). Her hardness is evidence of spiritual paucity; her level of consciousness is limited to the material show of an unreal strength: "she is ever straining to keep up appearances, with that despicable pride that shuns the semblance of poverty as of a shameful crime" (II, 257).

The statement that a woman like Mrs. Hargrave and one like Helen are poles apart is firmly established in the well-wrought development

of character; Helen learns from life in a way that is totally foreign to the Mrs. Hargraves of society. She reaches a seasoned wholeness which will only permit the steadfastness of honesty and the unwavering commitment of an egalitarian relationship. One of Anne Brontë's methods is to choose the unexpected as an illustrative tool: in the bluffly-drawn Hattersley she offers an unlikely mouthpiece for her philosophical enquiry into the nature of hardness and softness: it is Hattersley who makes the case for a strong woman who is not "yielding" (II, 43) but stands firm. He initially compares his long-suffering, passive wife, Milicent (an angel if ever there was one), with the spirited adamantine "creature" (II, 41) Annabella Lowborough. Annabella and the stables are spoken of in the same breath and one has the feeling that Hattersley describes a fine brood mare rather than a woman as he talks of her "magnificent black eyes" and "a fine spirit of her own" (II, 41), but then he goes on to make an important analogy about the need for an unyielding spirit in marriage:

> And did you never, Milly, observe the sands on the seashore; how nice and smooth they look, and how soft and easy they feel to the foot? But if you plod along, for half an hour, over this soft, easy carpet--giving way at every step, yielding the more the harder you press,--you'll find it rather wearisome work, and be glad enough to come to a bit of good firm rock, that won't budge an inch whether you stand, walk, or stamp upon it; and, though it be hard as the nether millstone, you'll find it the easier footing after all. (II, 43)

Helen's hardness, then, is not to be seen as a sign of a diminished spirit, rather, as an indication of her innate steadfastness and unshifting integrity; it is a necessary stage in her developmental journey.

That Anne Brontë presents Helen as a pilgrim engaged in a

journey of self-discovery is amply attested to by her repeated use of the pathway and journey motifs throughout the text. In fact, as in Agnes Grey, the outdoor imagery can be mapped out as a series of boundaries over which Helen must pass as she progresses. The chapter headings for the second volume read like a wartime escape plan: "Comparisons: Information Rejected," "Concealment," "Provocations," "The Injured Man," "A Scheme of Escape," "A Misadventure," "The Boundary Past," "The Retreat," "Startling Intelligence." It is significant that the first chapter of this volume, "Domestic Scenes," sets the position inside an enclosed space, while all the other titles point to slow progress and the last heading, "Fluctuations," suggests a freedom of movement which has taken Helen outside that restricted space.

Although Phyllis Bentley states that Anne Brontë's mind "was not a genuinely powerful one,"[29] she goes on to make the point that her exterior settings are "described in words of considerable expressiveness and strength." One recognises that the outdoor world in Anne Brontë's fiction presents the natural order as an escape from bondage. In The Tenant it is an escape which has different dimensions: one dimension is the actuality of the narrative, as Helen passes down the road which leads her away from Grass-dale and her marriage; another is the metaphorical world of the imagination, as she roams the wild fells seeking artistic fulfilment and spiritual solace through her study of the landscape. Anne Brontë's well-documented love for Cowper's poetry adds confirmation that she saw the same sense of comfort and delight in the outdoors: the idea that God made the country stands true for Anne Brontë as for Cowper, and it is in the beauty of nature, the sky and especially celestial imagery, that Anne Brontë formulates a setting where divine communion is not only

possible but an ever-present verity.[30]

Possibly the most memorable journey Helen makes, certainly the most crucial, is her flight from Grass-dale. Anne Brontë's scene painting here creates a powerful combination of several images which speak of a momentous step and the divine sanction given to Helen in making it:

> What trembling joy it was when the little wicket closed behind us, as we issued from the park! Then, for one moment, I paused, to inhale one draught of that cool, bracing air, and venture one look back upon the house. All was dark and still; no light glimmered in the windows; no wreath of smoke obscured the stars that sparkled above it in the frosty sky. As I bade farewell for ever to that place, the scene of so much guilt and misery, I felt glad that I had not left it before, for now there was no doubt about the propriety of such a step--no shadow of remorse for him I left behind. . . . (II, 160)

This passage is a summary of many images used by Anne Brontë throughout her work and it provides a key to her method of linking commonplace imagery in a context which underlines the spiritual and emotional experience of her characters. The "gate" and the "park" signify Helen's passage from both established social structures and captivity; the "cool, bracing air" she breathes as she looks back to the house signals that the oppression of the house (and marriage) gives way to the freedom of the open air (it is a figurative 'breath of life', a rebirth); the image of darkness is fitting for the "scene of so much guilt and misery." In Anne Brontë's writing windows symbolise both the imagination and the link between the inner world and the outer; they also represent a time-space continuum where both past and future coalesce. Here the windows reveal the soul-less and hopeless condition of the remaining occupants: there is no future left for Helen in that lifeless place. The sky, which Anne Brontë presents as a medium of communication with heaven, is another important image, and, here, Anne Brontë conveys the impression that this

starry night sky is a message of comfort for the fugitives. The stars with their twinkling energy are divine ciphers and there is an air of undefiled purity about the scene, which suggests, by the lack of smoke, that the house's contamination cannot touch the God-given message of hope.

Based in Anne Brontë's expressed concern with a doctrine of divine forgiveness, the symbolic representation of celestial comfort is a vital statement. Thus, only in the presence of this clear heavenly sanction can Helen move on, and take the road ahead.

Anne Brontë's choice of language reinforces the contrast between the house and the freedom beyond it. The crisp plosives in "stars that sparkled" counter the heavy vowels and halting rhythm of the phrase "so much guilt and misery" (II, 160). Together they promise a new beginning and the conviction that she leaves "prison and despair behind" (II, 160). Unlike Agnes Grey's cold autumn journey, which takes place at the same time of year, this one is full of joy and positive energy which colours the response to a countryside "all smiling--cheerfully, gloriously smiling in the yellow lustre of those early beams" (II, 160). The anthropomorphised "smiling" land is an allusion to God's nurturing aspect which Anne Brontë identifies in her poetry: "Bask in the sunshine of the sky,/ And be alone with God!" she writes in the poem "Retirement."[31] There is a musical, impetuous rhythm to the language which describes Helen's "retreat" from purgatory. It is full of positive energy:

> 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, --with my darling child in my arms, almost as happy as myself and my faithful friend beside me; a prison and despair behind me, receding farther, farther back at every clatter of the horses' feet,--and liberty and hope before! I could hardly

> refrain from praising God aloud for my deliverance, or astonishing my fellow passengers by some surprising outburst of hilarity. (II, 160)

After focusing on the "grim, dark pile" (II, 161) of Wildfell Hall, the harsh aspect of the landscape is rewritten on the basis of Helen's positive direction and hopeful vision of the future. Like the snowy wastes in Agnes Grey, the "bleak and barren fields beyond" represent the tabula rasa of Helen's future and she articulates her new-found power of authorship by defining her own beginning afresh, regardless of how bleak the prospect seems: "each separate object seemed to echo back my own exhilarating sense of hope and freedom" (II, 163). It would have been more obvious (and less like Anne Brontë) to show her heroine in a sunny, comfortable place, but here the "desolate wilderness" (II, 162) is used to good effect in that it points to Helen's existence as one which is not cushioned from hard truth. Her choice to flee takes her into relative physical discomfort, but also puts her in touch with the solid reality of moral rectitude and spiritual integrity.

The atmosphere of the hills and vales around Wildfell Hall provides a definite contrast to that which pervades the Park at Grass-dale. As the name indicates, Wildfell Hall stands on land which is wild and free; here Helen can wander at will and she is often pictured rambling over the moorland in a rather idyllic concert with her son:

> But sometimes I saw her myself,--not only when she came to church, but when she was out on the hills with her son, whether taking a long, purpose-like walk, or--on special fine days--leisurely rambling over the moor or the bleak pasture-lands, surrounding the old hall, herself with a book in her hand, her son gambling [sic] about her. (I, 49)

At Grass-dale, however, she is virtually imprisoned within socially

structured boundaries, firstly by her marriage and then by the unwelcome advances of Walter Hargrave. In a rather amusing picture of sisterly collaboration, the faithful Rachel is shown acting as lookout against the possible arrival of Hargrave:

> descrying the enemy's movements from her elevation at the nursery window, she would give me a quiet intimation, if she saw me preparing for a walk . . . I would then defer my ramble or confine myself for that day to the park and gardens. (II, 95)

For the dénouement of the Grass-dale narrative, Anne Brontë uses two evocative symbols of entrapment to describe Helen's state. Her confusion and manipulation at the hands of Huntingdon and Hargrave are symbolised in the maze image and the chess game. When Helen cries out that she cannot bear to leave her child "in this dark and wicked world alone, without a friend to guide him through its weary mazes, to warn him of its thousand snares" (II, 87), the lines are clearly drawn between the potential disorientation of her son and the crushing disorientation she feels. Her entrapment is destructive to the point where she can say: "I am weary of this life" (II, 87). The sense that she is out-manoeuvred is explicit in Hargrave's triumphant shout of "Beaten--beaten!" (II, 57), but there is a percipient irony in their dialogue. When Hargrave asks Helen whether she acknowledges his superiority, without hesitation she counters, "Yes--as a chess-player" (II, 58), the irony of which is that she may well have lost the game but certainly not the struggle.

Immediately following this in the narrative, there is a scene which draws attention to the discernible parallels between the gambits and manoeuvres of the chess game and those carefully plotted moves which allow Huntingdon to dupe Helen (almost) under her very nose. The comings

and goings and double entendres would be comic within the comedic convention of farce, but, seen in the light of Helen's innocent trust and heartfelt devotion, these antics lend a psychological intensity to the scene:

> Why did he laugh? Why did Hargrave connect them thus together? Was it true, then?--And was this the dreadful secret he had wished to reveal to me? I must know--and that quickly. (II, 58)

Helen's vulnerability is emphasised by the dubiously prophetic "combat" (II, 57) of the chess game and evinced also by the snare image: "A few more moves and I was inextricably entangled in the snare of my antagonist" (II, 57). Anne Brontë's skilled use of irony gives the image of death among the trees added significance. It is used to foreshadow the shattering impact of Helen's later discovery, and, in what is a poignantly misinterpreted conversation, reveals two people hopelessly at cross-purposes with each other:

> "It is a night that will give you your death, in another minute. Run away, do!"
>
> "Do you see my death among those trees, Arthur?" said I, for he was gazing intently at the shrubs, as if he saw it coming, and I was reluctant to leave him, in my new-found happiness and revival of hope and love. But he grew angry at my delay, so I kissed him and ran back to the house. (II, 53)

Anne Brontë, then, uses these images which suggest death, entrapment, combat and disorientation (the maze) to build the emotional atmosphere towards the crucial discovery scene. Here, as in Agnes Grey (and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre),[32] moon imagery represents a powerful éclaircissement and the strengthening presence of divine grace. The nature imagery in this passage becomes, as Ewbank puts it, "an integral part of an emotion and a spiritual state."[33]

> "God help me now!" I murmured, sinking on my knees among the damp weeds and brushwood that surrounded me . . . until 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 application, 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; and then, I saw the eternal stars twinkling down upon me; I knew their God was mine, and he was strong to save and swift to hear. (II, 61)

After demonstrating this flood of positive reinforcement from the heavenly power source, it is a pointed contrast which Anne Brontë draws between the spiritually empowering outdoors (with its connection to a limitless cosmos) and the limiting constriction of the social structures, the artificial constraints which apply within the confines of the house.

> Much of my newborn strength and courage forsook me, I confess, as I entered it, and shut out the fresh wind and the glorious sky: everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart--the hall, the lamp, the staircase, the doors of the different apartments, the social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing-room. How could I bear my future life? In this house, among those people--Oh, how could I endure to live? (II, 62)

It is clear that life, for Helen, must lie elsewhere, away from material comfort (the hall, the lamp, the staircase, in short, the patrimony of the establishment): the message for her is to find an alternative way of living, one which transcends the base hypocrisy and hierarchical impediments, "the social sounds" (II, 62) which enforce an inner death.

To give Anne Brontë her due, she does show that this problem is shared by both sexes, for Gilbert also faces the inhibiting walls of a stifling social structure as he journeys down the long, rough lane to the safe regions of Linden-Car from the "savage wildness" (I, 16) of Wildfell Hall. The rough road to the Hall carries with it conflicting messages about tradition, which lies in one direction (down in the vale),

and autonomy, which lies in the opposite direction (up at the Hall). The path image is used to emphasise the conflicting pull between Wildfell and Linden-Car, and the contrasting promise of independent harmony which is given to Helen and Gilbert on the "hard, white, sunny road" to the sea (I, 65). Gérin points out that in Anne Brontë's works the sea is a "great liberator."[34] Certainly there is liberation in the picture of Helen and Gilbert, united on a "loftier more precipitous eminence" over the sea ("though some of the ladies told her it was a frightful place, and advised her not to attempt it" [I, 68]). The image offers a sign of their higher potential when unencumbered by social shibboleths and restraints.

If one compares Anne Brontë's treatment of the sea image with her use of sky imagery, it seems that the sea, although it is an agent of liberation, is very much a reflection of individual potential. The liberating power equates with the suggestion of self-awareness prompted by this living, "not deadly calm" (I, 66) water. The sea symbolises personal scope and powerful individual depths. The sky in The Tenant tends to reflect less of the individual state, and more of the "placid" constancy which speaks of God. Lord Lowborough's groaning "agony" at his wife's infidelity is witnessed by a "placid sky" (II, 103), bringing to mind what Helen refers to as the "rapturous repose" of heaven--a repose his agony will not allow him to realize (II, 109). The sea, on the other hand, with its restless waters "covered with glinting breakers" (I, 66), is implicitly connected to the soul of those who observe it. Anne Brontë juxtaposes the view of the "deep violet blue" sea with Gilbert's comment on Helen's eyes, which are deeply coloured ("dark grey") and "full of soul" (I, 66, 67). Clearly, her communion with the sea from a

"precipitous eminence" (I, 68) says a lot about her inner dimensions:

Having journeyed from the embowered safety of his home to the airy heights of Helen's refuge and, even farther, to the heady sea-cliff "eminence," Gilbert still has one last journey to make; one which will take him, as the clifftop foreshadowed, to a place far beyond his original niche. That this last move is difficult is confirmed (as in Agnes Grey) by the material impediment of a heavy snowfall, which provides visual correlation for Gilbert's inner state of insecurity. His approach is 'snowed under' with fears that the woman he loves has risen beyond his reach to resume "her proper sphere" (II, 261):

> But the night was long and dark; the snow heavily clogged the wheels and balled the horses' feet; the animals were consumedly lazy, the coachmen most execrably cautious, the passengers confoundedly apathetic in their supine indifference to the rate of our progression. (II, 248)

Although Gilbert can overcome these physical obstacles in a commanding, 'manly' way, it is the social barrier of Helen's greater estate which finally confounds him. Anne Brontë conveys the alienating effect which this situation has on Gilbert by using the colourful, comic dialogue of two local characters who inflict their own pre-conceived notions of rank and propriety (which is, of course, allied to property) on an increasingly disconcerted Gilbert.

> "There'll be lots to speak for her!--'fraid there's no chance for uz"--(facetiously jogging me with his elbow, as well as his companion)--"ha, ha, ha! No offence, sir, I hope?" (to me) "Ahem!--I should think she'll marry none but a nobleman, myself. Lookye, sir," resumed he, turning to his other neighbour, and pointing past me with his umbrella, "that's the hall--grand park, you see--and all them woods--plenty of timber there, and lots of game--" (II, 260)

It takes the initiative of a strong and clear-sighted woman to

jolt the man out of his detached state of inverted pride. Helen claims her right to rearrange the status quo by making the decisive move to woo Gilbert in a liberated gesture of courtship usually adopted by the man, with the offer of a flower and all its associated symbolism of loving constancy. The window, through which Helen reaches to pick the christmas rose, is an image which Anne Brontë uses throughout her work to delineate the fragile and permeable membrane which separates the inner world from the outer universe; the act of looking out through the window describes an imaginative process wherein space and time coalesce and reveal 'all that is,' with pellucid simplicity. When Gilbert has finished reading Helen's diary, the window through which he "gazed abstractedly on the lovely face of nature" helps him to gain a clearer perspective of his situation, "this chaos of thoughts and passions cleared away, giving place to two distinct emotions" (II, 170). The window's promise of larger expanses outside offers the chance to progress beyond social limits, to overcome imposed emotional barriers, and find a broader reality. Helen seizes her chance, offered by the symbolic window, to do more than merely <u>look</u>; she takes life into her own hands and <u>does</u> something:

> . . . she turned away her glistening eye and crimson cheek, and threw up the window and looked out, whether to calm her own excited feelings or to relieve her embarrassment,--or only to pluck that beautiful half-blown christmas rose that grew upon the little shrub without, just peeking from the snow, that had hitherto, no doubt, defended it from the frost, and was now melting away in the sun. Pluck it however, she did. . . . (II, 271)

The use of the reductive "or only" works against the dramatic grande geste seen as Helen's movement in the phrase "threw up the window," and neatly emphasises the definitive sincerity of her action, just as the

repetition of the word "pluck" demonstrates her decisiveness. When Anne Brontë shows Helen reaching out through the window, reaching as it were beyond her past and present into the future, she gives a final affirmation of her statement that it is possible for a woman to step out of the mould (the ancien régime stereotype), to break through the enmarbling case of angelic submissiveness and passivity and become thoroughly whole, thoroughly alive. Helen is a picture of vitality with her "glistening eye and crimson cheek," and the rose itself could not more vividly symbolise the strength and beauty which she has attained with age and experience:

> "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. Look, Gilbert, it is still fresh and blooming as a flower can be, with the cold snow even now on its petals.--Will you have it?" (II, 271)

The flower which blooms in the snow is a composite symbol of life, love and maturity. Helen is clearly referring to the subtle beauties of mature love when she compares the rose with the more "fragrant" attractions of the "summer flower," whereas this resilient blossom is, like her heart, still "blooming" despite the "cold snow" of "hardships."

Gilbert's inability to grasp her bold offer of love causes Helen to withdraw so rapidly that we see the perilousness of her move. When it seems that her brave step into the future is blocked by Gilbert's lack of vision, his entrenched traditionalism and social insecurity, Helen's reaction is a deeply symbolic return to the fire:

> Misconstruing this hesitation into indifference--or reluctance even--to accept her gift, Helen suddenly snatched it from my hand, threw it out on to the snow, shut down the window with an emphasis, and withdrew to the fire. (II, 271)

The image has a definite impact: the old divisions are re-instated, the window to the future is shut down "with an emphasis," and life, for a moment, resumes its frozen stereotypical state "out on the snow," where the warmth of acceptance is denied; only the limited fireside rôle remains with its enclosed, non-creative heat. The retreat to the fireplace represents the consequences of both social and personal rejection: both sides lose, in a return to hierarchical assumptions of place (the "proper sphere" [II, 261]).

Throughout The Tenant and Agnes Grey, Anne Brontë has shown a profound awareness of the pain associated with unrequited love. Helen's gesture of throwing out the rose and shutting the window effectively describes her shutting out the already familiar pain of rejection. The situation recalls Agnes's temporary loss of Weston and Helen's earlier position when her love for Arthur was crushed and rejected. The imagery which Anne Brontë uses to explore the sense of emotional atrophy or "petrifaction" (The Tenant II, 84) in the novels is similar to that used in her poem "Self Communion," where she relates her personal experience of lost or "withered" love:

'Nay but 'tis hard to feel that chill
Come creeping o'er the shuddering heart,
Love may be full of pain, but still,
'Tis sad to see it so depart,--
To watch that fire, whose genial glow
Was warmed to comfort and to cheer,
For want of fuel, fading so,
Sinking to embers dull and drear,--
To see the soft soil turned to stone
For lack of kindly showers,--
To see those yearnings of the breast,
Pining to bless and to be blessed,
Drop withered, frozen one by one,
Till centred in itself alone,
It wastes its blighted powers. (Chitham, 156)

The fire, winter and stone images are linked, as in the novels, to emphasise the sense of isolation and wasted potential. As Anne Brontë works through her emotional and religious problems in the poem, what emerges, however, is a feeling of hope. The closing lines point to a positive resolution: "'Press forward, then, without complaint;/ Labour and love--and such shall be thy meed'" (Chitham, 160). This is essentially the same positive construct which is shaped by the imagery in the novels. Neither Helen nor Agnes is left with the poet's "blighted powers" (Chitham, 156). Their energy is not "centred in itself alone" (Chitham, 156), and, like the christmas rose in The Tenant, their yearnings do not "drop withered, frozen one by one" (Chitham, 156). In reclaiming the rose, the "emblem" (The Tenant, II, 271) of Helen's heart, Gilbert accepts the offer of loving unity and steps beyond the bounds of sexual and social division. Anne Brontë's choice of images here gestures towards the balance and growth of a natural order.

The imagistic world through which Anne Brontë leads her reader contains less of the bizarre or fantastic than those of her sisters in Villette or Wuthering Heights, but, nonetheless, its landscape is a fascinating one. The often commonplace symbolical landmarks lead into areas where "outward seeming" reveals the unexpected undercurrents of "inward mind" (I, 133). Repeatedly, Anne Brontë treats her reader to the incongruities and dualities which inform her placement of images within the text, and at every turn of the narrative there is a sign of enquiry into the problematical nature of accepted social 'unities,' such as marriage and the family.

I believe that Anne Brontë is more than the simple moralist of the Brontë sisters, and that her achievement as a writer far exceeded Charlotte's suggestion that she wrote merely to salve her conscience and perform some sort of literary exorcism, to drive out the demons of Branwell's alcoholism and the "undreamt-of experiences of human nature" at Thorp Green.[35] She cannot fairly be accused of "naiveté and religiosity," as Phyllis Bentley does,[36] when the deeply provocative fabric of her text speaks so powerfully and cogently of re-defining orthodoxy.

Not only in its structure does The Tenant attest to Anne Brontë's increasing maturity as an artist, but its dominant image patterns also display a contentious disquietude which advances the novel creatively beyond the more contemplative air of equanimity retained in Agnes Grey. The Tenant is shot through with images of strife and seemingly irreconcilable polarities. Its symbolism explores the dualities --love and hate, salvation and damnation, good and evil, freedom and oppression--and traces a vital flux as these oppositions diverge and coalesce throughout the narrative process. Whereas Agnes Grey chronicles a woman's development through her quiet determination to survive independently, the self-realisation which comes to the protagonists of The Tenant is won only through violent schism and radical break with tradition.

Anne Brontë's strategy is to present these distinct experiences and demonstrate their interrelatedness within the fully developed human consciousness by using key images to show the shifts of awareness, the conflicts and reconciliations which occur as her protagonists progress towards self-realisation. Anne Brontë's imagistic studies of domestic

strife and social division consistently represent the fruitlessness of the old way--the 'petrifaction' and 'bondage' which mark a life of servitude. Her exploration of the spiritual pull between natural open spaces and enclosed domestic limits implies the stress of breaking free from traditional structures.

Throughout her work she pictures the interplay of dualities by means of an antithetical image system: thus, images of light and shade, or summer and winter, rock and sand, or fire and ice, act as working sketches of the potential balance which exists in the natural order but has not yet been realised in society. Anne Brontë's textual analysis of this external balance holds an implied belief that there is some essential internal balance to the social structure which can only be achieved in more symbiotic relationships between man and woman, mistress and servant or landowner and tenant. The image patterns in Agnes Grey and The Tenant map out the kind of co-equal endeavour which would obviate the need for that "hateful bondage" depicted in the chapter so aptly named "Dual Solitude" (The Tenant, II, 85).

The egalitarian "truth" she expressly sets out to "reveal" at the start of her novels is precisely what Anne Brontë garners in to her experiential cornucopia in both The Tenant and Agnes Grey. Her Preface to The Tenant (like the narrative comments in Agnes Grey) shows an awareness of the demands placed on both reader and writer when choosing to follow a direction other than "the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue" (The Tenant, I, x). Even so, this decision to "reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller" (The Tenant, I, x) is unfailingly adhered to in all her fictional writing.

Having emphasised her polemical intent at the beginning of both novels, she then proceeds to encode in her imagery the searing inscription that there is "no peace" (The Tenant, I, x): there are ambiguities and divisions, there is torment and "petrifaction." Yet, at the same time, she offers an unhesitating hope for balance and wholeness through independent action.

Both Helen and Agnes are shown determinedly setting out alone, at critical moments when their footsteps are "the first to press the firm, unbroken sands" ahead (Agnes Grey, 208). Their movements through the "vale of life" (Agnes Grey, 161) take each one into a pleasant domesticity which, on the surface, does not suggest too radical a departure from the norm, but their progress is clarified as independent and resolute. The over-all stress of the two texts is on the need for creative and independent action from male and female figures alike.

The creative freedom of real independence is objectified in the imagery of both novels. With definitive poise, Anne Brontë's painterly vision ranges from the narrow focus of the hearth to broader scapes of heath and restless water. The well-balanced world of her structural images inscribes these wittily sensible texts with the provocative and solid thought that emotional equilibrium gives rise to limitless intellectual possibilities. Anne Brontë's use of imagery directs the narrative perspective beyond static social or sexual dichotomies, towards integration and progress.

NOTES

[1]Although, as Winifred Gérin points out, The Tenant was enthusiastically received by the public when it was published. "It came out in early June and was an immediate and sensational success. In view of the present eclipse into which the book has fallen, it is well to remember that, of all the Brontë novels, it had the greatest contemporary sale, with the one exception of Jane Eyre." Winifred Gérin, Anne Brontë: A Biography (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 260.

[2]Charlotte's letter to W. S. Williams, of July 31st, 1848, continues: "The simple and natural--quiet description and simple pathos are, I think, Acton Bell's forte. I liked 'Agnes Grey' better than the present work." Letters, p. 241.

[3]George Moore, Conversations in Ebury Street (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924), pp. 253-54.

[4]George Moore, p. 254.

[5]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar ask the question, "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal?" and answer it at some length in The Madwoman in the Attic. They also make the following point which seems to me a basis for much of Anne Brontë's use of imagery: "Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority (as our discussion of the metaphor of literary paternity argued), they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self--that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity." S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven, London: Yale, 1979), pp. 45, 48.

[6]A Craig Bell, Anne Brontë: The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, A Study and Reappraisal (Leeds: Emerald, 1974), p. 10.

[7]Terry Eagleton, Myths of Power, A Marxist Study of the Brontës (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 136.

[8]Phyllis Bentley, The Brontës (London: Arthur Barker, 1947), p. 109.

[9]A. Craig Bell, p. 61.

[10]Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere, p. 75.

[11]Eagleton, p. 123.

[12]Bell, p. 41.

[13]Coventry Patmore, Angel in the House, in The Poems of Coventry

Patmore (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), ed. Frederick Page, pp. 170-72 and 180-85. Although dated 1856, Patmore's poem deals with a particular 'angel' image which was held dear at the time when Anne Brontë was writing. The sexual 'love' he describes, however, is decidedly sadomasochistic in tone:

> Of smiles and simple heaven grown tired,
> He wickedly provokes her tears,
> And when she weeps as he desired,
> Falls slain with ecstasies of fears;
> He blames her, though she has no fault,
> Except the folly to be his;
> He worships her, the more to exalt
> The profanation of a kiss. (p. 171)

[14]C. G. Jung, Man and His Symbols (New York, 1964), p. 103. "The Trickster cycle corresponds to the earliest and least developed period of life. Trickster is a figure whose physical appetites dominate his behaviour: he has the mentality of an infant." Jung refers to the anima which I mention thus : "In the Middle Ages, long before the physiologists demonstrated that by reason of our glandular structure there are both male and female elements in all of us, it was said that 'every man carries a woman within himself.' It is this female element in every male that I have called the 'anima'" (pp. 14, 17).

[15]Juliet McMaster, "'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," Modern Language Quarterly, 43:4 (December 1982), 354.

[16]Ewbank, p. 77.

[17]John Milton, Paradise Lost, in Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Hughes, Book IX, pp. 390-91, ll. 526, 531.

[18]As above, p. 395, l. 708.

[19]Eagleton, p. 123.

[20]Ewbank, p. 78.

[21]Ewbank links the poem with Huntingdon, p. 77.

[22]Pinion, p. 246.

[23]Bentley, pp. 113-14. Phyllis Bentley's assertion that Brontë heroines were peculiarly "northern women" is open to dispute, but it is true that Helen displays the "stubborn, unbowed independence," which Bentley ascribes to "the heritage of northern English people," and, more particularly, Helen has "that innate sense of equality with all the rest of the world," evinced by Agnes Grey, "for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them" (p. 117). The Tenant, Preface, Vol. I, p. xi.

[24]"All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man." July 22nd 1848, The Tenant, Preface, Vol. I, p. xi.

[25]Patmore, Canto VIII, p. 181.

[26]Patmore, Canto VIII, p. 185.

[27]Ewbank, p. 68.

[28]This 'angel' is noticeably deficient in her organs of articulation:

> If none but her dear despot hears
> She prattles like a child at play. (Patmore, p. 180)

and

> She loves him for his mastering air,
> His power to do or guard from harm;
> If he but choose to use it half,
> And catch her up in one strong arm
> What could she do but weep or laugh! (p. 147)

[29]Phyllis Bentley must have read Anne Brontë by proxy when she concluded that her mind was not "a genuinely powerful one," and "her vision was not wide," p. 109.

[30]Anne Brontë herself attested to her regard for Cowper in her poem, "To Cowper," written in 1842: "The language of my inmost heart/ I traced in every line," from Edward Chitham's edition, The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary (Macmillan, 1979), p. 84.

[31]Chitham, p. 77.

[32]See also Gubar and Gilbert, The Madwoman in the Attic, where the following point is made, referring to Villette: "'A dwelling thou hast, too wide for walls, too high for dome--a temple whose floors are space' . . . Neither the male sun nor the female moon compare to this androgynous, imaginative power which cannot be contained or confined." There are also key moon passages in Jane Eyre, Vol. I, p. 266, Vol. II, pp. 105, 236 (The Shakespeare Head Brontë, Vols. I-II).

[33]Ewbank, p. 81.

[34]Gérin, p. 163.

[35]Gérin gives the complete text of Anne's birthday note of 1845. Referring to her stay at Thorp Green, Anne wrote: "I have had some very unpleasant and undream-of experiences of human nature." Gérin, p. 209. It is Charlotte, in her letter to W. S. Williams, who describes

the writing of The Tenant as "a painful penance"; she continues: "She wrote it under a strange, conscientious half-ascetic notion of accomplishing a painful penance and a severe duty." September 5th 1850, Letters, II, p. 156.

[36]Bentley, p. 109.

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