

Another creed no one ever taught them:
re-visioning theological ideas for women in
Charlotte Brontë's novels

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It is not uncommon to see women being discriminated against or being treated differently in the church. I too have had the same experience, and my protests were dismissed by the authority of the Bible and the Church. Whether God had made me a second-class citizen was a long-standing question I had in the church. In the course of my research for writing this thesis, I was surprised and shocked to discover that the questions British women in the 19th century had about the church were very similar to mine in the 21st century. Nevertheless, many women have continued to love God and the Church. Although man-made theories and institutions are not perfect, I thank God for taking care of His children.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

I hope that my daughter, Minha, will have a different experience in the church than the one I had.

I received help and love from many people—men and women—during my work on this thesis. My love and gratitude is too great to express.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the redefinition of Victorian women's creed and quest for self-fulfilment based on their Protestant faith in three selected texts by Charlotte Brontë, namely *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853). This involves the interrogation of Brontë's representation of her female protagonists' subversion of the discriminatory theological ideologies and practices of patriarchal Christianity during the Victorian era.

The core aim of this dissertation was to debunk the widespread misconception of Brontë's fiction as anti-Christian. Therefore, the argument in this thesis is that, although Brontë has been labelled an anti-Christian writer who opposes Christianity, my analyses of her novels reveal that Brontë distinguishes between patriarchal ideologies and the Christian creed. It also evinces that her criticisms are directed not at Christianity in its entirety, but specifically at the patriarchal and misogynistic theological principles that subjugated women within the religious spheres of the Victorian society. Therefore, rather than labelling Brontë's subversiveness as anti-Christian, my argument in this thesis is that it is more logical to understand that her defiant stance was propelled by an innate zeal to instigate feminist reform—one which would liberate women who have been forced into a subordinate pre-Reformational position under patriarchal Christianity. By imbuing her female characters with a burning passion for transformation, Brontë engages in her own Reformation and seeks religious autonomy for herself and her female characters.

To achieve its aim, the research employs Taylor's secularisation theory as a theoretical framework to gain an in-depth understanding of Brontë's work. Since Taylor's secularisation theory is instrumental to the comprehension of changes in the condition of belief, it is suited to the unravelling of the process through which women, who had been excluded from the new social imaginary since the Reformation, consequently became determined to redefine their own beliefs and creed.

This study establishes that, despite the exclusion of women from the pulpit and theological discourse in the Victorian era, Brontë boldly expresses her theological ideas for women through the female characters in her novels. Based on her Protestant faith, Brontë demonstrates the process of her female protagonist's quest for her vocation with independent religious conviction in *Jane Eyre*. As an extension of this aspiration, in *Shirley*, she redefines existing theological and patriarchal ideas foisted on Victorian women who have been excluded from theology and the pulpit through the audaciousness of her female protagonists, Shirley and Caroline. Similarly, instead of adhering stoically to the prevailing misogynistic hermeneutics, she reinscribes new hermeneutics that affirm women's religious autonomy and social participation. By creating a new imagination of Eve as the mighty mother figure, she demystifies the myth of Eve as the source of

original sin. Through this re-envisioning of the image of Adam's counterpart and the remodelling of the relationship between God and humans through the metaphor of the groom Messiah and his beloved bride, Brontë subverts the patriarchal quality of the Father/son model. In *Villette*, she further proposes her own creed, which differs from that of secularised Christianity. She cautions against the development of the Protestant faith, which affirms everyday life into an exclusive humanism that leads to the pursuit of human flourishing only. On the contrary, she presents a creed that affirms the transcendent world. Consequently, this thesis concludes that, despite the disparaging criticisms against Charlotte Brontë for her dissenting feminist vision, her authorial excellence proves that women's quest for spiritual autonomy and self-fulfilment in ordinary life are not mutually exclusive.

Key words/concepts: Victorian, feminism, Charlotte Brontë, religion, Reformation, evangelicalism, secularisation, Women, Christianity, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation

This study explores the dialectical relationship between women's religious belief and their attainment of self-fulfilment under the patriarchal restrictions of the Victorian era using Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853).

Charlotte Brontë's literary oeuvre remains a touchstone for the study of Victorian literature and religion as her writing is very concerned with the social complexities and religious turmoil that characterize the era. The Victorian age was characterised by the pervasiveness of religious beliefs and scepticism, and overall socio-political chaos. Lane (2011:3) describes the tumultuous atmosphere of the Victorian era as follows: "[T]heir deity seemed to abandon them, traditions appeared to be losing their grip, and fundamental questions loomed about the wellbeing of the country and the future of the world". This prevalent state of uncertainty was not confined to the sphere of religion, but "ultimately involved questioning the fabric of British social and cultural life" (Lane, 2011:3). It also explains why several Victorian intellectuals were concerned with the interrogation of religious truth and subsequently renounced their faith. What distinguishes Brontë from her contemporaries is the fact that, despite the spiritual crisis of her time, she did not succumb to a "waning belief or growing doubt in God" (Jenkins, 1995:65). Instead, the Brontës, including Charlotte, proactively sought to redefine their own religious path amid the conflicting theological and cultural trends (Bennett, 2014:69), and the prevalent repressive attitudes towards women by patriarchal Christianity. In fact, Charlotte Brontë's unconventional espousal of radical feminist ideals in her literary creativity led both her contemporaries and early feminist theorists to define her works as "personal and fictional forms of self-formation in rebellion" (Bennett, 2014:70) and as anti-Christian. However, as recent critics such as Jenkins (1995), Thormählen (1999), and Foster (2012) indicate, Brontë does not entirely denounce the Christian faith. Rather, she specifically expresses "her reservation about her age's ideologies regarding women" (Foster, 2012:71) from within the boundaries of Christianity. Brontë's displeasure with patriarchal religion is explicitly represented in her fiction; this makes her oeuvre a rich resource for the study of literature and religion in Victorian times.

1.1.1 Historical background: Victorian Christianity

During the Civil War, theological issues around predestination or free will were furiously disputed and, as backlash, people pursued a "less theologically elaborate faith", which could simultaneously guide their lives towards holiness (Taylor, 2007:223-224). After the civil war and its attendant age of religious fervour, religion in England declined significantly into what Taylor refers to as a "fatigue reaction", and notes that, during this period, religion was reduced to morality

(2007:225). Rather than enthusing over spiritual transformation or salvation, people pursued a civilised life of discipline and education. Altick remarks that, within this historical period, the Anglican Church was innately corrupt and failed to adapt to changing times. The Church of England in the pre-Victorian era was characterised by intellectual lethargy, deism, and meaningless rituals (1973:204). This spiritual recession continued into the early 18th century and as a result, church attendance showed a rapid decline not only in the Church of England, but also in the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Quaker churches (Baumber, 1992:25). The spiritual depression continued into the 19th century, as the religious consensus of 1851 showed that “absentees seem a greater cause for alarm” and “England was not even a Christian let alone Anglican country.” (Marsh, 1969:7)

Moreover, Thormählen (1999:175) describes the 18th to early 19th century Anglican Church as being “full of horrors”. Externally, Church buildings were poorly maintained and neglected, but Thormählen and Melnyk agree that the worst issue was the indifference of the clergy, who—because of the rationalisation of religion—perceived their profession not as a calling, but a job. For instance, amongst the 11,600 parishes in England and Wales, only 2,500 advowsons existed in the Church of England with about 600 living in the major colleges like Oxford and Cambridge and the remaining 5,500 belonging to individuals (Melnyk, 2008:7). Since simony was permitted, it was common for vicars to hold several parishes for economic reasons and hire cheap curates to manage these parishes. This explains parishioners’ resentment towards negligent clergy and the subsequent agitation that initiated the reformation across the Anglican Church in the 19th century.

Furthermore, in the Church of England, various reactions emerged as people sought for individual ways of breaking through the depression of the Church. The Evangelical Revival movement of the 18th century was one such response that heralded the era of “religion of the heart” (Marsden, 2014:8-9). According to Marsden (2014:9), the Evangelical movement opposed rationalised modern faith with its distinctive features of emotionally intense spiritual experiences and conversions. John Wesley and George Whitefield, both ordained priests of the Church of England, confronted the ebb of belief and inspired a new spiritual wave known as the Methodist movement. The prominent historian Baumber (1992:25) asserts that the original purpose of the Methodist movement was to initiate a revival “from within” the Church of England. Inevitably, the early supporters and followers of the Methodist movement included clergies of the Church of England. As Scotland (2002:2) points out: “at the highest point about one third or 6,000 Anglican clergy were Evangelical”. The Anglican Evangelicals were also referred to as low churchmen because they undermined the rituals of the Roman Catholic tradition and adopted the Reformation and Protestant traditions of the Anglican Church. In 1812, Wesley separated from the Church of England and formed the New Dissenters (after the Restoration, instead of returning to the Church of England, the former Puritans became Dissenters, who were also called non-conformists), but

a considerable number of clergies remained in the Anglican Church and continued to propagate the Evangelicalism of the Church of England (Melnyk, 2008:5). Although the Evangelical movement focused on preaching the gospel and engaging in ministry, it was comparatively lacklustre in terms of doctrinal theology (Scotland, 2004:153-154). As the Evangelicals proliferated, this became problematic; distinct factions emerged within the Anglican Church (Scotland, 2004:153). Jay (1986:6) further argues that the Evangelicals' peculiar emphasis on the authority of the individual on spiritual matters caused the divergence of doctrinal opinions and problems, but those problems could not be easily resolved nor deferred.

In contrast to the Anglican Evangelists' shortcomings, high churchmen insisted on the prioritisation of "theological concerns", and an emphasis on the authority of Church and the liturgy (Scotland, 2004:153). While low churchmen assimilated the Reformation spirit, high churchmen were closer to the Roman Catholics as the execution of the apostolic succession was important to them. In 1832, the Oxford movement (also known as the Tractarian movement) was instituted by high churchmen who insisted on the separation of church from state, or the exaltation of the Church over the state, and identified the Anglican Church as a 'Catholic' church (Thormählen, 1999:26). The proponents of the movement included John Keble, Henry Newman, and Edward Pusey (Nockles & Brown, 2012:2, 3).

1.1.2 Unconventional religious belief and the Brontë family

Brontë's father, Patrick, experienced these turbulent religious times first-hand. Patrick encountered Evangelicalism in Cambridge, and received a bursary from the renowned Evangelists, Wilberforce and Thornton (Baumber, 1992:28). In 1820, Patrick was called from Haworth for his evangelistic faith by a previous parish priest named William Grimshaw, who was not only the perpetual curate of Haworth and one of Wesley's foremost supporters in the early 19th century, but was also a vanguard of the Evangelical movement in the Anglican Church. Mason (2006:69) points out that Haworth was strongly influenced by the Methodist movement. This is because Evangelicalism began in the mid-18th century in Anglican parishes across Yorkshire and Cornwall, and Haworth was part of Yorkshire in the Bradford parish. In reference to the religious history of Haworth, Griesinger (2008:40) points out that "[t]he fathers of British evangelicalism, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Grimshaw [...] all preached from the pulpit of Patrick Brontë's church in Haworth during the previous century". Therefore, it is not surprising that Patrick, who was appointed curate of Haworth in 1820, assimilated and perpetuated the same spiritual inheritance. As the perpetual curator of Haworth, he fully supported the Anglican Church, but, at the same time, he adhered to his own evangelical spiritual principles, which were more attuned to the Methodists (Baumber, 1992:30). For example, he continued attending the cottage meetings, even after the separation of the Methodists from the Church of England (Baumber, 1992:30). As an Evangelic Anglican, Patrick detested the strict

Calvinist theology of eternal damnation or predestination, and often clashed with his curators, who were imbued with the Oxford movement (Baumber, 1992:30).

Patrick's religious attitude as a liberalist Evangelic Anglican had a significant impact on his children, especially Charlotte. Patrick's role as a father and his influence on his children are topics upon which authors have expressed a variety of opinions. One such opinion is provided by Charlotte Brontë's best friend, Elizabeth Gaskell, who published her biography, *The life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), after Brontë's death. In the book, Gaskell describes Patrick as a violent and eccentric father, a misanthrope who by nature did not like children (Gaskell, 1997:38). She further reveals that he was a resolute stoic who restricted his children's diet, burned their colourful boots, and shredded his wife's silk gown. He was a crank who vented his "volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession" (Gaskell, 1997:41-42). Patrick and his friends refuted what he claimed to be misrepresentations of his personality, and Gaskell was compelled to remove the aforementioned assertions from the third edition of the book (Gaskell, 1997:435). Arguably, the fact that Brontë feared the Calvinist doctrine of damnation from a young age and Gaskell's negative image of Patrick in her book, substantiates her assertion that he instilled religious fear into her. However, as previously mentioned, Patrick openly decried the cruel Calvinist doctrines of personal election or reprobation; therefore, these suspicions seem ungrounded. Similarly, recent research reveals that the Brontë parsonage was open to diverse religious arguments and that the evangelical Patrick encouraged his children to interpret the Bible in their own ways (Griesinger, 2008:45). Colón (2015:239) also contends that the fear of threatening Calvinist doctrines depicted in Brontë's works are not a confirmation of her father's cruelty, but an evidence of Patrick's liberal parenting style which permitted his children "to wrestle with different views of Christianity". In fact, Brontë ascribed to her father's religious attitudes in several ways; she was also critical of Calvinist doctrines, abhorred religious extremities, remained loyal to the Church of England, and trusted the mercy of God, just as Patrick pursued "the most charitable path" in his ministry (Colón, 2015:238). To sum up, Brontë's entire life revolved around seeking the truth as a member of the Church of England, and Patrick's parental foundation formed the basis of Brontë's religious quest.

1.2 Feminism, religion, and Charlotte Brontë's writing

An understanding of the subtlety and complexity of Brontë's religious stance is vital to appreciating her works, because religion contributed to the achievement of women's empowerment in the Victorian era as much as feminism (Bebbington, 1989:129). However, many previous critics tend to overlook this fact. As Clarke (2009:196) argues: even though the question of religion is deeply rooted in Victorian literature, critics have often ignored its importance. Hence, he suggests the

need for renewed academic insights into discussions pertaining to religion and its significance for the literature of the Victorian era. Oh (2017:22-23) identifies the paucity of research on women's spirituality in the 19th century or the relationship between female authors and religion as a prominent deficiency of 19th century English studies and suggests more feminist studies should be undertaken in these areas.

One of the main reasons for this underestimation of religious aspects is the uneasy relationship between institutional religion and feminism, which tends to regard religion as an integral constituent of patriarchy - therefore, having faith translates into the "internalization of patriarchal religious precept" (Melnyk, 2015:117). This understanding is especially prominent among second-wave feminists: in their 1979 book, *the Mad Women in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000:188) identify institutionalized patriarchal Christianity as an intimidation of women's authorship and readership alike. Similarly, Elaine Showalter (1977:22, 54-55) insists that Evangelicalism makes women feel guilty of writing because, under the Evangelical theology, the proper vocation for women should be to serve others, not for themselves. However, these second-wave feminist critics fail to examine Christianity apart from patriarchy. In the late 1980s, Nancy Armstrong (1987) successfully introduced New Historicism into feminist literary criticism in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, she argues that Christianity enhances the view that women belong in domestic spheres, though her arguments are limited to the private sphere and misses the fact that Christianity was a springboard to women's achievement of social agency. As Jung-Hwa Oh insists (2017:15), the relationship between the life of 19th-century women and Christianity is not that simple or linear. These feminist critics cannot explain why the most acute criticism against Victorian Christianity comes from Christian women writers such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell; or why writers who abandoned their Christian faith, like George Eliot, kept returning to Christianity in their works (Oh, 2017:25). They fail to realise the facts that religious discourse actually enabled women's agency in the Victorian era.

In the 21st century, religious topics have become increasingly relevant for exploration in literary and cultural studies. Regarding this shift, Perkin (2009:7) notes a trend in literary theory since the 1980's of openness to religious issues in literature and culture "by such secular-minded critics as Edward Said and Jonathan Culler". Moreover, in the beginning of the 21st century, events such as the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York reminded people of the fact that "religion remains a dominant factor in global politics, a factor one ignores at one's own peril", while "[t]he confident secularism that prevailed in humanities was at a loss to explain" such events (Perkin 2009:7).

The last 20 years have been marked by the emergence of a growing scholarly awareness of the role of religious faith in understanding the Victorian era and a burgeoning interest in that area of research (Clapp-Itnyre & Melnyk, 2015:1). Ruth Y. Jenkins and Julie Melnyk are among the few

scholars who study the relationship of Victorian women writers and religious authority. In *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis*, Jenkins (1995) examines how Victorian patriarchal Christianity repressed women and heeded Victorian women's writing. For Victorian women writers, writing served as an important means of deconstructing patriarchal religious language that marginalised women and enabled "women to reclaim the power of myth for their own empowerment" (Jenkins, 1995:27-29). In this sense, Jenkins acknowledges the theological role of literature in the works of Victorian women writers. Similarly, Melnyk highlights the function of literature as conveying theological ideas in Victorian women's works. Unlike religious writing, which was highly encouraged to women, Victorian women's theological writing is barely discussed in academic writing because "there isn't supposed to be any" (Melnyk, 1998:xi). In the Victorian age, the science of God—or theology—firmly remained a "masculine discourse" in which women's ideas about God, or His relationship to humanity (especially women) were prohibited. Instead, Victorian women sought to create their own theology and disseminate it through non-traditional genres such as letters, novels, magazines, pamphlets, or lyrics of hymn (Melnyk, 2010:34-5). Though Victorian women's theology was not systemic or academic as masculine theological discourse was, it had a remarkable impact on Victorian culture as "through its accumulated influence on its readers, women's theological writing quietly began to transfigure Victorian Christianity" (Melnyk, 1998:xii). Similarly, Rebecca Styler (2010:3-5) identifies 19th-century literature as a powerful theological method, not only for communicating, but also for the reconstruction of religious ideas at the time. Perkin (2009:9) suggests that Victorian novels were devices for conveying religious controversy. In light of this contextualisation, critics started to notice the role of literature in conveying religious and theological ideas in the Victorian era. This realisation is especially essential to the study of Victorian women writers who conveyed their own theological ideas that defied masculine, patriarchal theology.

Based on the foregoing, it is not surprising that scholars are increasingly engaging in the study of the religious aspects of Victorian fiction including Charlotte Brontë's works. Since Brontë actively uses biblical metaphors with over "450 allusions to and quotations from the Bible" (Wang, 2001:160) and religious issues in her fiction, it is noteworthy for researchers to acknowledge the role of religion in her fictions. Thormählen's book, *Brontës and religion* (1999), represents a solid contribution to the field of religious criticism on Brontës' works. In this book, she insists that "scholarly analyses of Brontë novels which fail to take the religious context into account are incomplete" for "[t]here is no escaping the fact that the plot lines in all the books [...] confirm fundamental Christian tenets" (Thormählen, 1999:6). This book delivers in-depth and broad knowledge of Brontës' religious background along with historical, biographical, and fictional analysis, so it is a treasure trove for Brontë scholars and provides the basis of this study. Rather than a literary analysis, this book focuses on laying the groundwork for studying the religious aspects of Brontë's works, which greatly inspired my own analysis of the three selected novels.

Interestingly, while modern feminist critics regard Charlotte Brontë as an anti-Christian writer and applaud her subversiveness against patriarchal Christianity, Thormählen (1999:7-8) considers the Brontës as intrepid pilgrims who explored various religious issues with open-mindedness and extols “their courage and independence of their explorations”. In a similar vein, recent researchers positively evaluate the role of religion in Brontë’s works. For example, Maria Lamonica (2002:259) observes that, in Charlotte Brontë’s works, the Christian discourse and theology are used to protest against the biased feminine ideals of the Victorian era, and Emily Griesinger (2008:47) asserts that the source of the female characters’ strength in Brontë’s work is their relationship with God.

However, these opinions are a new trend to Brontë studies, one that diverges from the historically widespread demonization of Brontë as an anti-Christian writer. Wemyss Reid (1877:229) defends Charlotte Brontë against the charges of rudeness in language and coarseness in thought by maintaining that her writings are nothing but “simplicity and purity”. This implies that there were complaints against her works amongst her contemporaries. Margaret Oliphant (1867:258-9) was concerned that Brontë’s rebellious female characterisation might lead to “a new erotic brazenness” of later novelists while Peter Bayne (1860: 423) criticises Brontë failure to deliver “a love higher than that of mere passion”. Another good case in point is Elizabeth Rigby’s (1848:173) disapproval of *Jane Eyre* as being “pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition”. Ironically, these accusations against the use of rude language, depiction of coarse thoughts or “ungodly discontents” in Charlotte Brontë’s work is read differently among modern critics who applaud the feminist temper of Brontë’s characters against suppressive institutional strictures (Peters, 2004:53-55).

Contrary to numerous assumptions and misinterpretations of her writings, Charlotte Brontë asserts in the preface of *Jane Eyre* that she neither denies nor rebels against Christianity. Rather, she bluntly states that her repugnance stems from the “conventionality” and “self-righteousness” of certain practising Christians, an attitude she regards as masks of hypocrisy (Brontë, 2006a:5-6). Evidently, this explains why, despite demonstrating censorious positions towards patriarchal Christianity, Brontë’s female protagonists such as Jane Eyre, Shirley Keelda, Caroline Helston, and Lucy Snow never abandon their faith. Instead, through their search for the maternal God, inward guidance, and their own creed, they assert their authenticity and attain self-fulfilment. In fact, it is their Christian belief that makes them independent individuals and helps them exhibit their social agency in the face of stifling patriarchal restrictions. By suggesting women’s communication with God without male mediation and, further, with a subversive maternal God, Brontë overcomes the aforementioned restrictions stemming from patriarchal brands of Christianity. Additionally, although her female protagonists pursue their religious belief, their final goal is not to attain an ultimate Christian truth or heroic ending, but to achieve self-fulfilment in

their ordinary daily lives. This individualistic approach to religion is very modern and further affirms Brontë's subversiveness as part of the process of modernisation/secularisation.

1.3 Problem statement

In light of the above contextualization, I challenge the widespread evaluation of Brontë as an anti-Christian writer. The central question of the thesis is:

Why does Charlotte Brontë remain invested in Christian belief in her pursuit of her "own creed" as a source of authenticity?

Additional questions relating to the central question are:

1. How do the representations of conventional religious restrictions of the Victorian era marginalise women in Brontë's novels?
2. How is the Christian belief redefined in Brontë's novels—how does it differ from what is practised in the existing mode of Victorian Christianity?
3. How do the female protagonists' pursuit of their "own creed" instigate self-fulfilment and evince the concept of secularisation?

1.4 Thesis statement

In this dissertation, I argue that, despite the various criticisms labelling Brontë's works as anti-Christian, she succeeds in redefining the role of Christianity in the lives of women in the Victorian period by creating female protagonists who proactively subvert the oppressive patriarchal systems through the pursuit of a distinct Christian belief. To achieve this aim, the thesis uses Charles Taylor's secularisation theory to analyse the intricacies of Brontë's Christian belief in *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853). The Victorian patriarchal ideas of Christianity infantilised women and portrayed them as dependent on the supervision and theological guidance of male authorities such as pastors, fathers, or husbands. Moreover, Victorian women were expected to take the role of "angel in the house", which means "the surrender of her self—of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both—that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000:25). However, in her novels, Brontë challenges the subjugation of women by depicting female characters who espouse a fierce quest for the re-ordering of the unjust social position of women in society. This desire for change is propelled by their awareness that, based on the Reform or Evangelical tradition, they share the same spiritual privileges as men before God.

Therefore, Brontë resists the conventional roles designated to women within patriarchal Christianity and seeks for new theological ideas for women in her works. In this way, Brontë engages in the process of secularisation to seek a new social imaginary instead of the one derived from the patriarchal tradition, but also recognises the inherent devastating potential of secularisation that is exclusive humanism. Ultimately, she eschews exclusive humanism and seeks transcendent meaning beyond reason.

1.5 Aims

The core aim of this study is to explore the theological ideas for women in Charlotte Brontë's three novels by engaging in in-depth analyses of her female characters' redefinition of their "own creed", and examining the inextricable link between their quest for unhampered faith and self-fulfilment within the context of secularisation.

The secondary aims of this study are:

- 1 To explore how Brontë depicts the effects of the union of modern social imageries triggered by the Reformation, with patriarchy and its attendant restrictions on women in the selected novels.
- 2 To illustrate the characteristics of Brontë's theological ideas in her novels and the effects of her female protagonists' own creed in building their modern/secularised identity.
- 3 To examine the essence of women's self-fulfilment in Brontë's novels and evaluate her rejection of exclusive humanism.

1.6 Theoretical framework and method

This study utilises Charles Taylor's theories of secularisation to ascertain how Brontë's protestant faith affects the development of her seemingly anti-Christian, modernised female protagonists. In his groundbreaking book entitled *A Secular Age*, Taylor (2007) identifies religious motive as the main impetus that brings modernisation after the Reformation. Taylor (2007:61) defines the concept of the "Reform" as an expression of "a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations". Basically, early Protestantism denied mediation in religious life, instead it required that laymen, as much as priests, be completely dedicated to God. As a result, the significance of ordinary life was enhanced so that everybody could glorify God in their daily lives. Similarly, the importance of discipline and human will was

emphasised. Therefore, according to Taylor, the Reformation introduced a new social imaginary in which society consisted of equal, horizontal individuals who were educated, disciplined, and pursued mutual interests in the public place. However, after the collapse of the dual system of layman and priest by the Reformation, society remained predominantly hierarchical and persistently applied the old patriarchal order to women. As Julie Melnyk (1998:xi-xvi) rightly observes, the Evangelical encouragement of woman did not extend to theological ideas, writings, or the pulpit. Although the Evangelicalism emphasises “the unique importance of the individual” (Jay, 1986:7), contradictorily, the father and the husband remain “the exclusive interpreters of both the natural and supernatural worlds” for women (Jenkins, 1995:16). However, despite the end of the Reformation period, the entrenchment of patriarchal values and the restriction of women continued in Christianity. The deep-rooted persistence of patriarchal structures within Christianity is not surprising; this is because, as Taylor (2004:147) explains, the adoption of a new social imaginary to an entire society takes time. As a result, the marginalised niche exudes a certain drive to be included in the new order. This drive for a new imaginary is prominently portrayed in Charlotte Brontë’s writings and an investigation into these social imaginaries forms the crux of this study. Although Brontë seeks the new imaginary for women in her novels, she is also cautious about the extreme end of secularity. More importantly, Brontë renounces exclusive humanism for its disregard of Divine Providence, its espousal of human capacity, and its pursuit of human flourishing through disengaged instrumental reason.

Religion is key to understanding the Victorian era, but it is very complicated at the same time. Obviously, the contemporary usage of the term “religion” contains various kinds of systems of faith from different cultures. It is true that atheists and mystical groupings already existed during the Victorian age; however, in this study, I narrow the term to broadly indicate various affiliations of Christianity in the Victorian era. In case of the term Christianity, I include both meanings, namely Christianity as a collective body of Christians, and the belief and system of doctrines of Jesus Christ in the Bible. As such, *religion* and *Christianity* in this dissertation refer to a collective belief system. By contrast, when I discuss Brontë’s personal belief, I use the terms *faith* or *belief*. The term *theology* will refer to a study of, or system of theory about God, which has scholarly authority and influence. The Oxford English Dictionary (2021) defines theology as “The study or science which treats of God, His nature and attributions, and His relations with man and the universe” and “[a] particular theological system of theory”. In addition, I conceptualise theology as the systemised religious values and views for explaining the omnipotence and immortality of God. Although theology provides a framework for understanding the essence of the divine, it can be limited and influenced by an individual or group’s religious, moral, or political values and interests. Therefore, theology itself cannot help but being limited and influenced by an individual or group’s religious, moral, or political values and interests. For example, in the Victorian context, only men had access to theology, which explains why Victorian theologies had a limited regard for women.

Because of this, Brontë actively explores existing theologies and envisages the possibility of a new theology. Since Brontë was neither a theologian nor an author of Victorian religious fictions, she refuses to use her fictional creativity as a propaganda. Therefore, I use the term theological ideas or *creed* rather than theology to refer to Brontë's own interpretation of Christianity, the bible, or doctrines.

1.7 Choice of texts

To discuss Brontë's theological ideas for women, I chose three out of her four completed novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853). I intentionally excluded *The Professor* from the novels under study because it is not thematically suited to the discussions herein. For example, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette* explicitly interrogate the issues of women's religious imaginations, theological ideas, and the redefinition of women's own creed, whereas such themes are not addressed in *The Professor*. Moreover, critics tend to investigate the themes of gender or social issues in *The Professor* rather than the nexus between those themes and the broader subject of religion. In fact, Winnifrieth (1996:21) asserts that *The Professor* reads more like a social tract than a novel. Similarly, Pearson (2009:21) draws an interesting inference on the paucity of religious issues in *The Professor* from Thormählen's book *Brontës and Religion*, noting that there are only four references to *The Professor* in the index list, "a fact indicative of the novel's apparent lack of religious content". Furthermore, Thormählen rarely mentions *The Professor* in her research on Charlotte Brontë. In her paper entitled "Religion in the novels of Charlotte and Anne Brontë" she mentions *The Professor* only once in relation to Brontë's disapproval of Roman Catholicism (Thormählen, 2002:258). This clearly reinforces my stance that *The Professor* is ill suited for the textual analysis of the religious climate of the Victorian period. Therefore, I engaged in a close reading of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*, which extensively explore the religious context and status of women's voice on religious matters in the Victorian period.

1.8 Chapter division

Based on the foregoing, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 include critical analyses of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, respectively, evaluating the protagonists' individual religious faith and its position within the framework of Taylor's theory of secularisation.

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë depicts a disciplined Christian society of the Victorian era, one that requires its members to live "as agents of instrumental reason, working the system effectively in order to bring about God's purposes" (Taylor, 2007:98), and emphasises "mutual benefit, self-love, social

order” (Taylor, 2007:226). The novel traces the development of the protagonist, Jane, through the strictures of social and religious barriers until she finds her own social imaginary. During her youth, Jane grows up in a patriarchal disciplined society and, as a marginalised individual, is forced to comply with the given social imaginary. As a young orphan, Jane is incapable of contributing economically to the Gateshead society. Moreover, uneducated Jane exhibits an enthusiastic disposition, which makes her a threat to the state of order at Gateshead. Therefore, Jane needs to undergo a “civilising” process at the Lowood School. The goal of the school is to tame its students’ wild natures, so they become refined through discipline, just like the headmistress Miss Temple, who represents the ideal well-disciplined Christian woman and epitomises the Victorian angel in the house. After spending eight years at the school, Jane accordingly evolves into a “disciplined and subdued character” (Brontë, 2006a:100). However, what awaits her in outer society are the fierce dichotomous prejudicial stereotypes, used to place women on “the moral extremes of angel (‘angel’, ‘fairy’, and perhaps ‘sprite’) and monster (‘ghost’, ‘witch’, ‘fiend’)” (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000:19). Throughout the novel, Jane has to navigate the rigidity of strictures faced by women in society. Consequently, she finds herself often expelled to the marginal niche. For instance, Rochester requires Jane to become his mistress, while St John demands that she assumes the role of the abstemious wife of a missionary. Like most disciplined societies, the Victorian society prioritises organisational ability and self-discipline as great strengths, while the inner devotional life and inner link with God are atrophied (Taylor, 2007:227-228). Therefore, Jane’s strategy for overcoming the social restrictions of the highly disciplined society is to seek her own creed within her inner self. Ultimately, through her perceived intimate relationship with God and His inner guidance, Jane becomes an independent woman with considerable social standing and economic worth.

In *Shirley*, Brontë advances her own feminist¹ theological ideals, and I examine it as a sort of denominationalisation. Taylor (2007:450) explains that, in the 19th century, religious options were varied, and by virtue of this diversity, the Victorian age was “ready to give shape and expression to the religious aspirations and insights of some group, whether defined by class, or by locality, or of region, or region plus ideological affinity, or even race”. For the purpose of this study, I would add gender to that list. In Ruth Jenkins’s review of the novel, she observes that the two marginalised female protagonists, Caroline and Shirley, make polemical challenges that demand “a radical feminist Protestantism” and excoriates patriarchal culture (Jenkins, 1995:85). Ironically,

¹ In the 19th century, feminism was inevitably intertwined with Christianity. Though patriarchal Christianity was the primary source of women’s oppression in the Victorian era, women were able to work outside the home by participating Church work and it became the basis of social movements for women’s participation in the public sphere (Schwarz, 2012:3). More importantly, personal faith played an important supporting role in Victorian feminists’ resistance to oppressive gender roles (Schwarz 2013:3). As a result, feminine theology, which encourages women trapped in a separated sphere to participate in social reforms consistent with God’s will, also germinates in the Victorian era (Melnyk, 1998:49).

what makes these characters' boldness possible is their unwavering religious faith. In *Shirley*, women are marginalised in society and in the church; therefore, what they strive to do is to overcome the suppression they experience through their own interpretation of the Bible, their own creed, and a matriarchal version of God. Shirley audaciously criticises Mr Helston's sermon as "pungent speech" and worships by herself outside of the church. There, Shirley preaches her vision of maternal God and offers a new reading of Eve, not as a *femme fatale* as in Milton's Eve, but as a daughter of God (Brontë, 2006b). Caroline also rebuts traditional interpretations of the Bible and insists on women's own interpretation of the Bible and religious practice derived from it. Although the essence of Brontë's theological ideas seems liberal, somewhat radical, and even subversive in relation to patriarchal Christianity, her criticisms are not against the Church of England or Christianity itself. In this sense, it is similar to denomination, which never aspires to established churchhood, but exists within the national Church of England for fulfilling the plan of God and never aspires to disengage from other recognized denominations. Taylor (2007:449-450) defines the term denomination as a "religious affinity group" that enables individuals to declare their religious inclinations. In this regard, in *Shirley*, Brontë implicitly suggests another variant of Christianity, a new religious imagination defined for women, which is impossible in the order of existing patriarchal Christianity.

Brontë's (2004) last fictional work, *Villette*, reflects a turn from secularisation and expresses a firm denial of exclusive humanism. While writing *Villette*, Brontë repeatedly mentions in her letters the intense sense of loss and agony of bereavement she suffers because of a series of sibling deaths in her family, and the attendant solitude she feels as the only surviving child. These familial tragedies seem to have influenced her writing of *Villette*, which reconciles the sentimental tones of retrospective narrations and expresses hopes for the afterlife. In the novel, Brontë criticizes the Roman Catholic Church for its culture of materialism and spiritual numbness. It is not only these Roman Catholic sentiments that she criticises; she also reveals the limits of disciplined society of England through characters such as Dr John and Ginevra. Especially, Brontë rebuts the Victorian version of Christianity; the typical Protestant rage for order developed into a strong confidence on disciplined people and society, and as a consequence, exclusive humanism, which seeks human flourishing, emerges and the driving force of it is not Divine but "purely human capacity" (Taylor, 2007:84). Through the painful incidents of her life, the protagonist Lucy becomes clearly aware that happiness is not manmade, but a divine gift and that Providence is not solely for human flourishing; sometimes it cannot be understood and observed with the intellect. In this way, Paulina is Lucy's double who symbolises unmerited blessings, while Lucy experiences unwarranted difficulties. One has everything whereas the other loses everything, and it cannot be explained with human reason. However, Lucy accepts her predicament and affirms all them as part of God's design, mercy, and grace. Nonetheless, Brontë does not directly instil her with the

same theological ideas as *Shirley*, but she broadens her religious palette in *Villette*. Here, Brontë suggests a worth of theological ideas that affirms beyond the human centered secular world.

CHAPTER 2 *JANE EYRE* AND HER OWN CREED AFFIRMS WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

2.1 Contextualisation

In this chapter, I examine *Jane Eyre* within the context of the Reformation tradition. The protagonist, Jane, struggles against social and religious restrictions that prevent her from gaining authenticity. Because of this challenge posed by conventional Christianity, *Jane Eyre* used to be read as an anti-Christian work. However, in the preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë defends her novel's critique of established Christianity. It is obvious in this reaction that she envisages critics such as Elizabeth Rigby, who label *Jane Eyre* as "pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition" in tone of "ungodly discontent" (1848:173-174). Brontë strongly maintains that her indignation is not directed at Christianity itself, but at conventional religion that tends "to elate and magnify a few" (Brontë, 2006a:6). She is clearly aware that those tendencies are problematic because they are confounded and confused, though it is dead against "the world-redeeming creed of Christ". Brontë insists that *Jane Eyre* is a "protest against bigotry", against "narrow human doctrines", which fatten only the establishment and ostracises the rest (Brontë, 2006a:5-6). Therefore, her intention is to separate the confounded two and restore the ideal creed of Christ above human doctrines. Brontë clearly criticizes the majority of Christians of that era and stresses the necessity of reform in the preface. In this sense, *Jane Eyre* should be read as a work in the vein of the Reformation tradition rather than a rebellious anti-Christian text. The fundamental principle of the Reformation concerns the abolition of disparity between secured and secular, priesthood and laypeople – such that places everyone on an equal pedestal before God as mortal souls. Brontë elucidates the fact that the Church of the Victorian period was not for all but for a selected few – particularly, the upper class and male authorities. She excoriates the state of gender relations with regard to religion in the extension of the Reformation.

The main question in this chapter is how the exclusion of women in the church since the Reformation of the 16th century influenced Victorian women in the 19th century. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine Brontë's description of the effects of the union of modern social imaginaries triggered by the Reformation with patriarchy and its attendant restrictions on women in *Jane Eyre*. As the 1847 version of the original, full-title *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* implies, Brontë illustrates the life of Jane from her youth to middle years from Jane's perspective. The progress of Jane from an inexperienced, penniless orphan girl to a dependent, mature woman is the main premise of this book. Christianity influences Jane's progress in both positive and negative ways. While patriarchal Christian authorities tend to usurp Jane's religious authority, her personal Christian belief gives her the strength to overcome such pressures that ask her to renounce her authenticity. Brontë creates a chronological structure to align Jane's progress and

stage of life to specific locations: Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Marsh End and Ferndean Manor. In this chapter, I examine Jane's struggle and development by tracing these locational stages.

2.2 Reformation and new modern social imaginary

Before analysing the *Jane Eyre*, it is necessary to look into Charles Taylor's conceptualisation of secularisation as used in this chapter.

2.2.1 Secularisation and the Reformation

Charles Taylor defines secularity threefold. The first understanding of secularity is the disappearance of God from public spaces. Religious belief is not a principle of action anymore; rather, people follow their "rationality in each sphere—maximum gain within the economy, the greatest benefit to the greatest number in the political area", etc. (Taylor, 2007:2). Of course, in the spiritual private sphere, believers still keep their religious life. What this means is "the emptying of religion from autonomous social sphere" (Taylor, 2007:2). According to the second understanding of secularity, people are "falling off of religious belief and practice" (Taylor, 2007:2). The third understanding approaches the term secularity from "the conditions of belief". In earliest societies, belief was axiomatic; in modern society—or at least in Western countries—"belief is an option" (Taylor, 2007:3). Hence, not believing replaces the default option of the past, which was belief.

In his book, *A Secular Age*, Taylor traces what happened in the process of secularisation in the third term of secularity. It is common understanding that the advance of science replaced religious belief but Taylor refutes these subtractive explanations. He insists that secularisation cannot be explained as human beings "having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions or limitation of knowledge" (Taylor, 2007:22). Rather, he suggests, it is "the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices" (Taylor, 2007:22). In this regard, secularisation means a historical and social process, which takes a few centuries, and in this way, even the Reformation is a part of secularisation, which brought a huge change in the condition of belief. The religious zeal that brought the Reformation not only brought the abolition of the ancient régime, but also "the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith" (Taylor, 2007:77). Taylor proves in his work that even seemingly contrary trends are in the same secularisation process, such as the Reformation and the deism or the atheism: the same religious zeal that led to the Reformation also led to deism or atheism. In the same sense, I argue that the seemingly anti-Christian elements of Brontë were also rooted

in her own religious belief and practices. On an individual level, through her works, Brontë experiences and practices her own “Reformation” against the repressive society of her own time.

2.2.2 Disenchantment and the rise of disciplined society

In the enchanted cosmos, the sacred and the profane were separated in the hierarchy. The system includes places, agents, and actions. Therefore, particular places such as churches, specific agencies like priests, actions like mass, or even certain objects such as relics are separated from ordinary places, people, practices or things (Taylor, 2007:446). As a result, any discrimination between the priest and laypeople were destroyed and it was claimed that laypeople are able to devote as a priest do in their daily lives. In the disenchanted world, God no longer reveals his purpose through signs. Rather, each individual must figure it out through instrumental reasoning and strive to fulfil His will on earth (Taylor, 2007:98). The Reformation in the 16th century changed the social perception of laypeople. Laypeople also devote their life to God and thereby society should be rid of disorder (Taylor, 2007:106). Living in disenchantment means that the individual adopts a disengaged and instrumental stance towards the world. Therefore, sound education and polite manners are important to the modern self because human nature must be civilised through discipline, just as it is necessary to devote oneself to the development of “rational moral self-control” (Taylor, 2007:101). With the legacy of the Reformation, Victorian society experienced an Evangelical movement at the end of 18th century, so it is understandable that Victorianism gave rise to a culture of discipline and ordered life. As Taylor (2007:451) argues, “[e]ducation and self-help were highly valued qualities” in 19th century Western culture.

2.2.3 A New Modern social imaginary

A social imaginary refers to “the ways in which they [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (Taylor, 2007:171). Therefore, the social imaginary is inseparable from the moral order of a certain age. In modern society, in order for the educated elite to expand their reach, it is taken for granted that everyone has a similar social imaginary and lives the same mode of life, but the process was not that always that simple (Taylor, 2007:424). Victorian England had already accepted a new social imagination—a new and modern self-understanding, which replicates the idea of the Reformation that society consists of equal, horizontal individuals and the individuals are educated, disciplined and pursue mutual interests in the public sphere. However, even after the Reformation, patriarchal values and the restriction of women persisted within Christian community: Victorian women were not allowed to have the same social imaginary as men. The adoption of a new social imaginary by society is time consuming, so the marginalised niche exudes a certain agitation for inclusion into the new order. Since the 19th century was such an

age of mobilisation for change in social structures and imaginaries (Taylor, 2004:147, 445), the quest for a new order did not only shape Brontë's theological ideas for women, it also became a prominent theme in her writings.

2.2.4 The Great Disembedding

The new, modern social imaginary and the great embedding are closely interconnected. Taylor explains the concept of great disembedding as a certain social phenomenon through which human agents "are embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates in the divine" (Taylor, 2007:152). These human agents thereby acquire new social statuses as individuals, different from the collective agents of the past (Taylor, 2007:152). Therefore, the realisation of the inequalities or injustices of the collective past are crucial because, through such realisation, one can disconnect the self from the social matrix. This explains why Protestant churches encourage their members to leave their biological membership and answer to their individual calling from God, to join the network of agape (Taylor, 2007:155, 158). In this regard, Taylor explains that the way to self-understanding is not expanding – me, others, society; rather, self-understanding, firstly, is marked by familial membership. Later, one can realise the self as a free individual through social disembedding (Taylor, 2007:155).

2.3 Brontë's new social imaginary for Women in *Jane Eyre*

2.3.1 Jane's great disembedding at Gateshead

Gateshead symbolises the abhorrence of Victorian society for disorder. During her stay at Gateshead, Jane's social status is that of a destitute orphan girl without any inheritance – one who is less than a servant. The reason orphans were not accepted by society was that the possibility of their presence disrupted the existing social order. The abuse and negative treatment that Jane endures at Gateshead is a perfect reflection of both the Reformed society and the Victorian era's perspective on poverty and strict adherence to a social hierarchy where poverty is perceived as a social anomaly to be excoriated and denounced. Even the young Jane shares the same negative view on poverty, "Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children [...] poverty for me was synonymous with degradation. No; I should not like to belong to poor people." (Brontë, 2006a:30) Ironically, while at Gateshead, Jane is economically and socially inferior. She is expected "to acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner - something lighter, franker, more natural as it were" (Brontë, 2006a:9). That is, she is required to be docile and accept her social status as an orphan who should refer to her cousin, John Reed, as a "master", but Jane bluntly refuses to do so.

For her defiance, Jane is punished by the patriarchal system. John Reed justifies his violence towards her in patriarchal fashion: “you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none [...] all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years” (Brontë, 2006a:13). Here, the patriarchal logic that protects primogeniture collaborates with the Victorian loathing of poverty, and the orphan girl, Jane, is pushed to the bottom of the social ladder at Gateshead. By enforcing continual violence, John ensures that Jane remains in the marginalised niche and tames her to become “[h]abitually obedient” (Brontë, 2006a:12). Again, although critics tend to read young Jane as a rebellious girl, the text describes Jane at this stage as a naive victim of patriarchal violence. For example, her fight against John was not premeditated, but a terror-inducing incident. She believes that John is a murderer and reacts in panic such that she does not even recognize her actions afterwards: “I really saw in him a tyrant: a murderer [...] these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don't very well know what I did with my hands.” (Brontë, 2006a:14) In this scene, Brontë shows that Jane is violently marginalised and suppressed. Even though the attack was a self-defensive, unintentional accident, Jane's rebellion against the first and only son of the family, John, is a direct revolt against the patriarchal power he symbolises, so she is punished.

The famous red room scene is a representation of the confluence of Christianity and patriarchy in the domination of women. Gilbert and Gubar (2000:340-341) call the red room “a kind of patriarchal death chamber” and spots the red room as the central motif of this book, “the enclosure and escape”. However, Colón (2015:250) criticizes Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation, since it misses the Christian theme in this scene so that it hastily equates Christianity with Jane's restriction. She argues that the red room scene is the beginning of Brontë's description of the connection between the supernatural and Christianity (Colón, 2015:251-252). I also agree with Colón on the point that the Christian theme in this scene should not be ignored. It is plausible to read the red room as the symbol of the violence of patriarchal Christianity against women; however, it is only half of the picture. From the red room scene, Jane begins her lifelong struggle for herself within Christianity. That is why Lamonica (2003:75) also interprets the red room as “a chamber the color of blood which encompasses Jane like a womb”, that enables Jane to be reborn with new subjectivity.

In the red room, Jane experiences a patriarchal God of juridical penalty. The last words Jane hears before her imprisonment in the red room is the threat of divine punishment, “God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums”. While her ordeal lasts, the admonishment “if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away” reinforces her fear (Brontë, 2006a:16). This hyper-Augustinian image of God is utilised in the psychological domestication of Jane:

The red-room was [...] one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre [...] Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it, and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne.

This room was [...] solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered [...] Mrs Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored divers parchments, her jewel-casket, and a miniature of her deceased husband; and in those last words lies the secret of the red-room - the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur (Brontë, 2006a:16-17).

The most distinct characteristic of this room is, of course, the deep red colour all around the room. Contrasting with the crimson coloured dark room, a grand white bed and the highly piled up mattress and pillows are set in the middle of the room. Generally, the description of the room makes a strong impression of authoritarianism and repression. The suggested presence of the punitive and patriarchal God in the red room where Mr Reed's deathbed stands like a tabernacle symbolises how the threat of religious punishment coalesces with patriarchal domination to restrain Jane. The fact that young Jane felt the bed as "a pale throne" reinforces the overbearing impression of this room. Here, Brontë uses the term tabernacle from the Old Testament, which originally symbolises the presence of God on the earth, as the symbol of the deathbed and continual presence of patriarchal heads of households. The same way the tabernacle is regarded as the Most Holy Place in the Old Testament, the entrance to which is reserved to only the high priests, the red room is only accessed by Mrs Reed who is evidently the high priest of Gateshead. What the red room symbolises here is patriarchal Christianity that disallows young Jane from directly accessing God without requesting the high priest to mediate for her. Therefore, for Jane, far from being a sanctuary, it is a place of terror and torment, one from which she is to be released only "on condition of perfect submission and stillness" (Brontë, 2006a:21). Later on, at the bedside of Mrs Reed, Jane remembers "the footstool, at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel, to ask pardon for offences by me uncommitted. I looked into a certain corner near, half-expecting to see the slim outline of a once dreaded switch which used to lurk there, waiting to leap out imp-like and lace my quivering palm or shrinking neck." (Brontë, 2006a:266) Clearly, to young Jane a bedroom is a place of punishment. In this way, the red room becomes a symbol of sanctuary for a punitive, patriarchal God.

Interestingly, Mrs Reed's hostility towards her does not frighten Jane. Rather, she is terrified by her thoughts of Mr Reed who loved and cared for her during his lifetime:

A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not - never doubted - that if Mr Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly; and now, as I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed

walls - occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror - I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed: and I thought Mr Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode [...] I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realised: with all my might I endeavoured to stifle it (Brontë, 2006a:20).

Jane thinks the spirit of Mr Reed would come to correct the injustices in Gateshead and save her. However, the spirit of Mr Reed is far from consolation to Jane but terrifies her. This scene shows that patriarchal authority represented here by the deceased Mr Reed cannot save Jane; regardless of its seemingly good intentions patriarchal authority can only be a source of repression. With that evidence, Jane is unable to grieve as she imagines Mr Reed's return. Jane does not want vengeance or aid from Uncle Reed either, as patriarchal intervention will only worsen the case. The episode in the red room ends with Jane experiencing a panic attack, which makes her fear she could die. Here, Brontë makes it clear that the patriarchal authority or punitive revengeful theology cannot be the answer to the difficulties imposed on women.

The use of confinement in the red room to threaten and tame Jane fails. This is because, contrary to Mrs Reed's intention of getting Jane to submit to authority, the red room experience becomes the propelling force for Jane to disembody herself from the expectations of the Gateshead society. She begins to subconsciously distance herself from the accusations levelled against her, she insists that she "dared commit no fault" and "strove to fulfil every day" (Brontë, 2006a:18). Due to adherence of the Gateshead community to the hyper-Augustinian doctrine that stresses original sin, Jane is considered troublesome regardless of her actions. In such a system, Jane's existence is innately problematic and, as such, she should be in the marginal niche excluded from the mainstream. Jane comes to this realisation in the red room:

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage [...] A heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing (Brontë, 2006a:19).

In this sense, the red room incident triggers Jane's disconnection from the social matrix of Gateshead and initiates her personal journey with God.

After the traumatic experience in the red room, the young Jane is transformed, not only is her world disenchanting, she also develops a new sense of self, a buffered self. According to Taylor (2007:27), the principal factor of disenchantment is "the sense of the self and its place in the

cosmos". He remarks that, in the enchanted world, the self is porous and embedded into the social matrix; as such, the self is easily influenced or possessed by spiritual powers and/or others. However, the buffered self is a disengaged self with its own boundaries, maintains distance from the outer world, and tries to keep self-control. The fact that Jane refers to the night she spent in the red room as her "dying day" indicates that the porous, childish self who lives in the enchanted world died in the red room. After spending a night in the red room, Jane confesses that her favourite novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, which she often read with delight and convinced of its truth, became an "eerie and dreary" story (Brontë, 2006a:26). Similarly, Jane desists from reading the Arabian tales because she can "make no sense of the subject" (Brontë, 2006a:46). Jane is no longer fascinated by the adventure stories and her reasoning becomes more logical. Jane undergoes disenchantment and, in the process, dispels her fear of sacred authorities and the patriarchal power ironically represented by Mrs Reed and the clergyman, Mr Brocklehurst.

When Jane realises that her world has undergone disenchantment, she hears Bessy's song of an orphan. The doleful ballad suggests Jane's circumstance: an orphan girl, like one in the middle of a desolate moor, cannot expect any help from hard-hearted men but are subject to the mercy of God. Gilbert and Gubar argue this song offers "an image that recalls the patriarchal terrors of the red-room and hints at patriarchal terrors to come—Lowood, Brocklehurst, St John Rivers" (Brontë, 2006a:343-344). Here, they make the same mistake they made with their interpretation of the red room scene, which is to simply equate Christianity and patriarchy. Of the five stanzas, they cite the fourth one:

Ev'n should I fall o'er the broken bridge passing,
Or stray in the marshes, by false lights beguiled,
Still will my Father, with promise and blessing,
Take to His bosom the poor orphan child (Brontë, 2006a:27).

What is noticeable here is that the image of God in this stanza is not patriarchal or hyper-Augustinian at all. Rather, the God Jane encounters from Bessy's song is the feminine, merciful God who takes a poor orphan to "His bosom" and bestows her with promises and blessings. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë contrasts between the patriarchal punitive God and merciful feminine God. Throughout the story, Jane is threatened with the juridical-penal understanding of God by male authorities; but the God she experiences, and who is embodied by female characters, is a merciful God, like in the song. Lamonica (2003:77) rightly insists that "two versions of God in contrasting guises of patriarchal power dominated Jane's childhood," one is "vengeful God" and the other is "merciful, protecting, benevolent God". If this difference is ignored, it causes a huge misunderstanding. Despite spending her childhood under the influence of patriarchal Christianity at Gateshead and Lowood, Jane refuses the patriarchal God and seeks for her own creed due to her experience of a feminine God early on.

Another episode that shows that the punitive, patriarchal God could not be Jane's creed, is her outburst of anger towards Mrs Reed. After the red room incident, Jane tries to resist Mrs Reed with the authority of patriarchal Christianity:

'What would Uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?' [...] 'My Uncle Reed is in heaven, and can see all you do and think; and so can papa and mamma: they know how you shut me up all day long, and how you wish me dead.'

Mrs Reed soon rallied her spirits: she shook me most soundly, she boxed both my ears, and then left me without a word. Bessie supplied the hiatus by a homily of an hour's length, in which she proved beyond a doubt that I was the most wicked and abandoned child ever reared under a roof. I half believed her, for I felt, indeed, only bad feelings surging in my breast.

November, December, and half of January passed away. Christmas and the New Year had been celebrated at Gateshead with the usual festive cheer; presents had been interchanged, dinners and evening parties given. From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded (Brontë, 2006a:34).

Jane demonstrates her rage against the unjustness she experiences and expresses an eagerness to reform the situation; Jane criticises Mrs Reed by the same logic she has been criticised, but her rage is met with dishonour and isolation. She fails to reform the situation and it makes her feel unhappy. The words of a punitive patriarchal God as uttered by Jane do not work effectively for either Mrs Reed or herself. Nevertheless, Jane attempts to use the juridical patriarchal power once again against Mrs Reed after the visit of Brocklehurst. She confronts Mrs Reed "on the rug, where Mr Brocklehurst had stood" and threatens Mrs Reed with exposing the long history of unjust abuses against her (Brontë, 2006a:45). However, after her victorious outburst, Jane is remorseful. She realises that, as right as she might be in her resistance of the unjustness meted against her, she needed something more than mere indignation. Jane confesses "[s]omething of vengeance I had tasted for the first time" but she wishes to have better than "fierce speaking" (Brontë, 2006a:45). This incident reconfirms that Jane needs another creed different from that of the vengeful God, the father. After her victorious outburst at Mrs Reed, Jane is remorseful and cries, "what shall I do?—what shall I do?" (Brontë, 2006a:46) and as Gilbert and Gubar (2000:343) observe, given the fact that this same question marks the beginning of Christian's path in *Pilgrim's Progress*, it indicates the genesis of Jane's journey into the disenchanted world, and her personal quest for a knowledge of God which differs from the perspective she acquired at Gateshead.

In the search for her own belief, Jane's weakest point – her social position as an orphan—works in her favour. Her social exclusion due to her orphanhood helps her to keep her distance from Gateshead and develop herself. As Auerbach (1985:67) rightly asserts, orphanhood in the Victorian novel does not equate the nullity of self, rather "it comes to stand for something like pure selfhood", a certain possibility of pursuing and establishing self because they succeed nothing.

Being an orphan without inheritance, Jane is more determined to develop herself. Bessy's nursery song also suggests that the despondent orphan, who has been ostracised by hard-hearted people, is taken care of by God Himself. A similar imagery of the lonely orphan in a cruel world is alluded to in the vignette of the first chapter of Bewick's book: "[T]o the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking [...] The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms." (Brontë, 2006a:11)

Before the Reformation, the idea of the self was embedded in the social matrix and religion or salvation was regarded as a collective term – get on the ark of salvation by excelling in one's given/natural social role (Taylor, 1989:217). However, the Reformation proffers a new conceptualisation of salvation that suggests that one must row one's own boat to redemption (Taylor, 1989:217). In this sense, the image of the sinking wreck in the stormy sea might be read as a foreshadowing of the process Jane undergoes while searching for her salvation and her "self" and a demonstration of how tough and lonely the Protestant pilgrim can become. This implies that, if Jane gives up rowing, she would sink and end up a "phantom" in the marginalised niche, as foreshadowed in the mirror in the red room. The Gateshead episode shows that, regardless of how young and feeble Jane is, she is saddled with the responsibility for her own redemption.

2.3.2 Entering into disciplined society: Lowood School

To break away from Gateshead, Jane decides to go to Lowood, ardently desiring an education. Lowood is depicted as a place of discipline, where Jane is educated to be useful to society and grows in confidence. At the same time, Jane meets her friend and mentor, Helen, and glimpses a spirituality other than patriarchal Christianity. Jane used to hear about school from Bessy, who described it as a place "where young ladies sat in the stock, wear backboards, and were expected to be exceedingly genteel and precise" (Brontë, 2006a:30), thereby highlighting the disciplinary character of schools. Even though Jane is appalled at the idea of school, she loathes the degrading life at Gateshead and chooses school. Jane understands school as a place of discipline and preparation towards becoming a lady. Of course, she could accomplish this at Gateshead, but Jane detests the disorder and unfair treatment she receives there. Mrs Reed instructs Mr Brocklehurst to make Jane humble and useful by submitting her to Lowood's curriculum, but she is unable to reign in her own son, John Reed. Against the schoolmaster's advice, the overprotective mother takes John home in the middle of the school term after she is cautioned, "he [John] would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home" (Brontë, 2006a:12). In short, Mrs Reed shields John from discipline and allows him to wallow in gluttony at home. Gateshead is not a place of just and consistent punishment; hence, Jane eagerly leaves for school, looking forward to a much different dispensation.

Unfortunately, Lowood School is not what Jane expects and she soon discovers that it is governed by patriarchal Christian rules; another hypocritical place represented vividly through its head, Mr Brocklehurst. Brontë depicts Brocklehurst as an epitome of the core value of patriarchal Christianity. During her first encounter with Mr Brocklehurst, Jane notices the physical gap between them: “[H]e seemed to me a tall gentleman, but then I was very little.” (Brontë, 2006a:38) Not only their physical differences, but also the gap in their social status is highlighted in Jane’s first impression of Mr Brocklehurst. His description reflects the solidity of his rank, for example, his features are straight, narrow, grim, and his face carved like a mask, with an erect, prim posture. Franklin (1995:463) argues Brocklehurst “is cast stereotypically as the hypocritical Calvinist” who uses the threat of predestination and relies on the doctrines of innate human corruption. Gilbert and Gubar (2000:344) note that Brocklehurst’s depiction as a black pillar presents him as a phallic image. The metaphor of the pillar is reminiscent of the two pillars of Solomon’s temple, which reinforces the juridical-penal understanding of the God of Calvinism. In addition, Mr Brocklehurst’s posture before Jane, as if “planted” in the rug, shows how confident he is in his social position as a male minister. Their first encounter is a preview of what it would be like for Jane to oppose established patriarchal Christianity. The question he poses to Jane about how to avoid hell sounds catechism-like, but she responds with a non-doctrinal answer, “I must keep in good health and not die.” (Brontë, 2006a:39) She therefore fails to provide an answer that is appropriate to patriarchal Christianity. The most problematic issue is that Mr Brocklehurst tries to place himself between Jane and God by dictating which book of the Bible Jane should like. Although the young Jane does not resist Mr Brocklehurst’s authority at this stage, the tone of the scene displays Brontë’s abhorrence and mockery of the suppressive, patriarchal Calvinism that attempts to act as mediator between humans, especially women, and God. Later in the chapter, Jane criticizes Brocklehurst’s unqualified intervention, “whatever he might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was further beyond his interference than he imagined” (Brontë, 2006a:76).

Other than patriarchy, Mr Brocklehurst represents the typical modern Christian with a buffered identity who pursues human flourishing and believes in people’s will to change themselves. At Gateshead, he proudly presents his school’s methodology for cultivating Christian virtues:

'Humility is a Christian grace, and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood; I, therefore, direct that special care shall be bestowed on its cultivation amongst them. I have studied how best to mortify in them the worldly sentiment of pride, and, only the other day, I had a pleasing proof of my success (Brontë, 2006a:40).

It is evident his concept is in tune with Reformed theory that has confidence in humans and the belief that Christianity should be characterised by order. The education at Lowood is supportive of the idea of the “polite age” and Calvinist principals that prescribe discipline, education and the inculcation of proper manners to refine one’s wild nature. Mr Brocklehurst’s confidence in human

will, order, and discipline influences his attitude towards spiritual matters: during their first meeting at Gateshead, to get a sense of Jane's personality, he asks her how often and regularly she prays or reads the Bible. He regards the standard of one's faith as quantifiable. The typical modern trust in reason is evident in him, and he uses reason in his methodological approach to spiritual transcendental matters.

Brocklehurst's juridical-penal understanding of God is fused into the curriculum at the Lowood institution. Hyper-Augustinian theology considers humans as being in the condition of total depravity, therefore the punitive character of God is highlighted with an emphasis on submission to God. This is because they do not believe in the possibility of any goodness from corrupt humans; external conduct and self-discipline are emphasised while the idea of an intimate relationship with God is often neglected (Taylor, 2007:227). This explains why Brocklehurst tries to correct pupils' so-called ruined nature through overtly puritanical actions:

'Julia Severn, ma'am! And why has she, or any other, curled hair? Why, in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly - here in an evangelical, charitable establishment - as to wear her hair one mass of curls?'

'Julia's hair curls naturally,' returned Miss Temple still more quietly.

'Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature. I wish these girls to be the children of Grace' (Brontë, 2006a:76).

To Brocklehurst, "natural" means the original sin; naturally curly hair indicates an evil nature of lavishness and conformity to the world. Since children of God should not conform to worldliness, he orders the girl's haircut. This is his mission "to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh" (Brontë, 2006a:76).

Under the Brocklehurst and Lowood, Jane realizes what is expected of her is different from what she expects of herself. What Jane expects from Lowood is the acquisition of a new identity and membership of society through discipline. However, from her first day at Lowood, Jane finds that Brocklehurst and Mrs Reed share the goal of forcing Jane to submit to patriarchal authority and keeping her trapped in her socially marginal position. Jane is still a dependent orphan – a charity child at Lowood:

'And why do they call it Institution? Is it in any way different from other schools?'

'It is partly a charity-school. You and I, and all the rest of us, are charity-children. I suppose you are an orphan. Are not either your father or your mother dead?'

[...] 'Do we pay no money? Do they keep us for nothing?'

'We pay, or our friends pay, fifteen pounds a year for each.'

'Then why do they call us charity-children?'

'Because fifteen pounds is not enough for board and teaching, and the deficiency is supplied by subscription.' (Brontë, 2006a:60).

Jane has never realized the fact that she is a charity child, not a normal student, before Helen kindly informs her that Lowood is not a grammar school for academic education, but a charity institute. Obviously, the goal of charity school could not be the same as that of a grammar school; its first priority is not the development of each student, but ensuring the stability of society. Since its inception in the 18th century, the purpose of charity school was focused more on religious instruction under the supervision of the church (Scotland, 2004:230). From Bessy's story, Jane dreams to be a little lady who is "expected to be exceedingly genteel and precise" but in reality, as a penniless orphan, Jane faces dehumanisation at Gateshead, as a charity child at Lowood; she is expected to endure the miserable conditions at the school with gratitude.

Nevertheless, Jane's education at Lowood is not all negative. The head mistress, Miss Temple, is the ideal well-disciplined Christian woman who guides Jane through a more sophisticated and civilised discipline. Significantly, Miss Temple allows Jane the experience of resolving unjustness sensibly. After Brocklehurst's inspection visit and his false accusation of Jane, Miss Temple does not expect Jane to surrender to unjustness as patient Helen does, nor to burn with rage as she is wont to; instead, she offers her a listening ear. Afterwards, in a logical and reasonable fashion, she sends a letter of enquiry to Mr Lloyd, and then announces Jane's innocence before the school assembly. When Jane has a similar chance to explain herself at Gateshead, she expresses the difficulty of disengaging from her emotions as "[c]hildren can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings" (Brontë, 2006a:29). During this process, however, she learns to become disengaged from her anger, her painful memories, and herself. In this restrained state, she can insert "far less of gall and wormwood" into her explanations than usual (Brontë, 2006a:84), and narrates her grievances as an "impartial spectator" without fierce anger (Taylor, 2007:232). Consequently, for the first time in her life, Jane's rage is rewarded with justice. She describes it as the moment her "grievous load" was lifted, and likens it to Christian's experience in Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*. Moreover, Jane confesses that from that moment she resolves, "to pioneer [her] way to through every difficulty" (Brontë, 2006a:88). That night, she finds that her hunger, her inward craving for food, had disappeared. Lesa Scholl (2016:3) argues that the physical hunger Jane experiences is connected with social hunger, so when Jane's rage for order is resolved, her hunger for a "Barmecide supper" to amuse her inward cravings is replaced by an imaginative feasting "on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark - all the work of my own hands" (Brontë, 2006a:88). The other index of Jane's disengaged self is that she now recognises a departure from her condition. For instance, while at Gateshead she used to fear the degradation of poverty; after this incident, she confesses, "I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries." (Brontë, 2006a:89) Jane is further disembedded from her

surroundings such that, regardless of her orphanhood and previous source of desolation, she envisages possibilities.

Consequently, Jane tries to develop herself and believes herself to have successfully evaded the marginal niche. She undergoes a typical self-disciplinary process and begins to believe that change is possible with practice and effort: "I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts; my memory, not naturally tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits." (Brontë, 2006a:88) Jane's goal at Lowood is simple: "I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood: to make so many friends, to earn respect, and win affection." (Brontë, 2006a:81) At Lowood School, under Miss Temple's tutelage, Jane evolves into "a disciplined and subdued character" (Brontë, 2006a:100). Finally, the orphan who was once a useless burden on society becomes the one who maintains the harmony and social order that enables economic fulfilment through the process of civilisation in Lowood, especially with the help of Miss Temple.

Miss Temple's guidance has its limits. For example, she guides Jane to self-accomplishment, not spiritual growth. Helen Burns, on the other hand, offers Jane spiritual guidance to make up for the inadequate creed she encounters at Lowood in the sense that she learns about the maternal God through Helen. Several critics have pointed out Brontë's loathing of the patriarchal, vengeful God. For instance, Jenkins explains that Brontë's passion is condemned as sin in the eyes of a Calvinistic God. Therefore, Brontë replaces the punitive God with "a merciful, empowering Saviour" after her lifelong painful struggle (Jenkins, 1995:67). Brontë reflects this personal struggle in the conversation between Jane and Helen at the latter's deathbed. Jane asks Helen, "What is God?" Helen shares her belief in a God who, other than Brocklehurst's God, is a God of love: "My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created [...] God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me." (Brontë, 2006a:97) This declaration by Helen is quite subversive, because it refutes the old juridical-penal view of sin and eternal condemnation represented by hellfire and held by the church and characters such as Mr Brocklehurst. Helen's understanding of God also resonates with the image of God in Bessy's ballad. Although Jane is impressed by her last conversation with Helen, especially regarding her alternative perspective of a loving God, she "was no Helen Burns" (Brontë, 2006a:78). Therefore, her God cannot be Jane's, as she is on a quest to define her own creed, her own belief and experience of God.

Another significant role Helen plays is to expand Jane's worldview beyond the transient life. Prior to the deathbed scene, Jane is a typically disciplined self who believes that "[t]he world is pleasant" and recognises only the present with "all the rest", feeling "formless cloud and vacant of depth" (Brontë, 2006a:94). This seems natural to Jane as the tradition at Lowood stresses the ideals of discipline and an organised life. On the contrary, Helen seems an untidy dreamer and admits that she has no "qualities or talents to make [her] way very well in the world" (Brontë, 2006a:97). She

appears even more eccentric in a milieu of exclusive humanism that focuses solely on the earthly flourishing of humans. While Jane focuses on efficiently managing her school life, Helen presents Jane with a wider scope of spiritual existence that transcends human perfection: “[b]esides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits” (Brontë, 2006a:83). Through her tribulations, Helen is strengthened by her belief in a loving God and in the existence of a transcendental world, which energises her in the face of hardship. She affirms that she holds “another creed, which no one ever taught me [...] it makes eternity a rest – a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss” (Brontë, 2006a:70). Helen’s religious viewpoints provide Jane with an alternative means of overcoming conventional religious restrictions. Now, the onus rests solely on Jane to find her own creed as the illustration of the wreck in the first chapter suggests.

After the death of Helen, Jane strives to develop herself at Lowood for 8 years under the auspices of Miss Temple, eventually becoming a teacher herself. It seems that Jane successfully disembeds and finds her new social imaginary through education. The core value of disembedding entails defying the social matrix in order to follow one’s individual calling. As Melnyk (2015:120) argues, the 19th century understanding of the calling of women as a singular group fulfilling a “group vocation” is a practical depiction of how Victorian women were embedded in society and perceived as a collective entity rather than as individuals. Therefore, the Victorian ideal woman portrayed by Miss Temple cannot be the model for Jane, who wants to be disembedded from the matrix and find her own personal calling. That is why Jane laments, “I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character.” (Brontë, 2006a:100) Although she appears contently disciplined by Miss Temple, Jane does not intend to assume Miss Temple’s role. Consequently, as soon as Miss Temple leaves the school, Jane undergoes a metamorphosis and realises that her disciplined disposition had been effected by Miss Temple; much later, Mr Rochester indicates that Lowood had caged Jane’s natural constitution. Despite her progression towards becoming a genteel lady, Jane finds herself still embedded in a society with stereotypical expectations of civilised women. She recalls her years of adhering to rules and systems at Lowood and decides to venture into the outer world in search of liberty.

2.3.3 Jane’s own creed of the ordinary

Since patriarchal Christianity allows women only a marginal identity, Jane needs to find her own creed in order to discover her social imaginary. Thornfield and Marsh End are stages in Jane’s spiritual ordeal where she faces two kinds of threats. First, she battles the social strictures that work to confine women to a life of domesticity. For example, Mr Rochester and St John try to restrict Jane to the marginal niche without paying attention to her calling. The second threat she faces is her own struggle to maintain the balance between two entrapments: being absorbed by

the mundane world, and monkishly renouncing the world (Taylor, 1989:222). As a Protestant, her ordinary life should be affirming and hallowed, this means that her calling, her secular productive activities of ordinary life and her marital life should contribute to the glory of God without idolising ordinary things. While at Thornfield, Jane idolises Mr Rochester; at Marsh End, she almost gives up her calling for St John's vision. In this regard, Emily Griesinger (2008:47) identifies *Jane Eyre* as a Christian feminist bildungsroman and makes two pertinent observations about the novel. The first is the fact that Jane's evolving awareness of her Christian belief strengthens and empowers her as a woman; the second point is that her blossoming discernment of the dangers of misappropriating Christian doctrines influences her capacity for knowledge and followership of God. Therefore, Jane strives to overcome external threats to her faith with her own Christian belief and her critical attitude towards institutionalised Christianity.

2.3.3.1 Thornfield, the error of principle

Although Jane escapes Lowood in search of liberty, she finds herself still encaged at Thornfield. She realises that being a governess is not the breakthrough she sought, but another form of servitude and stagnation. What she really yearns for is to explore vocations from which women were excluded by the strictures of Victorian society. In this regard, the bookshelf in the schoolroom symbolises the marginalisation of women in society: "[M]ost of the books were locked up behind glass doors: but there was one bookcase left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances." (Brontë, 2006a:122) Jane is unable to freely access or acquire knowledge but must be content with what she does have access to, which is the light entertainment section. The restriction of reading materials demonstrates the clear boundaries drawn for women by male authority even in the acquisition of knowledge. As in the pre-Reformation period—when laypeople could only learn about God by attending Mass, as reading the Bible or studying theology was forbidden for normal folk—women in the Victorian society could only access the lowest social position and the most basic knowledge.

Jane vividly expresses her discontent at the regulation of women's capabilities and stagnation of women's circumstances. Having escaped the marginal niche assigned to degraded orphans, Jane senses that, as a woman, she risks relegation to another marginal position—that of woman:

I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen; that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach (Brontë, 2006a:129).

In the scene on the rooftop in Thornfield Hall, Jane expresses dissatisfaction about her stifled prospects and expresses her desire for a limitless existence; she knows “the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness” and wants to seize it (Brontë, 2006a:129). It is significant that Jane needs to pass over obstacles to reach the view from the rooftop. The obstacles, exemplified as three staircases and a trapdoor, implies how hard it is for women to move beyond the limitations set.

Brontë anticipates the negative responses to Jane’s argument, and allows Jane to pre-empt them:

Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. [...] but women feel just as men feel [...] they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex (Brontë, 2006a:129-130).

Jane justifies her argument with two reasons: the first is her nature, and the second sexual equality. Both are unreasonable from the perspective of patriarchal Christianity as represented by Brocklehurst. From their position, the nature of woman is innately evil and should be denied, while pious women should remain in the domestic sphere. This manifesto shows that Jane departs from patriarchal Christianity and justifies herself with her own viewpoint. Predictably, contemporary Brontë critics have dwelt on Jane’s manifesto for a better life to censure her for expressing an “ungodly discontent” (Rigby, 1848: 174). As the response to those critics in the preface, Brontë rebuts that narrow human doctrine should be distinguished from the creed of Christ (Brontë, 2006a:6). In the quoted passage and the preface, Brontë regards the suppressive patriarchal Christianity as the fruit of a narrow-minded human doctrine, which only favours male authority.

In this sense, Jane’s discontent is not the outcome of blasphemous unbelief, but a fruit of her Protestant belief. In Protestant tradition, unlike the Catholic’s vocation of priesthood, the Christian calling is for all humankind and the gifts of God consists of “the manifestations of his spirit in us” (Brontë, 2006a:224), irrespective of gender or social class. Therefore, contrary to the myopic emphasis on asceticism, Christians should ideally work hard in their religious and secular lives. In other words, it is crucial to produce and reproduce both economically and sexually; in this respect, labour and marriage share equal religious significance. It is possible then to argue that the affirmation of ordinary life is vital to the Protestant belief. Jane prioritises the ordinary life and guards her spirituality accordingly. In fact, her displeasure with women’s vocation in the rooftop scene is a typical expression of Protestant agony because she strongly believes that she is

mandated to glorify God through her gifts. Therefore, her restless nature, the never-ending inner anguish she experiences, implies that her personal calling transcends that of being a mere genteel lady. Jane is certain that she has to answer diligently to God's calling in her daily life, therefore she argues that "women feel as men feel; they need [...] a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (Brontë, 2006a:130). Her quest for gender equality in this instance reiterates the Protestant stance in equality: "[W]e stood at God's feet, equal." (Brontë, 2006a:292) In this context, the social strictures against Jane and all women in the Victorian society are proven inhumane as they violate the Creator's will, so she vehemently resists them with a religious rage for order. Based on the Reformation spirit, which eliminates division between priests and laypeople, she maintains that women are equal to men. The issue of women's calling reverberates throughout Brontë's other works, especially in the next novel under study, *Shirley*, where her criticism is most radical.

The rooftop scene reaches its climax with Jane's sharp criticism of women's unjust conditions and ends abruptly with the sound of Bertha's lunatic laughter. Gilbert and Gubar's (2000:358) assertion in *The mad women in the attic* that Bertha is Jane's double is quite common in feminist readings, and I agree with this opinion specifically because, through Bertha, Brontë suggests what the outcome of Jane's suppressed rage could become without discipline. This is because Bertha and Jane, as most women in the Victorian era, share the same experiences of emotional and psychological subjugation and repressed rage. Both women are forced to comply with the stipulated marginal social role, their refusal to conform leads to them being unduly oppressed, punished, and confined. Whilst Jane is a civilised woman with internalised rage, Bertha represents the product of an undisciplined, uncontainable, raw feminine rage. Bertha's rage is likened to Jane's outburst of unrefined anger that threatens the order at Gateshead. For instance, on her deathbed, Mrs Reed recollects how young Jane's rebellion frightened her because she felt as if an animal had approached her in human form. Like Bertha, young Jane was treated like an animal. Not only Mrs Reed, but also the maid in the red room scene refer to Jane as "a mad cat" and treat her harshly (Brontë, 2006a:15). Only after Jane learns to express her anger in a detached manner is she regarded as human. Similarly, Bertha disrupts the order at Thornfield and Rochester's interests. This explains why, despite being justly angry, she is enclosed in the attic, treated worse than a beast, and labelled a mad woman. In this way, without undergoing the civilising process, Brontë presents Bertha as a probable future image of Jane. Therefore, to uphold her persuasive power, Jane has to control her rage, unlike Bertha. This is because the consequence of such unbridled expression of rage is imprisonment within the marginal niche, being labelled a lunatic, and being treated worse than a monster.

At this stage, Jane realises her lack of experience well enough and regards it as problematic. Rochester also refers to Jane as a neophyte and likens her ignorance to that of a cameo head on

a mantelpiece. He states that her inexperience distorts her view so that she sees bitter realities through charmed lenses. Jane is already aware of these weaknesses, so she desires “the power of vision which might overpass that limit” and “more practical experience” in the rooftop scene (Brontë, 2006a:129). Contrary to Jane’s naivety and inexperience, Rochester is depicted as a typical buffered self who has tasted the bitterness of life. He describes himself as an India-rubber ball: hard, tough and devoid of emotions. Given the contrasts in their personalities, it is not surprising that Jane is attracted to the more experienced Rochester. Jane feels that her relationship with him liberates and indirectly broadens her experience:

I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imagining the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed, never startled or troubled by one noxious allusion [...] my thin-crescent destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up (Brontë, 2006a:171-172).

However, because it is impossible for one to find their calling through a medium, Jane’s reliance on Rochester for self-actualisation proves illusive. This is specifically because the same rule applies to individual callings in Genesis 12:1: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee”. What this implies is that Jane’s dependence on Rochester in this way would lead to her idolising him and losing direction.

In fact, instead of broadening her horizons of knowledge and self-worth, Rochester reduces Jane to a stereotype. From their first encounter at the moor, Rochester treats Jane as a “good genii”, “sylph”, “elf”, or “angel” (Brontë, 2006a:59, 165, 282, 300) who is sometimes too supernatural to grasp but is an excellent employee. Rochester expects nothing but domestic servitude and purposefully conceals his immoral traits from Jane. During the preparation for their wedding, Rochester confesses his past iniquities to Jane and urges her to be his angel. Mr Rochester’s offer that she travels the world with him suits Jane’s desire to traverse beyond her limits and expand the scope of her experience. Nonetheless, the offer contravenes Jane’s deepest wish. Rochester promises Jane, “all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph’s foot shall step” (Brontë, 2006a:300). It is, however, obvious that what he wants is for Jane to cover up his sins with her purity and naivety: “[N]ow I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter.” (Brontë, 2006a:300) Jane retorts by stating that she is not an angel and declares, “I will be myself.” (Brontë, 2006a:300) Ironically, instead of asserting her individuality, the wedding preparations send her back to the marginal niche of society. Jane’s use of metaphors such as “an ape in a harlequin’s jacket”, “a jay in borrowed plumes”, and “the Grand Turk’s whole seraglio” to describe her condition suggests that she realises the potential threat Rochester’s request poses to her individuality (Brontë, 2006a:299, 310).

While Jane struggles against these threats to her authenticity, she also faces the threat of idolatry. In the novel, Brontë juxtaposes the image of the Biblical Isaac with Rochester. For instance, during a game of charades, Rochester acts as a bridegroom in the first act. The second act depicts the selection of Rebecca as Isaac's bride. During these two scenes, the image of the bachelor seeking a bride is united with Rebecca; Rochester plays the role of Isaac. Moreover, the reunion scene during Jane's visit to Gateshead closely resembles the first encounter between Isaac and Rebecca in the book of Genesis. In Genesis chapter 24, Isaac meets Rebecca in the field while he is meditating; as soon as she recognises him as her husband, Rebecca veils herself and the narration ends with the disclosure that Isaac finds comfort in Rebecca. Similarly, while Rochester is writing near the entrance on a summer evening, Jane sights him on her way back to Thornfield and immediately covers herself with a veil. As previously mentioned, Rochester also pesters Jane to be his comforter and the angel in his house. In this manner, Brontë draws a parallel between Rochester and Isaac. Although Isaac and Rebecca are one of the best-known couples in the Bible, Isaac is better known for his role as Abraham's offering and a Biblical symbol of renunciation. Likewise, if Jane really wants to keep their relationship, she should focus on God who led Rochester to her instead of focusing on him.

Protestantism affirms the importance of ordinary life, and marriage is an affirmed and hallowed part of ordinary life. Therefore, couples are mandated to glorify God and achieve His purpose through their union (Taylor, 1989: 226-227). The affirmation of ordinary life prioritises married life and equally sacralises conjugal affection. Hence, it is not surprising that Jane remonstrates a loveless marriage between Rochester and Miss Ingram. Considering Jane's humble status, a possible union between Rochester and Jane seems less proper than between him and Miss Ingram. However, due to Jane's Protestant belief in equality that regards the rich and the poor alike, she considers a loveless marriage between Rochester and Miss Ingram immoral. Of course, Jane reprehends Rochester: "I would scorn such a union: therefore, I am better than you." (Brontë, 2006a:293). She believes that she must love Rochester because they are akin to each other and not loving him would be against her nature. The only initial obstacle to their union is their difference in social status, but Jane's espousal of equality allows Rochester to propose to her.

Since the core affirmation of ordinary life involves the balance between asceticism and indulgence, Jane's acceptance of Rochester's proposal is significant because it exposes her to the dangers of bigamy and idolatry. Joshua (2002:83) explains this balancing of ordinary life as "[t]he central religious theme of the novel is the renouncing of idolatry [...] a secondary theme of the novel is that rejecting idolatry does not require a rejection of human relationships". This suggests that, although Protestant belief affirms married life and conjugal love, confounding means with end places the glory of God behind the ordinary life: it becomes a cardinal sin of worshipping an idol. The problem is, however, that Jane's deepening attraction to Rochester leads her to worship him

instead of glorifying God. Jane is also aware of the error of idolatry but fails to resist the error. She confesses “[h]e stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun [...] I had made an idol”. Rochester also senses that he is becoming an idol for Jane, but instead of cautioning her, he congratulates himself: “You wandered out of the fold to seek your shepherd, did you, Jane?” (Brontë, 2006a:321) Moreover, Rochester also expects a Messianic role from Jane by asking her to be his cure and solace as an instrument of God. Originally, the term “an angel in the house” in Victorian terms confers a saviour-like role on wives, as it was believed that a morally upright and unblemished wife in the domestic sphere could atone for the husband’s sins and public transgressions. Therefore, Rochester’s patriarchal expectations of Jane constitute a double threat for Jane because the burdensome role of false saviour is foisted on her, thereby ensuring her marginalisation and oppression. In this way, they reciprocate their idolisation of each other.

As a result, Rochester intrudes between Jane and God, and this spiritual eclipse causes Jane to lose her wits. When Jane’s disengaged reason becomes dysfunctional, she is unable to rationally evaluate her realities. She reverts to the enchanted world and experiences the superstitious fear peculiar to this world. She falls into incomprehensible “strange and anxious thought” and senses “hypochondriac foreboding” (Brontë, 2006a:320). Jane, who has previously aspired beyond her limitations, loses the power of vision: “I cannot see my prospects clearly to-night [...] everything in life seems unreal.” (Brontë, 2006a:321) She seems to drift away from disembeddedness and towards the marginalised role of women. Furthermore, in Rochester’s absence, Bertha sneaks into Jane’s room and shreds her wedding veil. Instead of responding from a place of reason, Jane interprets the incident as a supernatural “warning of disaster” (Brontë, 2006a:320). Instead of getting to the root of the incident by herself, Jane accepts Rochester’s vague and unsatisfactory explanation. Rochester describes Bertha as a “creature of [Jane’s] over-stimulated brain” (Brontë, 2006a:320). When she shows him the torn veil as evidence, he is embarrassed and dismisses the incident as half dream and half reality. He even decides what Jane imagined and what was real. Jane avers, “no one knew of or had seen the event but myself”, so it is illogical for Rochester to decide the dream and reality on her behalf (Brontë, 2006a:320). Jane should draw her own conclusion, rather than accepting Rochester’s rather weak offering. Moreover, given the fact that Jane sharply criticises Miss Ingram for not being genuine and never offering nor having an opinion of her own, it is disappointing that she degrades to the same state of ineptitude. In other words, Rochester acts as Jane’s mediator, like the priests in the pre-Reformation era, and the non-conforming Jane concedes willingly. Brontë conveys Jane’s disordered condition through the imagery of the absent moon:

As I looked up at them, the moon appeared momentarily in that part of the sky which filled their fissure; her disc was blood-red and half overcast; she seemed to throw on me one bewildered,

dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep drift of cloud [...] the moon shut herself wholly within her chamber, and drew close her curtain of dense cloud: the night grew dark; rain came driving fast on the gale.

'I wish he would come! I wish he would come!' I exclaimed, seized with hypochondriac foreboding (Brontë, 2006a:319-320).

In this passage, the moon is absent or only partially reveals herself in a confused state. In this novel, the moon symbolises feminine divine guidance and transcendental power that surpasses human reason. Therefore, the description of the moon buried underneath deep clouds symbolises Jane losing her spiritual guidance amidst her desire to idolise Rochester.

After the revelation of Rochester's bigamous plot, the wedding ceremony is cancelled and Jane retreats to the room to think. She reflects, "now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved—followed up and down where I was led or dragged—watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but *now, I thought*" (Brontë, 2006a:340). Jane tries to reappraise the situation with her disengaged and disciplined reason. Before the wedding, she dreamt meaningful dreams, but after losing control of herself and the power of disengaged reason, she can only sense the foreboding. However, after regaining her reason, she can discern the cause of the threat. In those dreams, Jane is strangled from behind by a little child. Many critics have interpreted this child variously as little Jane Eyre, Jane's self, Bertha, or the sin of self-dependence. It is more plausible, however, to read this child as Jane's idolised emotions because, after the wedding ceremony, Jane admits that her disordered love is dead. She likens this death to that of the firstborn sons of Egypt in the book of Exodus: "My hopes were all dead [...] such as, in one night, fell on all the first-born in the land of Egypt [...] I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's—which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle." (Brontë, 2006a:341) Here, Jane compares her idolised love for Rochester to the first-born sons of the Egyptians and bemoans its death. Jane also reveals to Rochester that she does not idolise him anymore: "I *do* love you [...] but I must not show or indulge the feeling." (Brontë, 2006a:350) What this implies is not a conflict of reason and emotion, but the attainment of balance in ordinary Christian life.

The most symbolic moment in this regard is the reverse wedding scene. Jane confirms her leaving Rochester by answering "I do" thrice, which indicates the reversal of wedding vows and an annulment of a bride's allegiance to her husband. At the same time, it signifies Jane's own renewal of her wedding vows to Jesus, who is the ultimate bridegroom of every Christian. Just like Peter who confessed his love for Jesus three times after his betrayal of Christ, Jane ends her idolisation of Rochester and regains her sense of disengaged reason.

What is noticeable in this situation is that Brontë does not present disengaged reason as the one and only solution. In fact, the propelling force behind Jane's transformation is not only her

disengaged reason, but also her intuition. The inner power in this sense does not refer to the supernatural intervention of God. It signifies the intuition that affects her rational decision and will. Clearly, Brontë's Romantic influences come to the fore here. For instance, she affirms the importance of disciplined ordinary life but also expects an "encounter with an indefinable other", such that definitely "could be situated within the traditions of Christianity" (Marsden, 2014:11). This resonates with the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher's assertion that "[r]eligious feeling begins in the pre-rational consciousness and is only later to be acted upon by the reason" (cited in Marsden, 2011:11). Therefore, the discipline at Lowood is essential for Jane's development but not enough to sustain her through the crisis she faces at Thornfield. Jane needs to find her inner power instead of dwelling on external stimulations such as sermons, lessons, customs, or teachings. She even pleads for some miraculous intervention from the external power, but the inner voice flatly declines: "No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it." (Brontë, 2006a:343)

Ultimately, with the guidance of her inner voice, Jane escapes the threats of re-embedding and idolatry. While regaining her individuality and concluding her separation from Rochester, he urges her to stay and be his mistress. This further demonstrates a deleterious aspect of his exclusively humanist nature because he tries to justify his immoral act with the idea that it is mutually beneficial. Rochester understands marriage as a contract; he sees his first marriage as a false contract that should be annulled because it is based on deceit. Therefore, he strives to retain his relationship with Jane. Contrary to his flawed logic, Jane insists on keeping the institution of marriage sacred as mandated by God. For her, marriage is not merely a contract, but a divine calling from God to which the rules of mutual benefit do not apply. Moreover, when Rochester asks Jane to remain his mistress as she has no one to fear offending by doing so, she firmly rejects with the declaration, "I care for myself [...] I will keep the law given by God." (Brontë, 2006a:365) Even though no one expects high moral standards from Jane, she declines his offer under divine guidance and the power of her inner convictions. By doing so, she becomes a priest for herself, discerning right from wrong and hallowing her own life. In addition, by refusing to marry Rochester while his previous marriage remains valid, Jane disentangles herself from him. Up to this point, Rochester compared Jane to a caged bird enclosed in Lowood and in need of maturity. However, Rochester is no different from Lowood; he foists the beautiful wedding veil upon Jane and "the strange, wraith-like apparel" displaces her Lowood attire (Brontë, 2006a:317). Taking the veil signifies becoming a nun, which, in reference to her cousin Eliza, Jane describes as being "walled up alive". In this sense, the wedding veil Rochester gives Jane symbolises his desire to keep her restricted. Interestingly, Bertha—who represents Jane's undisciplined self—tears up Rochester's wedding veil, thereby rebuffing his patriarchal tendencies. In the end, Jane's liberation does not stem from him, but from the inner voice—her own order—which is her own creed.

Again, this resonates with the modern free agent who is unconstrained by authority and follows the self-imposed law (Taylor, 2007:282).

In the last scene at Thornfield, Jane formulates her own creed from the notion of the maternal God who differs from the patriarchal God. Her image of the maternal God is of one who is strict but gentle and reveals herself through nature. It is important to note that the imagery of Mother Nature or the maternal God represented by nature is not exclusive to Brontë or women writers alone. In fact, numerous male Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Jean Jacques Rousseau recognised Mother Nature. However, Mary K. DeShazer (1986:17) argues that the extolment of the Romantic Mother Nature will remain a mere powerless muse as long as the creative power belongs to the son, the poet. However, as Gail Turley Houston (2013:13) rightly indicates, 19th century women writers, including Brontë, used “the Mother Nature as an emblem for a woman-centered mythology”. For example, in *Jane Eyre* Brontë depicts a maternal God who, unlike the punitive patriarchal God, is strict but guides Jane without intimidation:

I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling. I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come - watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disc. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—

'My daughter, flee temptation.'

'Mother, I will.' (Brontë, 2006a:367)

Different from her experience in the red room where she experienced a dreadful patriarchal God who punished her, Jane experiences a maternal God who urges her to avoid the sin. Repeatedly, Brontë first introduces the maternal God as God the fosterer in Betty's nursery song, then she portrays Him as the God of love in Helen's creed, and, finally, Jane's visions conjure a maternal God who guides her daughter from danger. Brontë develops her ideas of the maternal God further and more explicitly in *Shirley* through the myth of titanic Eve. I shall expatiate on this theme in the next chapter on *Shirley*.

After leaving Thornfield, Jane wanders in the heath and experiences the presence of God in nature. This is the most Romantic part of the novel, because she perceives the inefficacy of her reason and seeks for divine will amidst nature. Though she evades the threats before her and regains her reason, it proves to be nothing but “torture of thought” that wears her out. Jane

explains her experience of God's presence in nature "in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence" (Brontë, 2006a:373). In the sky, she senses the immanence of divine otherness that reason cannot define. Simon Marsden (2011:30) explains that, since the disenchantment brought the splitting of spirit from matter, Romanticism tries to relocate the divine to the world of things. In the Romantic imagination, nature is not a void space guided by the laws of nature, but a re-enchanted sphere where one can search for divine immanence. Therefore, Jane senses divine immanence and realises God's will regarding Rochester, not through reason, but by intuition:

Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky Way. Remembering what it was - what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light - I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits. Mr Rochester was safe: he was God's, and by God would he be guarded (Brontë, 2006a:373).

The moment of sublimity in the heath loosens Jane up, she becomes porous again and can acknowledge the supreme power of God. For the first time, she stops struggling and accepts her fate. At Gateshead and Lowood she could not understand why she suffered, and she did not perceive any reason in Helen's doctrine of endurance. While in the heath, she concludes, "[t]he burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled" (Brontë, 2006a:374). Clearly, this proclamation reiterates Helen's doctrine. The only difference is that, while Helen endures like a gnostic who believes that secular life is worthless and hopes only for the afterlife, Jane believes in "the responsibility fulfilled" in this life (Brontë, 2006a:374). Despite Brontë's romanticising nature as a site of divine immanence, Jane cannot live in the heath indefinitely, as the Protestant Jane could not be attuned to life as a hermit. Therefore, she must return to society and lead an ordinary life.

2.3.3.2 Marsh End, the error of judgement

After her departure from the heath, Jane arrives at the Moor House in Marsh End and meets St John, a Calvinist minister, who dedicates himself to the Reformation. Critics have compared him to Brocklehurst or Rochester, especially regarding his strong expression of Calvinist doctrines such as election, predestination, and reprobation. As Vejvoda (2003:244) rightly observes, St John and Mr Brocklehurst show how patriarchal religious authority oppresses women, appearing as accusers of Jane in order to control her. However, what distinguishes St John from Brocklehurst is the latter's hypocrisy, which stands in stark contrast with what he preaches. Similarly, Annika Mizel (2016:189) argues that St John demonstrates the extreme opposite of

Rochester's passionate indulgence, and that he embodies "the Victorian ideal of masculine self-denial" and absolute self-discipline. Considering the errors of the proper affirmation of ordinary life, St John soon proves as problematic to Jane as Rochester. Through his total confidence in his reason, self-control, and self-denial, he attempts to coerce Jane into a monkish renouncement of the world. Some critics understand the Moor House episode as Jane's emancipation from Christianity itself; however, it is more like the restoration of Jane's previously usurped spiritual authority.

St John depicts a self-confidence peculiar to the disenchanting, buffered modern self. Jane considers him a "pagan philosopher" and a deist because of his confidence in reason and restless ambition: "Reason, and not feeling, is my guide: my ambition is unlimited; my desire to rise higher, to do more than others, insatiable. I honour endurance, perseverance, industry, talent; because these are the means by which men achieve great ends and mount to lofty eminence." (Brontë, 2006a:432) He denies being deistic and argues that he believes in God. Nonetheless, Jane's intuition is not baseless, because divine intervention or transcendental events do not exist in his conversion story. In the novel, St John mentions two great ordeals he must contend with: the discordance between his nature and ordination, and the discordance between his calling as a missionary and his love for Rosamond. Unlike Jane, who overcomes her trials by divine help (which could also be grace), Brontë seems to suggest that what St John believes to be a spiritual breakthrough is actually a form of self-delusion, as made evident by his statement that:

God has given us, in a measure, the power to make our own fate; and when our energies seem to demand a sustenance they cannot get - when our will strains after a path we may not follow - we need neither starve from inanition, nor stand still in despair: we have but to seek another nourishment for the mind, as strong as the forbidden food it longed to taste - and perhaps purer; and to hew out for the adventurous foot a road as direct and broad as the one Fortune has blocked up against us, if rougher than it. (Brontë, 2006a:416)

Despite St John's self-differentiation from deist philosophers, the above excerpt explicitly demonstrates that what he really believes in is his willpower and rationality. In the process of his self-making, there is little mention of divine intervention. Even his vocation as a missionary is not recognised as a divine calling, but as the product of him pioneering his destiny. The only thing that differentiates him from deists is his involvement in mission work; still, the ambiguity of his goals makes it difficult to ascertain whether he truly is Godly or just fulfilling his religious ambitions. He is passionate about his mission work and ready to sacrifice himself for it. As Franklin (1995:467) points out, his endurance differs from Helen's "doctrine of endurance" for his is "more a matter of personal ambition". St John exemplifies how the rage for order of the Reformation leads to secularisation and acts as a catalyst for the pursuance of human prosperity through disciplined

instrumental reason. Summarily, St John is a typical representation of the modern buffered self who believes totally in his distanced instrumental reason.

Consequently, St John is problematic to Jane as he tries to be an illegitimate mediator for her and gives her false guidance that inescapably results in the monkish error of renouncing the world. In many ways, St John is a perfect representative of the Evangelical teachings and values upheld in the Victorian era, which positively encouraged women's role in the spiritual sphere, but also meticulously restricted it. In other words, St John values Jane from an instrumental perspective, yet he disallows her from attaining complete religious agency. He perceives a wife not as an equal partner in mission work like a curate, but as a useful tool that he is able to own exclusively: "I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death." (Brontë, 2006a:468) What St John's proposes in this sense is Jane's total subjection to him and an abandonment of her religious and individual agency.

St John's ascetic aspects are even exposed in his appearance. Jane's first impression of St John is:

Mr St John - sitting as still as one of the study pictures on the walls, keeping his eyes fixed on the page he perused, and his lips mutely sealed - was easy enough to examine. Had he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier. He was young - perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty - tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin (Brontë, 2006a:396).

Jane describes St John as having a sculpture-like appearance with a Greek face, a straight classic nose, and an Athenian mouth and chin which are related with Stoicism. Jane calls St John's self-denial "Christian stoicism," and alludes to him as "the sternest-seeming stoic" (Brontë, 2006a, 424, 429). Taylor (1989:219) differentiates between stoicism and Christian renouncement and argues that stoicism will deny a certain thing because it is worthless. In Christianity, that which is valuable is renounced with the belief in God's restoration in the end. In this regard, St John seems more likely a stoic than a Christian because he regards things other than his mission as trifles. He considers his calling as elevated above that of others, as his aim is to achieve a higher existence than ordinary people. To him, renouncement is one way of achieving his goal. Therefore, it is an easy choice for St John to sacrifice his life for mission work and he requires the same of Jane, but Jane rebuts him, "God did not give me my life to throw away." (Brontë, 2006a:477) There is a difference between the perceptions of St John and Jane, for she is not a stoic but a Christian, for whom every ordinary day is as precious as the daily toil of mission work or acts of martyrdom. She will not sacrifice her ordinary life for greater causes as St John does. The other problem is that the restraint required of men is slightly different from that expected of woman in Victorian society. The peculiarity of St John's stoicism is that the purpose of his renouncement is

ambiguous whether it is for God, for his ambition, or for both. In the article on Victorian restraint culture, Mizel (2016:177) insists that, in the Victorian era, a different kind of restraint was required of men and women. While the restraint of the male is an “active self-discipline” for aggressive self-mastery, that of woman is a more personal form of exercising obedience to authorities. Since the Victorian male’s self-restraint is closely connected to self-achievement, it is no wonder the goal of St John’s self-denial points to his own glory under the name of Jesus. He gives up on his love for Rosamond for his ambition, or vocation, of mission work. By this renouncement, he is able to step further to achieve his goal and celebrate himself: “Jane, the battle is fought and the victory won [...] The event of the conflict is decisive: my way is now clear; I thank God for it!” (Brontë, 2006a:454) However, his requirement that Jane renounces her own ideals for the sake of mission work will not contribute to her self-mastery, but lead to the elimination of herself:

I would cross oceans with him in that capacity; [...] but my heart and mind would be free [...]. There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came; and sentiments growing there fresh and sheltered, which his austerity could never blight, nor his measured warrior-march trample down. But as his wife - at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked - forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital - *this* would be unendurable (Brontë, 2006a:469-470).

That is why Jane refuses to be his wife, because she is aware that being his wife would mean endless self-effacement. Moreover, she realises that he does not require from her the same holy calling that he is answering to; her restraint would not serve a higher purpose but, as woman, would make her submissive to another human: “[I]n short, as a man, he would have wished to coerce me into obedience.” (Brontë, 2006a:472)

For Jane, St John becomes another patriarchal challenge after Rochester. While Rochester became her idol and required her to be a femme fatale, St John tries to play God and fashion her into an ascetic saint. Although their demands are contradictory, the ideology is identical. Griesinger (2008:51) insists that permitting a mere creation like St John to govern her instead of God would amount to idolatry on Jane’s part; loving Rochester more than God holds a similar implication. Moreover, St John proves to be hypocritical in his exclusive exertion of spiritual authority. For example, even though he is no stranger to Jane’s troubles—he went through the agony of discordance of propensities and principles himself—he treats her unfairly. He ignores Jane’s protests about the unsuitability of mission work to her nature and, claiming to be under divine guidance, forces her to serve him as a missionary’s wife: “I am not going out under human guidance, subject to the defective laws and erring control of my feeble fellow-worms: my king, my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-perfect.” (Brontë, 2006a:463) His inconsistency of character proffers a plausible hypothesis: women are inadequate to communicate directly with God by

themselves, so they need a mediator (preferably one that is male). As his wife-to-be, Jane's vocation should be subsumed under St John's calling, so he assumes the role of religious mediator in Jane's relationship with God, which is a violation of Protestant belief. Actually, in the context of early 19th century England, St John's claims were not strange at all, because "clergy wives were depicted as having a lifelong commitment to their husband's vocation" (Walker, 2010:100). In addition, because St John does not dignify Jane's spiritual agency, he rejects her alternative vocation of engaging in the mission field as a curator. More precisely, he refuses Jane's suggestion to become a sister or a clergyman like himself because he believes that it is highly improper for a single woman to be accompanied by a single man in evangelism. To him, marriage is the only way to prove a single woman's modesty and, since Jane is not his sister, it could lead to "injurious suspicions" against his reputation (Brontë, 2006a:470). Ultimately, he judges egoistically and rejects Jane's bold suggestion to be his curator because she is female and therefore incompetent. He suggests instead that she becomes a coadjutor of some missionary's wife. The implication of St John's argument here is that women cannot be equal clergy partners to men.

The exclusion of women from positions of religious authority is not unique to St John. This is because of the institutionalised social designation of the "group vocation of domesticity" (Melnik, 2015:120) for women and the severe prohibitions on women's ordination. In theological circles, the limits of Evangelicalism in the Victorian era allowed women to attain secondary positions without authority. This is problematic, as Jenkins (1995:22) argues that if women cannot be the spiritual mediator for themselves, they cannot attain positions of sacred authority, and "consequently can never effectively challenge patriarchal constraints implemented in the name of God". Although Evangelicalism sets a foundation of equality between men and women by admitting that they are equally called by God to engage in the reformation task, women were excluded from endeavours of true reformation Christianity such as interpreting the Bible, being ordained, or studying theology. Susan Starr Sered (2009:10) contends that patriarchal religion thrives on relegating women to specific symbolic roles. Therefore, they cannot become active agents who can "state one's religious needs freely, to image the divine and address the divine as one sees fit, to gather together openly with others of like mind in order to carry out rituals, and to choose freely which rituals and ceremonies to join or eschew" (Sered, 2009:10). In this regard, women were permitted to join the reform only through domestic channels, specifically as mothers educating the children. Jenkins (1995:22) criticises the attainment of religious authority through the position of motherhood or subjugated domesticity. She argues that it socially disallows women to empower themselves and is used as a mechanism for perpetuating patriarchal hierarchy. Consequently, women themselves erroneously propagate the well-known female symbol of the "an angel in the house", which pushes them further into the marginal niche.

Based on the foregoing, it would be subjective to read Jane's refusal of St John's proposal as her, and by extension Brontë's rejection of Christian values. Instead, it could be read as an active practice of their Protestant belief. This is because, as a Protestant, Jane refuses St John as mediator between herself and God and the loveless marriage he proposes. Thormählen (1999:50) indicates that Brontë is influenced by Thomas Arnold's abhorrence of priestly intercession between God and humans, and emphasises the need for laity's freedom in spiritual matters. Thormählen (1999:50) identifies this scene as "the most memorable example" showing Brontë's stance in that regard. When St John proposes to Jane, she states that she could devote her life but never to the vocation of being his wife. However, at first, Jane is confused because he sounds religious and portrays his hopes as God's plan for her; he warns her not to "forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God" (Brontë, 2006a:471). Fortunately, she recognises soon enough that St John is an imperfect creature. Jane points out the hypocrisy of his proposal because what he asks of her is to be his useful wife and not a loving partner: "Oh! I will give my heart to God,' I said. 'You do not want it.'" (Brontë, 2006a:468) Jane sees through his spiritual bullying with conviction, "if I saw good, I might resist" (Brontë, 2006a:469). Moreover, St John's intentions could be likened to Catholic dualism. This is because Catholics distinguish between the lives of the clergy and the laity, seeing the former as spiritually superior to the latter. The Catholic demarcation of spiritual roles where priests take charge of the spiritual work and laypeople engage in secular work is reflected in St John's arrogation of the spiritual discernment, sovereignty to himself, and delegation of labour to Jane. Jane's contention with St John is comparable to the Protestants' rage during the Reformation. She refuses St John's usurpation of her religious authority and the place of God in her life.

Another issue Jane strongly tackles is St John's perception of marriage. St John's idea of marriage as a utility service, in which the core value of a wife is measured in terms of her contributions or usefulness to his mission work, is flawed. St John sacrifices every sphere of his life except his ambition for his mission work and asks the same of Jane. For her, marriage is too sacred to be subjected to such renouncement. St John's request depicts another form of monkish error, the renouncement of worldly values. Based on her Protestant values, Jane considers a loveless marriage intolerable because marriage is an important commitment for laypeople through which they must glorify God. Jane remains consistent in her avowal that marriage should be based on mutual love. For example, while in Thornfield she scorns Rochester's mercenary union with Miss Ingram and here she derides St John's loveless proposal: "I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St John, and I scorn you when you offer it." (Brontë, 2006a:471)

Jane desires a spiritual breakthrough, and the only way to achieve this is to regain her religious agency. She shares her agony with her sisters, and even though it does not change her situation, she receives some sympathy from them. She tries to persuade St John with the alternative offer

of going to India with him as a co-worker and curator rather than his wife, but he bluntly refuses. The consequence of Jane's rebellion is dire. Just like Mrs Reed at Gateshead, St John tries to exclude her from the favours of Moor House. This mistreatment reinforces Jane's conviction of the necessity of a new theology for women. Within the limits of established patriarchal theology, sisterhood or the application of rational approach are ineffective; what Jane wants is to acquire her modern social imaginary. However, this proves extremely difficult because established patriarchal theology forces women, including Jane, to remain docile tools in the hands of men. Like many Reformation pioneers, she must find her own creed, one that no one ever taught her.

In the face of the intense pressures Jane faces from St John, she desperately seeks divine will and direction. Whilst several critics have made valid references to the importance of financial independence to Jane's quest for individuality, they often overlook the issue of her desire for spiritual independence. I argue, however, at least in the case of Jane, that not everything about the financial independence brings about positive outcomes:

In the calm with which you learnt you had become suddenly rich, I read a mind clear of the vice of Demas:—lucre had no undue power over you. In the resolute readiness with which you cut your wealth into four shares, keeping but one to yourself, and relinquishing the three others to the claim of abstract justice, I recognised a soul that revelled in the flame and excitement of sacrifice. (Brontë, 2006a:465)

St John convinces Jane that she is qualified enough to be a missionary's wife because of her attitude towards unexpected wealth. Ironically, her financial independence puts her spiritual independence at risk and triggers St John's forceful spiritual intervention. Jane's struggle to regain her spiritual authority in this part marks a watershed moment in her *bildung*.

I sincerely, deeply, fervently longed to do what was right; and only that. 'Show me, show me the path!' I entreated of Heaven [...] the room was full of moonlight. My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock, but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor, from which they were now summoned and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited while the flesh quivered on my bones.

'What have you heard? What do you see?' asked St John (Brontë, 2006a:483).

Jane describes the answer she seeks as one that would work on her senses to shake them out of lethargy. This implies the presence of the ability of religious communication within her in a state of torpor. Since Jane almost lost herself by yielding to St John's requests, it is possible to suggest that Jane's spiritual ability in need of an awakening is inactivated by the pressures of patriarchal Christianity. St John's question, "What have you heard? What do you see?" shows that he is now

excluded from Jane's religious experience and has no right to be her mediator (Brontë, 2006a:483). Brontë clearly affirms that Jane's spiritual experience is solely hers.:

I broke from St John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way - a different way to St John's, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet (Brontë, 2006a:484).

From this moment, Jane fully regains her religious agency and uses it actively. She orders St John to leave her and he does. Unlike St John's Calvinist mode of prayer that forces the so-called predetermined will of God on Jane and regulates her with the fear of retributive eternal punishment, Jane redefines her own way of prayer that connects her to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Jane re-examines her faith and seeks for a new language and new way of praying for herself. Jane's method of prayer, like the one in Philippians 4, is answered with divine peace that surpasses all human understanding.

Finally, Jane defines her own religious creed and repossesses her spiritual independence. Later, on her return to Rochester, she pronounces herself an independent woman. Her independence in this regard relates not only to the wealth she gains from her late uncle's inheritance, but also to the social relevance it brings, one that makes her a social member who can contribute mutual benefits. In dealing with women's independence, Brontë does not ignore the importance of economic independence or overestimate it as universal solution. The uncle's legacy proves an incentive to lead up to Jane's spiritual crisis. Rochester's wealth makes him arrogant, which hinders his spiritual growth. Therefore, rather than focusing on Jane's sudden inheritance, it would be better to consider the value of Jane's unrelenting quest for religious autonomy and self-sufficiency: Jane struggles to achieve economic independence while working as a teacher at Lowood and Morton School, and as a governess at Thornfield. In addition, she tells Rochester, "I am my own mistress", which means that she possesses spiritual individuality, the capacity to discern her way and the liberty to make her own choices (Brontë, 2006a:501). As a consequence, the independent Jane can no longer be subservient to any man. She only strives to communicate directly with God and to serve Him in her daily life.

The answer she receives in her search for divine direction is a calling that echoes from within her being, a literal calling of her name, "Jane! Jane! Jane!" (Brontë, 2006a:483) This calling bears a dual significance. First, it signifies the divine call to Jane to embody her independent spirit; she is called repeatedly to awaken from her spiritual inertia. This calling is reminiscent of the calling of

Samuel in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 3, young Samuel, under the guardianship of Eli the priest, was repeatedly called by God in his sleep and anointed as a prophet. This incident marked the beginning of a generational change to the corrupt household of Eli. As the last Judge, Samuel dissolved the era of Judges and began the new era of Kingship by anointing the first King, Saul. In this sense, the repeated calling of Jane's name can be understood not only as a call that liberates her from spiritual oppression and builds her independence, but also as the signalling of a new phase for women in theology, one that is devoid of the discriminatory characteristics of patriarchal Christianity.

Secondly, the calling could also symbolise a metaphysical calling from Rochester that transcends space through divine providence to displace St John's intention to make Jane his wife, and reunite her to himself. The spiritual connection and communication between Jane and Rochester are facilitated by their individual spiritual preparedness. For example, Jane is not just financially independent, but spiritually balanced. Rochester, on the other hand, is now humble, repented and has reconciled with God. Jane and Rochester, who used to idolise each other, are divinely reconnected as independent souls. In this way, Jane's previous protest against customs, convention, and immorality, as well as her insistence on spiritual equality is resolved. In this sense, the calling reiterates Jane's retort to St John that, if a vocation is divinely orchestrated, "will not their own hearts be the first to inform them of it?" (Brontë, 2006a:463).

This divine calling differs from St John's in the sense that his is grounded in his confidence in his reason and will, whereas the divine calling is an inexplicable, transcendental experience. Brontë recognises willpower, reason, and discipline as values of human ability but she acknowledges the possibility of transcendence as well in religious matters. In this novel, Brontë propounds a transcendental Christianity, which is criticised as irrational or fanatic from patriarchal institutional Christianity. As Franklin argues (1995:477), this scene demonstrates Brontë's "desire to forge a new, hybrid spirituality for herself and her time". Again, Brontë proffers Romantic discourse at the heath scene: "[I]t is the work of nature." (Brontë, 2006a:483) For Jane, nature is not only a place to acknowledge and appreciate God's divine design, but also a place to experience the providence of God of Mother Nature in a supernatural way. Irene Tayler (1990:174-175) notes that, although Jane seeks help from heaven, the response she receives is not from the masculine heaven but from feminine Nature. Earlier in the novel, Jane criticises St John's ignorance of "that peace of God which passeth all understanding", which indicates that Jane realises the limits of human reason and values transcendence (Brontë, 2006a:405). She does so because she experienced the consolation and peace that surpasses all human understanding from Mother Nature in the heath. Although some readers could label Jane's spiritual experience as heresy or superstition, Brontë solves this problem by highlighting Jane's spiritual authority. For example, Jane mentions there is a "spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate" and she expels it;

this seems a fulfilment of Jesus's promise to his disciples in the book of Mark 16:17, "in my name they shall cast out devils". By doing so, Brontë clearly sets a boundary between Jane's transcendent spiritual experience and accusations of superstition. Moreover, Brontë reinforces Jane's spiritual legitimacy by showing her experience as resonating with Rochester's repentance and conversion in the last chapter. By doing so, Jane's spiritual experience is affirmed as God's providence. As Colón (2015:252) asserts, this experience "validates her rebellion, frees her from the oppressive forms of Christianity that have threatened to consume her, and suggests that there is hope in an empowering Christianity that is separate from the versions represented by Mr Brocklehurst and St John".

2.3.3.3 Ferndean: the victory of plain Jane

The final stage of Jane's narrative at Ferndean Manor has been the subject of controversy. There are two main issues pertaining to the ending: first, how to read Jane's married life in the devastated Ferndean Manor with disabled Rochester? Second, what is the meaning of the closing of this novel with St John's heroic declaration, not Jane's? Even though at the end of the novel Jane writes that she married Rochester and lives happily in Ferndean Manor, several feminist critics argue that her marriage to the disabled Rochester makes the ending ambiguous. For example, Gilbert and Gubar (2000:369) suggest that it portrays the limit of Brontë's imagination, as she could not envisage a better vision of women's freedom. This line of argument is justifiable because what the marriage ending implies is that Jane disregards all her lifelong struggles to become an angel in the house and guardian of the domestic sphere, a role she previously abhorred. Heather Glen (2004:63) rightly argues that, in the ending, the Edenic union of Jane and Rochester replace Jane's "desperate struggle", the 'I' fades away unsatisfactorily while the 'we' retire happily. Similarly, the novels' end with St John's heroic confession perplexes even critics who focus on its religious aspects. Peter Allan Dale (1984:13) argues that Jane's exclusion from the final confession of faith reiterates the assumption that Jane's self-actualisation cannot go beyond romantic love.

In interpreting this ending, it is crucial to note that the ordinariness of the ending does not imply the inferiority or failure of this work. Rather, through Jane's story Brontë insists that ordinary people should strongly affirm the ordinary life. The adjective "plain", used repeatedly to describe Jane, conveys the same message. Jane is different from the natural-born, ambitious hero, St John, and Brontë does not value any of them higher than she does the other. When St John suggests a noble mission work to Jane, she postpones her decision because she is uncertain "whether [she] cannot be of greater use by remaining in it than by leaving it" (Brontë, 2006a:477). Here, Jane even envisages that her ordinary life in England might be greater than the mission work. Unlike St John who confesses his self-contradiction, "I, who preached contentment with a

humble lot, and justified the vocation even of hewers of wood and drawers of water in God's service" (Brontë, 2006a:410), Jane maintains her Protestant spirit with self-consistency. Therefore, the ending of the novel only seems persuasive after gaining a thorough understanding of Jane's Protestant stance. For Protestants, marriage is one of the most significant ways of glorifying God. In this sense, Jane's marriage is ideally a fulfilment, because it is not the result of Jane's love of this world, but the love of the godlike she finds in husband and family (Qualls, 1982:68).

Therefore, Jane's marriage is as precious a vocation as St John's missionary work. Considering his physical and spiritual condition, Rochester becomes humble and confesses. As Glen (2004:515) suggests, he "began to experience remorse, repentance, the wish for reconciliation to [his] Maker. The union of the independent Jane and the humble and converted Rochester presents the perfect ending to Jane's pilgrimage. Marsden (2011:245) defines this union as a restoration of the "Edenic union of man and woman". Similarly, Griesinger (2008:54) interprets Rochester's physical disability as a refinement by fire, a preparation of Jane's equal partner before God. The novel concludes with the letter from the yet "unmarried" missionary, St John. Echoing the contrast between "Reader, I married him" and "St John is unmarried", his resolute letter shows that Brontë wanted to depict Jane's ordinary married life to be as devotional as St John's. In the end, both characters would arrive in the same place, Heaven, and although the paths they trod might differ, the point remains that every path is invaluable. While the heroic missionary St John is pioneering the arid and unclaimed soil of India, the plain Jane cultivates Ferndean Manor. When Jane first arrives at Ferndean Manor, the bareness of the place shocks her and she asks, "Can there be life here?" In addition to the inhospitable and desolate atmosphere of the Manor, Jane is tasked with rehabilitating the crippled and sightless Rochester. Jane's 10-year toil in the marriage and presence in Ferndean Manor proves fruitful: Rochester's health and eyesight are restored, and they bear a son. Through her marriage, Jane transforms the lifeless Ferndean Manor into a place full of God's mercy and happiness.

Ever since the religious reading of *Jane Eyre* has been emphasized, there are some critics who also evaluate the ending of *Jane Eyre* in a positive light: Lamonica's (2003:94) evaluation of the ending affirms that Jane serves God in her own way, different to St John's. Franklin's (1995:481) reading of the ending of the novel reiterates the fact that Jane becomes the missionary of love by following her own vocation, just as St John strives to be the missionary of glorified death. For Jerome Beaty (1996:211), the lesson to be taken from the novel is that, although there may be diverse ways for different individuals, "each way is equally viable for the appropriate pilgrim". Furthermore, Marsden (2011:245) interprets the contrast between Jane and St John in the ending as the conflict between Jane's creative Edenic narrative and St John's eschatological narration. What these critics have in common is that they focus on the religious values that had been ignored

and draw positive evaluations. Since Brontë tries to suggest a new possibility of Christian theology for women other than the patriarchal, institutional Christianity in this work, it is plausible to read the ending as an inference to the necessity and directivity of new theological discourses that are represented by Jane.

This chapter examines how Brontë pursues women's modern social imaginary in *Jane Eyre*. Because Brontë opposed the unjust treatment of women by systems of patriarchal Christianity and describes the agony that women experience because of it, *Jane Eyre* has often been labelled an anti-Christian book. It is true that Jane relentlessly resists institutional Christianity as represented by the episodes with Brocklehurst and St John. It is also her Christian faith that enables her to resist the temptations of Rochester and St John's excessive demands. In this sense, *Jane Eyre* is about Jane's spiritual journey to overcome patriarchal Christianity, which forced women into the pre-Reformational position, submissive to the religious authority of men. Instead of a punitive God the father, Jane seeks for her own creed that affirms women's religious authority. Through several spiritual ordeals in Thornfield and Marsh End, Jane eventually becomes an independent individual that can be guided by God without any mediation by patriarchal authorities. This whole process is similar to the Reformation, as it returns the religious authority to the individual and the secularisation, for it suggests new social imaginary of spiritually independent women. In the next chapter, I discuss how the cautious proposal of a new creed in *Jane Eyre* is further explored in *Shirley*.

CHAPTER 3 SHIRLEY AND DIVERSE RELIGIOUS VOICES

3.1 Contextualisation

This chapter engages in a critical reading of *Shirley* (1849) as an exploration of diverse religious voices from different social positions. In the novel, Brontë criticises the complicity of the Victorian society and religion in the subjugation of women and advocates for the redefinition of women's positions in all spheres of society. Although Brontë highlights the need for a new understanding of Christianity for women through her subtle portrayal of the hypocrisy of institutional patriarchal Christianity in *Jane Eyre* (1847), in *Shirley* she is more audacious in tackling the problem of women's religious agency in institutional Christianity. This implies that she critiques her own church, the Church of England, and re-evaluates her own theological ideas, unique from hermeneutics and imaginations. For instance, the female image of God, which is manifested as Mother Nature or the moon in *Jane Eyre*, evolves into robust theological ideas such as the notion of the maternal God and prompts fresh understandings of Eve in *Shirley*. Since the Victorian age was an era replete with diverse religious voices from various social and political positions, the novel, *Shirley*, addresses complex social problems that include women's issues, class struggles, and conflicting issues of religion. Interestingly, adversarial characters contend against one another and try to exalt their own religious viewpoints as the ultimate truth. In this regard, the exploration of religion in *Shirley* does not posit a unified path to the universal truth. Rather, what Brontë tries to reveal is the complexity of Victorian Christianity, the prevailing religious pluralisation that could be the first step to solving the problem of women's subjugation in the Church.

One could argue that *Shirley* defies categorisation into a specific genre. For example, it could be read as a romance, since the main plot revolves around Caroline and Shirley's marriages. It could also be read as a social satire that critiques prevalent social problems of the time such as the Luddite movement, conflicts between the Anglican Church and dissenters, and the Napoleonic Wars. As much as the marriage story of Shirley and Caroline, *Shirley* represents the pains of the working class due to industrialisation and mechanisation, and conflicts between working class and bourgeois mill owners. With the class struggle, political conflict forms part of the main theme: the Anglican rector and Tory Helstone have several arguments with freethinker Mr Yorke and Jacobin Robert. With each conflict, characters insist on the religious legitimacy of their political opinions, and religious tension is intensified. The wealth of thematic issues explains why *Shirley* is criticized for its lack of unity. Fending off such criticisms, Perkin (2009:58) argues that *Shirley* was not the only novel plagued by the issue of critical inconsistencies of the 1840s, as England was experiencing rapid social changes at that time, which made it difficult for authors to accurately

depict society at certain key moments. Religion lies at the heart of the contention surrounding the novel.

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Christianity in England had declined due to religious fatigue that resulted from the Civil War. It is against this backdrop of the decline in Christianity, that the Wesleyan movement arose in 18th century England. *Shirley's* historical context of 19th century England was characterised by a mixture of varying positions on Christianity (Taylor, 2007:224-226, 322-323), with the plurality of denominations and movements such as Presbyterianism, Unitarianism, Anglicanism, the Oxford movement, the Methodism, and Roman Catholicism. Indeed, "Victorian England was not a religiously-homogeneous nation." (Clapp-Itnyre & Melnyk, 2015:3) The diversity inherent to Victorian religion remains a pervasive thematic concern in the Brontë novels. In the introduction of her book, *The Brontës and religion*, Marianne Thormählen (1999:2) highlights the complexity of Victorian religion which she inevitably has to unpack as a Brontë researcher. She indicates that the religious currents of the early Victorian society were rife with inconsistencies and contradictions, which continue to pose an issue for researchers.

Similarly, Melnyk pinpoints the erroneous assumptions about the unity of Victorian Christianity and affirms that such misconceptions remain an obstacle to the full understanding of Victorian religion. This is because, in reality, the Victorian era was an "era of religious controversy", in which numerous denominations coexisted and diverse beliefs and practices existed even within a single denomination (Melnyk, 2008:2). When considering the spiritual elements at the Haworth parsonage, the Brontës' openness to diverse Christian issues becomes more evident. Of their religious awareness Thormählen (1999:2) explains that, as daughters of a clergyman of the Church of England, the Brontës were "firmly rooted in Evangelicalism, freely associated and corresponded with Nonconformists". In this sense, the discussion of religion in the works of the Brontës constitutes what Thormählen refers to as a minefield for Brontë scholars. Felicia Gordon further asserts that this difficulty stems primarily from Brontë's own complexity and the shifting religious positions of the Victorian age (cited in Thormählen, 1999:3). Due to Charlotte Brontë's rebellion against the status quo in her religious life, it is impossible to cleanly categorise her faith (Thormählen, 1999:13). For Brontë, faith is not premised on fixed indicators, but the development of an inner self that grows through various hardships. In light of this contextualisation, this chapter explores Charlotte Brontë's theological ideas in *Shirley*. In doing so, I examine Brontë's portrayal of the religious turbulence of the Victorian era and the treatment of women's issues amid those diversities.

In *Shirley*, Brontë goes back almost 30 years in time to the year 1811, and chooses Yorkshire as the setting of the novel. The socio-political state of Yorkshire in the 1810s was fraught with diverse social, political, and religious conflicts: there were the Luddite movements and religious disputes

between the Church of England and the newly separated Methodist dissenters. In *Shirley*, Brontë explores how the women in the novel strive to assert their marginalised voices amid the unfavourable and stifling socio-political atmosphere. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë suggests that women can and should uphold their religious independency, clearly distinct from the dictates of male authorities. In *Shirley*, she urges independent Christian women to define their own creed since the existing creeds of established churches do not embrace women's religious needs but marginalise them. The crux of the discussion that follows pertains to the particularity of Brontë's definition of Christian belief in *Shirley*, compared to what was obtainable and practiced in the Church of England of the Victorian era.

3.2 *Shirley* as a book of Denominalisation

From the perspective of Charles Taylor's secularisation theory, the complexity of the Victorian era is best explained as the process of changing in people's conditions of belief. Taylor (2007:437) proffers an understanding of secularisation which does not merely equate secularisation with the decline of belief, but emphasises "a new placement" of the spiritual in individual and social life. In the enchanted world, ancient-régime model or baroque Catholic society, the church and the state are divinely interwoven, and all authorities obtain God's sanction as is exemplified in the case of the divine rights of kings. In this society, sacred places, times, actions and agents are precisely separated from the profane, and the political society is regarded as part of a higher, sacred plane (Taylor, 2007:446). What this means is that people embrace the ontic God as their society, and even the daily natural phenomena they experience are interpreted as acts of God. For example, people fear natural disasters, as they perceive it as manifestations of God's wrath or tricks of the devil. In this model, as in Plato's Idea theory, meaningfulness is located beyond this life. The focus of religion and the object of belief supersede the earthly, ordinary life but are of transcendent value and of a transcendental world; some power comes from outside this world. In the disenchanting Protestant societies, spiritual matters that characterise daily life are taken one step further. Nature is no longer regarded as a representation of God Himself, but as a metaphoric epitome of God's design or plan (Taylor, 2007:446-447).. Therefore, it remains the responsibility of humans to figure out God's will from the natural world and actualise their destinies through their daily efforts. This signifies a transformation in the goal of belief. As already explained in the previous chapter, the ordinary occupations of life are important aspects of Protestant belief; the separation between sacred and secular is denied by the Reformation and the ordinary is hallowed. In addition, the typical protestant zeal for the actualisation of the kingdom of God on earth through discipline accelerates the advent of "a purely self-sufficient humanism" or exclusive humanism (Taylor, 2007:19). Protestantism pursues transcendental values but approves human flourishing; Taylor (2007:18) identifies this stance as a "fundamental tension in Christianity" and explains that

“[f]lourishing is good, nevertheless seeking it is not our ultimate goal. But even where we renounce it, we re-affirm it, because we follow God’s will in being a channel for it to others, and ultimately to all”. The significance of this phenomenon is that it introduced a new type of fullness that could be achieved through innate human power. This later inspired exclusive humanism, which seeks human flourishing and denies transcendental values. In other words, self-sufficient humanism becomes a viable option for “the naïve religious faith” (Taylor, 2007:19).

In this respect, both worldviews hold disparate perceptions of the concept of Church. For instance, in the ancient-régime model, there is only one church, a national church “that of the whole society, to which everyone must belong” (Taylor, 2007:442). The Church was also “the essential definer” of one’s social place and the “guardian and articulator” of the organic society who abided by obligations or duties (Taylor, 2007:442). People could not imagine having divergent options other than those given by Church. However, from the late 18th century, with the changes from “the earlier naïve framework” to the reflective one, people started to reflectively choose their church (Taylor, 2007:14). The concept of a single, unified church was no longer the norm, as people could easily excogitate new options for themselves in religious matters. In this regard, Taylor (2007:450) explains that denomination

belongs to the age of Mobilization. It is not a divinely established body (though in another sense, the broader “church” may be seen as such), but something that we have to create—not just at our whim, but to fulfil the plan of God [...] this kind of spontaneously created affinity group offered unique advantages when migration, social change or class conflict rendered older, more inclusive churches in one way or another alien and forbidding for non-elites.

This implies that, due to the individual’s zeal for fulfilling God’s plan in their own life through their own endeavour, people no longer settle for spiritual guidance from established churches. Instead, their individual practice of belief in their daily lives constitute a form of denomination. When this notion of denomination is applied to a reading of *Shirley*, it successfully explains how Brontë seeks another creed for women without entirely betraying her beloved Church of England. It is obvious that the established Church of England could not satisfy Brontë’s lack of understanding of and consideration for women. Therefore, she tries to decipher her own breakthrough within the boundaries of the Church of England. Lawson (1989:730) argues that Brontë’s two female protagonists—middle-class ladies and members of the Church of England—suggest a movement of feminist dissent, which refuses “something intrinsic to Christianity in all of its sectarian varieties” and “undermines the conservative orthodoxy” of the established church. Although Brontë does not establish and name her own denomination, I want to focus on Taylor’s characterisation of denomination as a “spontaneously created affinity group” (2007:449-450). Even though Brontë does not launch a new denomination by herself, it constitutes her core thematic preoccupation in *Shirley* as her entire spiritual life hints at the potential for a new religious affinity group for women.

In her letters, it is clearly revealed that she explores the religious truth from a liberal view rather than a conservative orthodox view that insists there is only one way to seek truth and meaning: “I perceive myself that some light falls on earth from Heaven—that some rays from the shrine of truth pierce the darkness of this life and world; but they are few, faint, and scattered, and who without presumption can assert that he has found the only truth path upwards.” (Brontë, 2000:242) Brontë explores the possibility of a new interpretation of the Bible or a new theological idea for herself and women, which differs from that of the established church. In *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë intentionally accentuates women’s voices amongst the multitude of religious voices from diverse social positions of the era. In this sense, *Shirley* could aptly be called a book of denomination.

3.2.1 Brontë’s critique of the Anglican Church

Brontë begins *Shirley* by censuring the ancient-régime notion of a universal church that functions as the sole church for the whole society. For example, in the first chapter of *Shirley*, Brontë critiques the laxity of the Church of England:

Of late years, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England: they lie very thick on the hills; every parish has one or more of them; they are young enough to be very active, and ought to be doing a great deal of good. But not of late years are we about to speak; we are going back to the beginning of this century: late years - present years are dusty, sun-burnt, hot, arid; we will evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the mid-day in slumber and dream of dawn (Brontë, 2006b:5).

Here, Brontë mentions that the Pastoral Aid Society was “a direct result of the pressure for Church reform” (Thormählen, 1999:182), which was provoked by the spiritual recession in 18th century England. Brontë, however, deems the Pastoral Aid Society a failure because, even though numerous curates were sent to the parishes, like a brief rain shower, it proved futile, as the dustiness, sunburn, heat, and aridness of the period persisted. In this sense, neither the Church reform movement nor the Oxford movements were able to solve the prevalent spiritual thirst. She alludes to the failure caused by the lethargy of young curates who were indifferent about ministry work.

After describing the spiritual harshness of the 1840s, Brontë suggests readers should revert to the dream of the 1810s, the time of *Shirley*. Contrary to readers’ initial expectations, however, *Shirley* is not a dreamlike romantic escape from the spiritual barrenness that pervaded England in the 1840s. The narrator of the novel invites readers to evade the hottest mid-day and escape into the story, while concurrently warning readers not to expect a conventional romance: “If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken [...] Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning.” (Brontë, 2006b:5) Brontë informs readers from the onset that *Shirley* is not

merely a book with a romantic marriage plot that revolves around the love story of young couples. Rather, she suggests that it be read as a realistic depiction of the spiritual desolation of the Victorian period. By doing so, the reason for the convergence of three curates in the first chapter and the appearance of the other characters involved in the marriage plot much later in the novel, becomes logical. For instance, of the 37 chapters of the novel, Caroline only appears in the fifth chapter, Shirley in chapter 11, and Louise in chapter 23. In this sense, Susan Zlotnick (1991:283-284) insists that Brontë differentiates between the plotline for pleasure and the more ideologically engaging one, and identifies *Shirley* as containing more of the latter, one which explores the history of the women of England who were often forgotten. Zlotnick's assertion is insightful because, from the authorial viewpoint of Victorian men, memories of the past are romantic and nostalgic. This contrasts starkly with Victorian women's experiences, as they chronicle the past as "unromantic and unappealing, the past is seen as brutal and barbaric, a time of mind-numbing labour and painful social inequalities" (Zlotnick, 1991:283). This explains why Brontë moves the background of the novel to the past and insists that *Shirley* is not a romance, although Zlotnick ignores the religious aspects of Brontë's work in her criticism. I totally disagree with her erroneous conclusion that Brontë believes capitalist power would liberate women from the strictures of patriarchy. Thormählen (1999:175) also comments on the condition of the Victorian Anglican Church as "supposedly staid mid nineteenth century" while "full of horrors" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By shifting the background to the 1810s, Brontë highlights the unromantic past of women in the Church of England, which instigates her repugnance.

At the core of her censure, Brontë sharp-wittedly uses the characters of the three curates in the beginning of the novel to criticise the state of inertia in the Church of England. Instead of the abundant shower of Tractarian curates in 1840s, the narrator introduces three curates in the West Riding of Yorkshire district in the 1810s and sarcastically names them the "three rods of Aron". The three curates, Mr Donne, Mr Malone, and Mr Sweeting, demonstrate absolute passivity towards ministerial work, the parishioners, and theological issues. The three curates are "young enough to be very active, and ought to be doing a great deal of good", as those of the 1840s, but they perceive their ministerial duties as "dull work" (Brontë, 2006b:5-6). They do not only disregard their work, but they also disdain the value of labour. The three curates disrespect their landladies, especially because the landladies work by themselves without servants. They are only interested in satisfying their voracious appetites:

The curates had good appetites, and though the beef was 'tough,' they ate a great deal of it. They swallowed, too, a tolerable allowance of the 'flat beer,' while a dish of Yorkshire pudding, and two tureens of vegetables, disappeared like leaves before locusts. The cheese, too, received distinguished marks of their attention; and a 'spice-cake,' which followed by way of dessert, vanished like a vision, and was no more found. Its elegy was chanted in the kitchen by Abraham,

Mrs Gale's son and heir, a youth of six summers; he had reckoned upon the reversion thereof, and when his mother brought down the empty platter, he lifted up his voice and wept sore.

[...] While they sipped, they argued; not on politics, nor on philosophy, nor on literature—these topics were now as ever totally without interest for them—not even on theology, practical or doctrinal; but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves (Brontë, 2006b:8-9).

This scene is replete with humorous ironies. For example, although the narrator refers to the curates as three rods of Aron or Levites, their locust-like gluttony contradicts this reference as they sorely disappoint the six young servants who were eagerly waiting to feed off the leftovers in the kitchen. The allusion to the biblical expression, “he lifted up his voice and wept sore” further reinforces the irony in the scene. Brontë uses the portrayal of the negligent and voracious curates as a microcosm of the Church of England to indict clerics as the major culprits of the spiritual crisis in England.

Furthermore, Brontë juxtaposes the three curates' gathering with the attic of Whitsunday in the Bible to show their dereliction. The senior rector Mr Helstone pays a surprise visit to the curates and rebukes them as follows:

'What! Has the miracle of Pentecost been renewed? Have the cloven tongues come down again? Where are they? The sound filled the whole house just now. I heard the seventeen languages in full action: - Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; - every one of these must have had its representative in this room two minutes since.'

[...] 'What do I talk about the gift of tongues? Gift, indeed! I mistook the chapter, and book, and testament: - Gospel for law, Acts for Genesis, the city of Jerusalem for the plain of Shinar. It was no gift, but the confusion of tongues which has gabbled me deaf as a post. *You*, apostles? What!—you three? Certainly not: - three presumptuous Babylonish masons, neither more nor less!' (Brontë, 2006b:12).

Mr Helstone sarcastically compares the three curates with the apostles in *Acts*, remarking that, while the apostles in the bible were thought to be drunk when the Holy Spirit descended upon them, the curates truly were drunk on wine due to overindulgence. The biblical story of Whitsunday starts from Jesus' prophecy after his resurrection. Jesus ordered his eleven apostles and other followers to be the witnesses of Christ for all nations, only after they “have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke, 24:46-49). It was during their gathering in the attic in Jerusalem on Whitsunday (or the Pentecost), that they were empowered by the Holy Spirit and suddenly began to speak in diverse languages. This incident is significant because it marked the beginning of the Christian mission towards all nations, according to *Acts* Chapter 2. The disciples' glossolalia,

which was in fact a sign of their capability for the mission of Christ, was misconstrued by some as drunkenness. Brontë distinguishes the apostolic experience from that of the curates in the attic as they were not only spiritually ineffectual, but were also genuinely drunk. As Jesus said, spiritual empowerment is the only qualifying condition to become witnesses of the Gospel across the nations; clearly, the curates are disqualified in that sense. Interestingly, the young curates are not the only negligent ones. Mr Helstone visits the curates to send one of them to honour a supper engagement with the other senior Vicar, Boulton, in his stead. Just like the curates, the senior pastor also prefers to have sup than to visit a parishioner in need. In this sense, Brontë highlights the prevalence of pastoral lethargy in the Church of England as a whole and the widespread lassitude toward serious religious issues across the Church.

Through this juxtaposition, Brontë links the incompetence of clerics to the pertinent question of whether the Church of England is indeed qualified to take charge of all nations or not. Mr Helstone answers in the negative. After revoking the three curates' liberties, Mr Helstone orders Malone to go to Moore and guard him from imminent attacks triggered by Moore's adoption of machines in place of his workers:

I promised to send you as my substitute; for which, by-the-by, he did not thank me: he would much rather have had me than you, Peter. Should there be any real need of help, I shall join you: the mill-bell will give warning. Meantime, go [...] Malone, you are but a great floundering Saul after all, good only to lend your armour: out with your fire-arms, fetch your shillelagh; it is there—in the corner.' [...] Helstone smiled sardonically; Malone laughed a horse-laugh. He then replaced his arms, took his hat and cudgel, and saying that 'he never felt more in tune for a shindy in his life, and that he wished a score of greasy cloth-dressers might beat up Moore's quarters that night,' he made his exit; clearing the stairs at a stride or two, and making the house shake with the bang of the front-door behind him (Brontë, 2006b:17-18).

In this scene, Malone is armed with a pistol and a cudgel, and is commissioned to guard Moore. Again, unlike the apostles in Bible who were armed with unction of the Holy Spirit to proselytise all nations, Helstone and Malone are armed with weapons to protect Mr Moore, the mill owner, who denigrates desperate working people and refer to them as "greasy cloth-dressers" who should be smashed. The fact that Helstone and Malone seem to enjoy the use of violent measures to assuage the disgruntled workers, evinces the socio-political bias and class stratification that pervades not only the social life, but also the role of the clergy who explicitly disregard the labourers and lower-class parishioners. Brontë pinpoints that the Church of England's failure to embrace people of all social classes belies Jesus' commission of proselytising to all nations.

The narrowmindedness of the Anglican Church is also excoriated in the Whitsuntide feast scene because it describes the conflict between the Anglican Church and dissenters—those who deviate from the spirit of Whitsuntide, which celebrates the extension of the Christian mission to the entire

world. In the novel, parallel conflicts between Anglicans and dissenters, and mill owners and the working class, intensify around Whitsuntide. Even worse is the fact that the clergies of the Anglican Church aggravate rather than pacify the situation. The curates, Malone and Donne, only care about their marriages. They spend so much time wooing Shirley and Caroline that they overlook the social and religious conflict in their parish, paying heed to neither dissenters nor the Church of England. On his part, the senior rector, Helstone, fuels the conflict on and off the pulpit:

‘The Dissenting and Methodist schools, the Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyans, joined in unholy alliance, and turning purposely into this lane with the intention of obstructing our march and driving us back.’

[...] Helstone signed to his bands: they clashed out with all the power of brass. He desired them to play ‘Rule, Britannia,’ and ordered the children to join in vocally, which they did with enthusiastic spirit. The enemy was sung and stormed down; his psalm quelled: as far as noise went, he was conquered (Brontë, 2006b:288).

During the Sunday school parade, they meet dissenters in Royd-lane. While the dissenters protest with “the most dolorous of canticles”, Helstone counters it with the Rule Britannia. An absolutely patriotic Tory, Helstone seems more attuned to being a soldier than a clergyman. This explains why he prefers the use of brute force to manage the Luddite protests in his parish on the side of mill owners. Consequently, Helstone’s sermon becomes a “pungent speech” full of reproach, schism and anger from the battle of Royd-lane (Brontë, 2006b:302). By doing so, the Anglican Church during the Whitsuntide feast states its political position as Tory rather than to tolerate all parishioners.

Women are also marginalised as working class in the Church of England due to the chauvinist prejudices of the clergy. This issue is made evident through the clergies’ treatment of women in the novel; for instance, women were excluded from positions of authority and denied religious independence. Also, the three curates demonstrate interest in the young women in Church not for ministerial advancement, but to indulge their amorous intentions. To them, women are worthless if they are not wives; otherwise, they are placed on the same pedestal as children. When Caroline discusses becoming a governess with Mr Helstone, he angrily retorts that her idea is a silly feminine fancy and advises her to “put all crotchets out of your head and, run away and amuse yourself” (Brontë, 2006b:185). Caroline refutes by asking her uncle, “[w]hat with? My doll?”, to demonstrate that she is privy to the fact that he is infantilising her. This infantilisation of women in the novel is not unique to Caroline. On his first encounter with Shirley and Caroline, Helstone orders Shirley to recite the creeds and she obeys “like a child” (Brontë, 2006b:194). The scene is furthermore reminiscent of Mr Hall’s visit to the home of his former parishioners, the Williams. During his visit, Mr Hall orders the Williams’ children to stand up and recount the catechism (Brontë, 2006b:136). Although Shirley is the sole legitimate heiress of Fieldhead and a mature

and accomplished woman, in the Church she is treated as a plebeian child who should be a clergyman's "pupil in politics and religion" (Brontë, 2006b:190). However, not all the clergies in *Shirley* uphold patriarchal Christian ideals. One case in point is the vicar of Nunnery, Cyril Hall, who neither excludes the labour class nor marginalises the female characters. Thormählen (1999:202-203) identifies him as an ideal man of God who represents the Church of England at its very best: such that it does not require further reform. Ironically, the genuinely apostolic Mr Hall has the least influence on matters concerning the church polity and, as such, cannot instigate any form of transformation in the Church. The decision-making processes of the Church of England are overseen by other mainstream clergies such as Mr Helstone. Moreover, the exceptional Mr Hall is as alienated as Shirley and Caroline are from the war council led by Helstone (Perkin, 2009:63-64).

It is important to note that this misogynistic attitude is not limited to the clergy. It is a societal issue, as the marginalisation of women is also perpetuated by other male church members of the Church of England. For example, during an argument with Shirley and Caroline, Joe Scott furiously insists that he reserves "the right of private judgement", which is a typical Protestant idea that every individual has a right to interpret the Bible and to apply it:

'You allow the right of private judgement, I suppose, Joe?'

'My certy, that I do! I allow and claim it for every line of the holy Book.'

'Women may exercise it as well as men?'

'Nay: women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them.'

'Oh! Oh!' exclaimed both Shirley and Caroline.

'To be sure; no doubt on't,' persisted the stubborn overlooker (Brontë, 2006b:312).

The issue here is that, while Joe asserts his right of private judgement, he expressly contends that women are not allowed the same right or religious autonomy. In his mind, they must remain subsumed under the patriarchal authorities of their fathers, spiritual Fathers in the Church, or their husbands. Jenkins (1995:16) forthrightly criticises institutionalised religion—especially the Church of England—for its subjection of women to notions of "a pre-Reformation Relationship between women and God", where a male mediator is required to interpret the Word of God to women (like the Catholic fathers did), and argues that such practices perpetuate the patriarchal subjugation of women to inferior positions within the Church (1995:16-17). Jenkins' use of the specific phrase, "a pre-Reformation relationship", aptly highlights the major shift from the Reformation; one that is characterised by a limitless relationship between God and humans.

Unfortunately, the Church of England's deprivation of women's religious rights is based on erroneous misogynist theology. Patriarchal Christian ideology blames the first woman, Eve, for the fall of Man. As such, women have borne the brunt of Eve's transgressions and have been

deprived of their religious rights. For instance, Milton's *Paradise Lost*—which was a monumental text at the time—represents the archetypal woman, Eve, as the culprit of the Fall; Adam, the unsuspecting victim, did nothing wrong but to trust and love his wife. Moreover, Milton's theology posits a patriarchal order of creation that subjugates women to a state of unquestionable subordination to their husbands because Adam was created before Eve (Styler, 2007:73). In addition to Milton's interpretation of the creation story in the book of Genesis, the apostle Paul's epistles have been pivotal to the perpetuation of the misogynistic dogmas of patriarchal Christianity. For example, in 1 Timothy 2, Paul mandates that women remain silent in the churches: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (1 Timothy 2:11-14) This passage resonates with Milton's theology, because Paul also accuses Eve of transgression and absolves Adam of any wrongdoing. In the novel, Joe expresses this chauvinistic point of view when he tells Shirley and Caroline, "I think that women are a kittle and a forward generation." (Brontë, 2006b:311) He justifies his misogynistic beliefs by quoting an important verse from the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible: "for they are a very forward generation" (32:20). In the debate that ensues, he alludes to Milton's theology and Pauline verses to substantiate his misogynistic assertions against Shirley and Caroline: "Adam was not deceived; but the women, being deceived, was in the transgression." (Brontë, 2006b:311) It is evident that his devaluation of women stems from his patriarchal religious beliefs. In other words, by upholding patriarchal Christian ideologies, the Church of England perpetuates the denigration and relegation of women. So, when Joe finds Shirley and Caroline strolling outside the Church and not participating in the service, he condescendingly advises the ladies to return to the church and, symbolically, to conform to the stipulated images of women sanctioned by the patriarchal Church of England.

In a similar vein, the image of women in Victorian society is two-fold: women either live a sanctimonious life of sainthood, or are labelled as wicked. Joe encourages the women to go into the church, where they are expected to embody the Victorian image of the ideal woman: "half doll, half angel" as Shirley notices (Brontë, 2006b:333) . The image of the woman as an angel that is upheld by the Church entails self-sacrificial subservience, while the doll must be secured through the erasure of women's desire. The senior rector, Mr Helstone, is another misogynist character who regards women as "silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible", and wishes women "to be,—inferior" because to him, women are "toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away" (Brontë, 2006b:112). Needless to say, all these images converge into the famous Victorian myth of the angel in the house. In this context, the only proper public role women were permitted to perform, regardless of their capabilities, was charity work. Despite the Reformation's introduction of a new understanding of the value of ordinary life and its emphasis

on individual calling, when it came to women's issues, the Church continued to adhere to the old, pre-Reformational ideologies that excluded women from pursuing their own vocation. Jenkins (1995:82) points out that it is paradoxical that Shirley and Caroline are placed in a culture that "defines individual worth through one's vocation, women are not permitted to pursue a career".

Even if a woman chooses to live the life of saint, she is not assured that she would attain certain positions of leadership. As the historian Brian Heeney (1986:90) points out, women were excluded from leadership positions until the twentieth century, and, in whatever sphere women found themselves, they were often "subordinate, limited, and controlled everywhere by the authority of men". In this regard, Brontë portrays Miss Ainsley as an exemplar of the 'half doll, half angel' female character who satisfies the expectations of male authorities in the novel. She is even referred to as a saint for her lifelong self-giving charity, and her lack of critical thinking (especially towards the clerics) means that she would never complain about the way she is treated. Her "harmless infatuation" (Brontë, 2006b:255) with the clergy stems from her pre-Reformation viewpoint. She differentiates the sacred from the secular, and herself as layperson from clerics:

The clergy were sacred beings in Miss Ainsley's eyes: no matter what might be the insignificance of the individual, his station made him holy. The very curates—who, in their trivial arrogance, were hardly worthy to tie her patten-strings, or carry her cotton umbrella, or check woollen-shawl - she, in her pure, sincere enthusiasm, looked upon as sucking saints. No matter how clearly their little vices and enormous absurdities were pointed out to her, she could not see them: she was blind to ecclesiastical defects: the white surplice covered a multitude of sins (Brontë, 2006b:255).

What this implies is that even young, inexperienced curates exercised sacrosanct power over Miss Ainsley, despite their "ecclesiastical defects", merely because they were ordained and were therefore sacred beings. Although she reveres the curates as John the Baptist did Jesus, she is excluded from any form of leadership and devalued by all male leaders of the Church except Mr Hall. When Shirley launches the charity project, she appoints Miss Ainsley—who proves her capability by immediately outlining the budget—as the project principal. In fact, in the field of charity work in Briarfield, no one outperforms Miss Ainsley and, despite the fact that the initial fund for the project comes from Shirley, Mr Helstone is displeased and remarks that he is being led by "female manoeuvres" (Brontë, 2006b:258). This shows the diverse ways women were forced to remain in the marginal niche. Even after the Reformation, Christian women's status in the society remained static and largely unchanged.

Instead of any glorious spiritual achievement, what awaits the ideal woman at the end is a life of misery or a life of wickedness. The saintly, Jesus-like Miss Ainsley is the only role model Caroline could find, as a single woman, whose desires are removed or replaced by the quest for heaven. Just like Helen in *Jane Eyre*, Miss Ainsley only wishes for heaven, "wishing always to die", since

she has neither a charming life, friends or hope (Brontë, 2006b:369). Brontë detests the nun-like life, as she believes that it is akin to being buried alive. For Brontë, the romanticisation of the angel-like woman as the ideal is an elusive patriarchal deception that is employed to exploit women's vulnerability. Patriarchal Christianity stipulates domestic roles for women so the Church could not envisage any vision or vocation for women other than "house work and sewing" and the life of living death (Brontë, 2006b:370). From this patriarchal standpoint, under the ostensible excuse of heavenly rewards, spiritual or social rewards are postponed to the afterlife (Lorentzen, 2008:114). Though a large portion of church works—such as charity, Sunday school teaching, or visiting parishioners—were delegated to women, none of any female participants were paid, of course (Heeney, 1986:330). Moreover, their devotion work was not rewarded socially as well, which means it was impossible to lead women to their profession. In this circumstance, as Caroline rightly observes, young women had no choice but to desperately strive towards marriage: "The great wish—the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands." (Brontë, 2006b:370) Since "the matrimonial market is overstocked", young women are ready to get married by any possible means. Ultimately, the patriarchal myths of angel are belied by the reality of women who finally become mermaids: monstrous beings who try to tempt eligible young men. Women are forced to choose between two options: to live the exploited life of Minton's cook or the monstrous life of a mermaid.

In other words, the Church of England requires women to remain fixated in the pre-Reformative stage. In Taylor's term, Victorian women were required to fall behind the secularisation. Taylor explains that "two very different stances" coexist in our civilisation. On one end, people pursue "the transformation perspective", which sees human's highest goal as transcending beyond the flourishing in this world. On the other end, there is the view that the highest goal is human flourishing, "in a context of mutuality, pursuing each his/her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, in a society of mutual benefit" (Taylor, 2007:430-431). Secularisation leads "to a decline in the transformation perspective" by modernity (Taylor, 2007:431). So, while men actively searched for their new stance, pursued their vocations in public spheres, and enjoyed the achievements of a modern social imaginary, women were expected to remain stagnant; devoid of earthly transformation, and pursuing heavenly rewards only. I do not mean to say that any particular stance is better than others, but there was a historical, social, and ideological stream of modern secularisation from which women were intentionally barred. This explains why the female characters in *Shirley* are so frustrated with the lessons from the cleric or church. Brontë tackles this issue head on in the novel, even though her contemporary critics slated it for advancing 'ungodly discontent', as *Jane Eyre* did.

In this way, Brontë dismantles the mirage-like belief that the Anglican Church is the one and only national Church that must embrace all people. The established Church of England evidently failed in this respect because certain classes of people, such as poor labourers and women, were alienated from the Church, and the ideal image for women was exploitative and unfair. In fact, throughout the 19th century, England experienced a shift to the disenchanting Protestant setting. The division between the secular and sacred no longer applied, and “no one church can uniquely define and celebrate the link of the political society and divine providence” (Taylor, 2007:454). However, the existence of the national Anglican Church complicated the shift. As Taylor (2007:454-455) rightly observes: “[t]he British situation is muddled by the continued existence of national churches, which in one case (the Anglican Church) goes on assuming a ceremonial role, which in type and even in many of its ritual details is a legacy of its Catholic, mediaeval past”. The Church of England seemed to imitate the ceremonial aspects of the Catholic Church and tried to exercise power as a national Church, whereas society perceived the Church of England as one of many types of Churches, as Protestant reformed society usually did. Belief and faith became optional, as one could choose to either be a believer or a non-believer, and could also choose from a wide range of faiths listed by Helstone, including dissenter, Methodist, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, and Anglican. The ancient regime-model of a universal Church was replaced by the new era; people could choose the type of belief that aligned with their personal values, identities, or political views. By demonstrating the narrowmindedness of the Anglican Church at the beginning of the story, Brontë initiates a discussion about the multiplicity of belief systems in the Victorian era. Brontë’s unflattering love of the Church of England notwithstanding, she explicitly excoriates the Anglican Church’s discrimination against women. In line with this shift, she explores the possibility of a new type of belief within the boundaries of the Church of England, one that acknowledges the full humanity of women and affords them religious autonomy.

3.2.2 Emergent voices from women: Caroline’s audacious Hermeneutics

The search for new theological ideas for women necessitated women to be able to interpret the Bible for themselves. Since patriarchal Christianity justifies its suppression of women through Hermeneutics, such as that of Milton’s Eve, women need their own, woman-affirming way of interpreting the Bible. Numerous denominations with varied theological, political, and social approaches to Christianity existed in the 18th century. This phenomenon—known as denominationalisation—constitutes an integral aspect of secularisation, which means an explosive increase in new positions. Taylor (2007:424) defines this phenomenon as the nova effect in Christianity, with “some believing, some unbelieving, some hard to classify”. Until the Victorian era, the Bible was the touchstone for setting one’s religious position. However, with the proliferation of Evangelicalism in both the Anglican church and dissenters, Evangelicalism superseded Luther’s sola scriptura spirit, which solely acknowledges the authority of the Bible,

whereas the Oxford movement or high church movements revisited the authority of the liturgy (Scotland, 2004:3).

Several critics have indicated the importance of hermeneutics in *Shirley*. For example, Jenkins rightly notes that, contrary to the experiences of many Victorian men, Brontë's crisis does not stem from doubting God, but from the conflict between the religious and cultural constraints that limit the maximisation of her talents. Jenkins contends that Brontë isolates the stifling ideologies of patriarchy from Christianity and, by doing so, she espouses "a radical Protestantism" (1995:73) that encourages women to interpret the Bible for themselves. However, I disagree with Jenkins' (1995:88-89) observation that the novel's marriage ending acts as an anti-romance and a mere subversive device against patriarchy, as this dismisses the fact that, for Protestants, marriage is as valid a vocation as one's occupation. Similarly, Houston (2013: 2-3, 29, 35-38) maintains that Brontë denounces patriarchal hermeneutics in *Shirley*, as she tries to replace the patriarchal God with a pagan goddess, Mother Nature. Houston's book, entitled *Victorian women writers, radical grandmothers, and the gendering of God* (2013) is a vital resource in this regard because of its detailed representation of Shirley's audacious vision of Eve. However, his interpretation opposes patriarchal Christianity with a feminist heretical goddess. By failing to separate patriarchy from Christianity, Houston misreads *Shirley* and ignores the extent to which Brontë's Christian faith shaped her convictions. In this respect, I agree with Thormählen (1999:7), who warns critics against the error of regarding Christianity "as inseparable from its earthly organisation and the views and practices of its members". In a similar vein, Melnyk observes that it is a common feminist error to consider religion as "part of the patriarchal structure that control women" and faith as "an internalization of patriarchal religious precept" (Melnyk, 2015:117). The argument here is that Brontë specifically abhors 'patriarchal Christianity' because it is a hindrance to her religious exploration as an independent Christian. Styler's (2010:69) research is a treasure-trove of information relevant to the discussion of Victorian Christian feminism that interprets biblical women characters "using the genre of collective biography". In this book, Styler notes that, besides Brontë, many Victorian women experienced marginalisation in the Church and made a breakthrough by interpreting the Bible from their own perspective.

In *Shirley*, Brontë (2006b) shows her critical mind on patriarchal Christianity, which allows men's exclusive interpretation of the Bible for their private purposes. *Shirley* is set in the age of denominationalisation, where people could express their individual religious aspirations and divergent interests, albeit a privilege exclusively for men. This explains the opposing interpretations of Exodus by the Tory, Mr Helstone, and the Republican, Mr Yorke:

"The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore;" yea, "the depths covered them, they sank to the bottom as a stone." The

right hand of the Lord became glorious in power; the right hand of the Lord dashed in pieces the enemy!'

'You are all right; only you forget the true parallel: France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses. Europe, with her old over-gorged empires and rotten dynasties, is corrupt Egypt; gallant France is the Twelve Tribes, and her fresh and vigorous Usurper the Shepherd of Horeb.'

'I scorn to answer you' (Brontë, 2006b:38).

While Mr Helstone understands England as Israel and Wellington as Moses, Mr Yorke avers that "France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses." (Brontë, 2006b:38) Similarly, during a debate on the subject of the Luddites, Tory and formalist Mr Helstone describe the social conditions as one in which "the masters are aggrieved, the workpeople unreasonable". He criticises the Luddite movement as "blasphemy against God and the king" a deadly sin, that warranted the "judgement to come" (Brontë, 2006b:52-53). On the contrary, the free thinker Mr Yorke regards the "corrupt, base, and bloody' government" as the main culprit of the prevailing social problems and he anticipates that "the scoundrels who seemed triumphant in this world" would pay the price for their greedy sins (Brontë, 2006b:53). So, even though both Mr Helstone and Mr Yorke base their political convictions on Biblical interpretations and reach the same conclusion about the Last Judgement, their perceptions of the accused at the Last Judgement are the rebellious labourers and the privileged respectively.

Male characters are strangely convinced of their interpretation. Despite the incompatibility of their Bible interpretations, the two male characters are strongly convinced of the logic of their interpretations, a privilege that is outrightly denied to women. Regardless of denomination, the male characters reiterate the influence of Victorian Evangelicalism that upholds the idea of the priesthood of the believer, thus each of them freely exercise their religious agency. During the argument, the layman, Mr Yorke, justifies his Bible interpretation—which contradicts that of Pastor Helstone—by emphatically stating, "I can think what I please" not only about matters of politics but also about religion (Brontë, 2006b:38). Similarly, during the debate between Shirley, Caroline, and Joe, Joe expresses conviction of his biblical interpretations and private judgements by firmly asserting, "I allow and claim it for every line of the holy Book." (Brontë, 2006b:312) When Rev. Moses Barraclough persuades Moore not to adopt machines at his mill, he mentions Providence. This is such a pathetic scene, because right after he mentions that Providence led him, he begs Moore for "the smallest contribution", which is obviously money for drinking (Brontë, 2006b:131). Jenkins (1995:75) rightly observes that male authorities often misappropriate the Bible and that their hermeneutics are often contradictory, how "Helstone (the pro-war Anglican), Moore (the antiwar industrialist), and Noah (the leveling Evangelist) *all* claim sacred intent for their mutually incompatible agendas."

Even though the Victorian Evangelicalism extolled women as the guardians of morality and piety, their significance was restricted to the confines of the private sphere. Because of this relegation to 'the boundary of private sphere', women's spiritual autonomy was invalidated. The Victorian romanticisation of women's domesticity simply denotes a return to the pre-Reformational, two-dimensional division of sacred/secular, which is decided by one's religious status as priest or layperson. At first, people wanted to accomplish God's plan in the public sphere through the achievement of their vocation. In other words, reforming the society was God's will. Ironically, this zeal for the reformation resulted in the dependence on human capacity instead of God, so the goal shifted from following God to human flourishing (Taylor, 2007:84). The division between the sacred and secular shifted to gendered divisions. With the proliferation of secularisation, the determination to fulfil God's will was relegated from the public to the private sphere. In addition, Victorian Evangelicalism instigated a new order in Victorian society, which was "family centred, and often involved identifying the male as the source of potential disruption, and the female as victim and guardian of this ordered domestic space" (Taylor, 2007:451). Barbara Taylor expatiates on this phenomenon:

A morality more convenient and more contradictory would be hard to imagine. Having confined all those virtues inappropriate within the stock market or the boardroom to the hearts of their womenfolk, middle-class men were then left free to indulge in all those unfortunate vices necessary for successful bourgeois enterprise. The fate of women and Christian selflessness having been thus bound together, the dependency and social powerlessness of the first become a virtual guarantee of the social irrelevance of the second: once God had settled into the parlour, Mammon had free range in public life—and the exclusion of women from virtually all areas of public existence guaranteed that this tidy division was maintained (Taylor, 1983:126).

Ultimately, the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house, together with the disparate ideologies, seemed to present "an exalted vision of middle-class women as the 'instrument (under God) for the regeneration of mankind'", but at the same time, confined women "to exerting influence from a domestic base" (Midgley, 2010:142). Brontë problematises this issue through the character of Caroline. While her mentor, Miss Hortense, believes that women should concern themselves with domestic duties such as mending stockings, Caroline seldom does so as a "penance for the expiation of her sins" (Brontë, 2006b:79). Brontë tries to highlight the fixations of women in pre-Reformation stage by referring to the concepts of penance or expiation, which originate from the Catholic doctrines, especially because such doctrines were no longer practised by Protestants after the Reformation. For Protestants, justification for humankind comes from faith not deeds. Hence, the reference to the doctrines of the pre-Reformation stage is Brontë's subtle way of decrying the retrogressive confinement of women to the private sphere saddled to a life of domesticity—a serious theological mistake that clearly violates the foundational principles of the Protestant faith.

Caroline deviates from the image of the Victorian ideal. Robert Moore's older sister, Hortense, accurately notes that Caroline is "not sufficiently girlish and submissive" (Brontë, 2006b:65). As a woman and the niece of a rector, Caroline is constantly requested to complete onerous chores such as stocking-mending or crafts-making that are deemed the "duties of woman" (Brontë, 2006b:79). However, she perceives these traditional women's duties as self-effacing tasks because they do not bring financial rewards or personal satisfaction. When Robert asks Caroline what her life aspirations are, she expresses dissatisfaction with her status in life and an urgent desire to find some worthy role in the world. She acknowledges that her life, like that of numerous Victorian women, is encumbered by patriarchal dependency: first on her father or guardian—her uncle Mr Helstone—and, later on, her husband. Interestingly, the relationship Caroline dreams for herself and Robert is an unconventional one. She wishes she were a boy, an apprentice to Robert, so she could assist him to realise his dream of becoming rich. While women are traditionally expected to support their husbands from the confines of the home, Caroline desires to assist her lover in the public sphere as an apprentice. From this perspective, Caroline's point of view seems unusual, but one can hardly argue that she exudes radical feminist awareness of expected societal roles from the beginning. This is because her dream of being Robert's apprentice instead of a housewife hinges primarily on her desire to please Robert rather than her personal quest for self-development. Moreover, she aspires to be an excellent wife to Robert and is fully acceptant of assuming the role of a typical angel in the house: "I would tell him of his fault (for he has few faults), but I would study his comfort, and cherish him, and do my best to make him happy." (Brontë, 2006b:96) This shows that she is not entirely liberated from the Victorian ideals for womanhood and represses her inner turmoil for an alternative existence.

Brontë suggests that the only solution to Caroline's agony is for her to develop through her painful experiences. Caroline's situation is not so different from that of the imprisoned girl in the French poem she is required to memorise and recite. Both the girl in the poem and Caroline are on a lifelong path of self-actualisation and want to achieve it until the end. However, they are both imprisoned by religious and societal strictures that force them to be infantilised, undermined, and marginalised from the new social imaginary. This indicates that Brontë is distinctly aware of the differing enchanted and disenchanting worlds:

Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old; and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced. Before that time, we sit listening to a tale, a marvellous fiction; delightful sometimes, and sad sometimes; almost always unreal. Before that time, our world is heroic; its inhabitants half-divine or semi-demon; its scenes are dream-scenes: darker woods, and stranger hills; brighter skies, more dangerous waters; sweeter flowers, more tempting fruits; wider plains, drearier deserts, sunnier fields than are found in nature, overspread our enchanted globe. What a moon we gaze on before that time! How the trembling of our hearts at her aspect bears witness to its unutterable beauty! As to our sun, it is a burning heaven—the world of gods.

At that time—at eighteen, drawing near the confines of illusive, void dreams, Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front. These shores are yet distant: they look so blue, soft, gentle, we long to reach them. In sunshine we see a greenness beneath the azure, as of spring meadows; we catch glimpses of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters. Could we but reach this land, we think to hunger and thirst no more; whereas many a wilderness, and often the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as Death, is to be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. Every joy that life gives must be earned ere it is secured; and how hardly earned, those only know who have wrestled for great prizes. The heart's blood must gem with red beads the brow of the combatant, before the wreath of victory rustles over it (Brontë, 2006b:95).

Brontë depicts the stage of puerility as an enchanted and innocent period. Women are expected to remain as innocent as angels at this stage. In this enchanted world, gods and elves are alive like “a marvellous fiction”, and they are everywhere in the wood, hills, skies, waters, and flowers, which means that this world is full of spirits, and they are “already outside of us, prior to contact” (Taylor, 2007:34). The essence of each being is given by God, also the proper role and status – the meaning is not given based on one’s reaction. In other words, this heroic world represents the world of romance and the world of the ancient-régime. From the beginning of the novel, however, Brontë warns that the story will be as “unromantic as Monday morning” (Brontë, 2006b:5). Therefore, what Brontë expects from Caroline is the stark realisation that the world of Reality can only be reached through distressing experiences. Using the biblical expression culled from the runner metaphor of 1 Corinthians 9, which stresses the importance of hard work, temperance, and submission for winning the Godly rewards, Brontë links the disenchantment to divine orders from God, which every Christian should strive to fulfil. To achieve her own goals, she must be disenchanted and move on to the world of reality.

Therefore, Caroline interrogates patriarchal hermeneutics and tries to define her own interpretation of the Bible, just as her Protestant forebears did. She rebuts Joe’s misogynistic Milton theology, and argues that he arrives at his interpretations because he “read it in his own fashion” (Brontë, 2006b:312). By doing so, Caroline highlights the weakness of patriarchal hermeneutics. As a rebuttal, Joe cites the Pauline epistle that advises women to be silence in the church, to which Caroline boldly retorts:

'And what is *your* reading, Miss Helstone, o' these words o' St Paul's?'

'Hem! I - I account for them in this way: he wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn; to make it say, "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection;" - "it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace," and so on.'

'That will n't wash, Miss.'

'I dare say it will. My notions are dyed in faster colours than yours, Joe. Mr Scott, you are a thoroughly dogmatical person, and always were (Brontë, 2006b:312).

Caroline makes two assertions here: firstly, the patriarchal hermeneutics is founded on a fallacious generalisation of the Pauline epistle. Secondly, before examining the hermeneutics, she questions the credibility of the translations. Arguably, the misogynistic hermeneutics were primarily based on mistranslations of ancient biblical texts, and Paul's original message might have stated the complete opposite of what was translated. Caroline agitates for the dismantling of misogynistic theology and argues that women should be allowed to speak, teach, and exercise religious authority.

Caroline's two arguments do not challenge the divinity of God or Biblical authority; rather they assert the possibility of human imperfection. Like Brontë, Caroline has been a parsonage resident throughout her entire life and is therefore privy to the fallibility of ministers. That explains why Brontë insists on her directing her censures towards the clergy from the beginning of the book; but, despite taking this precautionary measure, Brontë continues to receive harsh criticisms. For example, her publishers W.S. Williams and George Smith objected to the publication of the first chapter for its anti-clericalism, and George Henry Lewes expressed his discomfort at the first chapter on curates (Peters, 1975:257). Brontë (2007:132), however, declined and averred that "[t]he curates and their ongoings are merely photographed from the life", from her acquaintances in Haworth and nearby parishes (Gaskell, 1997:298). To her, excoriating the problematic aspects of the Church of England does not constitute blasphemy. This anecdote implies that Brontë had remarkable insights into religious matters and inserted the thematic issue of religious deterioration from the beginning of her story, with the specific intention of critiquing patriarchal Christianity. Jenkins (1995:69) argues that Brontë's lifelong marginalisation in the parsonage fortified her belief in God, hence she was not delusive "about the infallibility of the Church or its clerics" and could "distinguish between the Church and God, between patriarchal interest and sacred intentions". Brontë and her character, Caroline, are aware of the fact that highlighting the imperfection of patriarchal authorities of the church does not result in apostasy. Therefore, while Gilbert and Gubar opine that Brontë's female characters "cannot escape the confinement of biblical myth" (2000:386), they ignore the fact that Brontë does not intend to escape from the biblical myth, but only seeks to dismantle the patriarchal hermeneutics and to define a new one for herself. Rather than discarding the Bible in its entirety, Brontë prefers to emasculate "elective affinity" that patriarchal religious authorities "'elect' out of a text that element for which they have a 'natural affinity' and which sits well with their pre-conceived notions or presuppositions" despite "recognizing that there clearly were female leaders in the Early Church" (Scotland, 2018:36).

With regard to women, Caroline proffers her own interpretation of the Bible passage Proverbs 31—the chapter about the virtuous wife. Interestingly, this passage is often wielded by patriarchal theology to suppress women. The patriarchal interpretation commends the virtuous wife's industriousness and overlooks the fact that she is overlaboured by familial commitments and responsibilities, toiling restlessly from dawn till night. Caroline is preoccupied with her life's trajectory because she realises that the endless house chores are nothing but "a grievous burden" so much so that "she would much like to put them in the fire" (Brontë, 2006b:79). Upon this reading, the only two options available to Caroline are to either assume the role of an angel in the house as a married woman, or to self-sacrificingly serve her parish like Miss Ainley. Rather than comply with these patriarchal hermeneutics, she analyses the bible verses in her own way:

The "virtuous woman," again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; she "got breakfast over" (as Mrs Sykes says) before one o'clock a.m.; but *she* had something more to do than spin and give out portions: she was a manufacturer - she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist - she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what the matrons hereabouts call "a clever woman." On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; but I don't believe either Mr Armitage or Mr Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain: yet, I like her. "Strength and honour were her clothing: the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness: her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her" (Brontë, 2006b:371).

Caroline intentionally focuses on the roles the virtuous woman plays outside of her engagement with house chores, the aspects that are often intentionally or indifferently omitted by patriarchal theology. She realises that the virtuous woman is not only a good wife and mother; she is also a manufacturer, an agriculturist, and a manager. In similar way, the daughter of Mr Yorke, Rose Yorke, loathes Caroline's death-like life in Briarfield Rectory and urges her to change her situation. In Rose's opinion, a life of domesticity is a waste of God-given talents and a sin against God who gives such talents to women to fulfil a purpose. She validates her argument by quoting Jesus's parable about talents from the book of Matthew and justifies the need for her own profession in the public sphere: "[I]f my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more." (Brontë, 2006b:378) By proffering this interpretation, Brontë urges women to subvert the patriarchal version of the ideal woman. Evidently, the patriarchal model is founded upon half-baked hermeneutics and the scope of women's experiences should be extended beyond the domestic sphere. Lorentzen (2008:116) commends women's re-reading of the Scriptures as "an alternative literacy" that enhances women's own narratives and insists that, through this "new discursive practice", women can realise that traditional hermeneutics are not the natural truth but just a "dominant ideology as a created discourse itself"..

In this respect, Caroline dauntlessly attempts to interpret and apply the Bible to her own lived experiences. She refuses to transfer her religious autonomy to patriarchal religious leaders, and she bluntly rebuts the misogynistic theological ideas of Milton's theology and the biased interpretations of Paul's epistles and the book of Proverbs. Caroline interrogates women's exclusion from the field of hermeneutics—including the study of theology, preaching, and poetry—and asserts that she is capable of independence of thought:

'Who told you this, I ask? Did Moore?'

'Why should anybody have told me? Have I not an instinct? Can I not divine by analogy? Moore never talked to me either about Cowper, or Rousseau, or love. The voice we hear in solitude told me all I know on these subjects' (Brontë, 2006b:215).

Just like Helen and Jane, who in *Jane Eyre* strove to define their own creed that no one taught them, Caroline strives to decipher her own interpretation of the Bible and devise a theology that acknowledges the full humanity of women and their ability to think independently. In her study of the Brontës and their religious temper, Thormählen (1999:42) refuses to classify them into specific denominations such as the Broad church or Evangelicalism. Instead, she asserts that they exude "a considerable boldness in their explorations" of the tenets of Christianity. I strongly agree with Thormählen in this regard because, through her character Caroline, Brontë looks beyond the chauvinistic limitations placed before women. She overtly rejects patriarchal hermeneutics, and seeks to define her own denomination, one that would satisfy her individual religious needs.

3.2.3 Shirley's vision of a maternal God and female genius

While Caroline explores her own creed through an intrinsic interpretation of the Bible, Shirley redefines her vision of the maternal God and authors the new story of Eva. In other words, Caroline suggests a new type of hermeneutics for women within the boundaries of Protestant Christianity and advocates for the improvement of women's positions in the Church. Conversely, instead of re-reading the Bible with a new lens, Shirley prefers to redefine the entire creation story from a woman's perspective, especially because it serves as the basis for the discrimination of women. This re-narration explains the antagonism by some Brontë scholars towards what they identify as the subversiveness of *Shirley* towards patriarchal Christianity and the claim of her depicting a feminist pagan goddess. As previously argued concerning Caroline's character, I aver that Brontë is not analyzing Christianity itself; instead, she is specifically censorious of the oppressive principles of patriarchal Christian ideology. Thormählen (1999:68-69) also dismisses such accusatory readings, as Brontë neither conflates Nature and God, nor refers to Nature as a Mother; she argues that these ideas of nature as divinity or feminine have been passed on through the ages and even "Christian poets through the centuries have regarded Nature as a manifestation of God". The argument here is that, if Milton's *Paradise Lost*—which explicitly

espouses patriarchal theology—has never been labelled a pagan work, there is no rationale for the labelling of *Shirley*, which simply reimagines the vision of a maternal God and re-envision the narrative of the first woman Eva, as a pagan work. Just like Caroline, who advocates for a Reformation for women, Shirley envisages new theological ideas for women through her imagination, as Milton does.

Shirley's theological ideas for women begins with a redefinition of the delusive images of woman perpetuated by male authorities, specifically the image of Eve presented by Milton, which is the representative image used by patriarchal ideology to suppress women. Shirley subverts the narrative and states that Milton did not see the first woman:

Milton was great [...] He saw heaven: he looked down on hell. He saw Satan, and Sin his daughter, and Death their horrible offspring [...] Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not.' [...] It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the rectors, - preserves, and "dulcet creams"—puzzled "what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes, not well-joined, inelegant; but bring taste after taste, upheld with kindest change (Brontë, 2006b:303).

Shirley insists that, although the great Milton provides valuable insights into major theological discourses about heaven and hell, Satan, Sin and Death, he was not versed on the subject of women; therefore, his observations about women are flawed. In the above passage, Brontë parodies the fifth chapter of Milton's *Paradise lost*, the scene where Eve is preparing dishes for the angel who visits Adam and Eve to warn them about Satan's temptation. In true patriarchal fashion, even though Eve is the one Satan tempts, the angel directly cautions and advises Adam while ignoring Eve. Likewise, Milton only makes reference to Eve's preparation of the table. By parodying those lines, Brontë criticises Milton's depiction of Eve as a mere housewife, rather than as the mother of all creatures who holds divine authority to speak about spiritual matters. In her reading of the above passage, Kowaleski-Wallace (1991:201-202) disapproves Lady Shirley's condescending reference to the working-class Mrs Gill. She asserts that "Shirley's feminist vision fails to include the notion of solidarity among women." I do not agree with this reading; what Mrs Gill represents here is not working class cook but the domestic role women have been forced into by the patriarchal perspective. Under the patriarchal perspective, Mrs Gill and Shirley are not much different. Though Shirley perceives herself as "quite a woman and something more" (Brontë, 2006b:194), and uses her wealth to acquire the traditional male-reserved title of an esquire, Shirley does not enjoy the privileges of living a liberated life free of patriarchal denigration, as she is still excluded from the public sphere and denied political power (Zlotnick, 1991:293). Regardless of their social standing, both Caroline and Shirley experience the patriarchal Christianity's subjugation of women.

In pursuance of her own religious vision, Shirley must extricate herself from the Church of the patriarchal God. Two contradictory forms of worship are portrayed in Shirley's field worship scene: one is the male-dominated, traditional service, which is "claustrophobic, and sententious", while Shirley's feminine worship is "expansive, and unselfconscious" (Kowaleski-Wallace, 1991:199). In *Shirley*, the church is not a women-friendly space; it is symbolically depicted as a tomb for women. Caroline lives in the rectory near the churchyard, and she reveals that, outside the kitchen enclosed in the churchyard, there are graves that cause her to feel "an inexpressible weight" on her mind, so much that her reasoning and efforts fail to eliminate the fear from her head (Brontë, 2006b:227). The churchyard and the kitchen, which obviously symbolise patriarchal religion and domesticity, are represented as physical spaces that suffocate her. Later in the novel, when Caroline becomes gravely ill as a result of Robert's abandonment, she confesses that she is "musing about remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould" (Brontë, 2006b:231). In the same way, Rose Yorke contends to Caroline that it is not wholesome living but a slow death "buried in marble" "in Briarfield Rectory" (Brontë, 2006b:377). In her novels, Brontë clearly abhors the life led by nuns; she regards it as being buried alive. In *Shirley*, she compares the lives of Protestant women to those of nuns living in the nunnery under the stifling dictates of patriarchal Christianity. Therefore, the vision of the maternal God and new Eve is hardly accepted within the established church, which is itself a place of suppression and suffocation for women. Since patriarchal Christianity fails to regard the full humanity of women, Shirley actively seeks her own creed rather than submit to the patriarchal creed or abandon her Christian belief.

Brontë uses the metaphor of the Pentecost to assert the legitimacy of religious subjecthood. While Helstone vents his wrath and "pungent speech" against dissenters during the service, Shirley sees the vision of "the pure Mother of God" different from Milton's theology during her own worship (Brontë, 2006b:303). It is important to note that this happens on the Whitsunday evening, which is supposed to be a commemoration of the Pentecost. However, the male authorities, including curates or rectors, choose to degenerate the significance of the Pentecost by overindulging in wine and propagating schism. Moreover, that evening, they scheme the defence of riots by the force of arms and Shirley comments about Robert's shooting of the rioters as "the gift of tongue; that was not a single voice" denoting the violent nature of patriarchal Christianity (Brontë, 2006b:326). On the contrary, Shirley experiences her own outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Nature at the same moment:

The grey church and greyer tombs look divine with this crimson gleam on them. Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, I see her! and I will tell you what she is like: she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth' (Brontë, 2006b:302-303).

This worship of Nature juxtaposes the worship in the Church, which is replete with pungent speech and aggravates schism. Similar to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost, the vision of the maternal God effuses the scenery. In that moment, Shirley also becomes a member of the Pentecost attic, who is “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4) and able to see visions as predicted (Acts 2:17). The gendered marginalisation within the patriarchal Church notwithstanding, Shirley actualises her religious autonomy as a disciple.

Another evidence that proves Shirley’s experience of the miracle of the Pentecost in this scene is that she also gets her own tongue, just like the disciples on the Pentecost acquired different tongues, “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The next morning—right after the field worship scene at dusk and when the gunfight is launched in the night—Shirley discusses the previous night’s gunfight with Mr Yorke. During their discussion, Mr Yorke realises that he cannot comprehend Shirley:

Yorke tried to read, but could not—the language was there—visible, but untranslatable - a poem - a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue. It was not a plain story, however—no simple gush of feeling—no ordinary love-confession—that was obvious; it was something other, deeper, more intricate than he guessed (Brontë, 2006b:351).

Mr Yorke is utterly embarrassed because Shirley signifies a new story that diverges from the traditional misogynistic narratives of women such as Milton’s Eve as a cook, or a mermaid. What makes her untranslatable is that her narrative is in “an unknown tongue” to the patriarchy. The new tongue she acquired from the Whitsunday worship on the field is a tongue for liberated women, a story of an unaccused and justified Eve. With this tongue, a new script of a maternal God can be reimagined. By employing the metaphor of the Whitsuntide, Brontë authorises Shirley’s audacious vision of a maternal God and theological ideas for women by legitimising them as much as the discipleship of Pentecost. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000:391) aptly remark: “[w]omen will starve in silence [...] until new stories are created that confer upon them the power of naming themselves and controlling their world”. Thus, Shirley subverts the exploitative nature of the patriarchal idealisation of women’s images and attempts to re-envision new stories for women. To achieve her authorial goals, Brontë does not renounce her Christian faith, but chooses the Pentecost scene from the Bible to validate her theological ideas.

Brontë’s theological ideas for women are expressed in Shirley’s field worship scene and her composition “La Première Femme Savante”, which represents Shirley’s version of Genesis. Those two scenes are noteworthy, because in them Brontë clarifies her theological ideas, which could be misconstrued as radical by adherents of patriarchal Christianity. Houston (2013:40-41) rightly notes that the most significant changes in the novel occur in those two scenes, and affirms that “Brontë knew that the intense visionary nature of these scenes would be problematic to her

readers, but, like Shirley, she cannot fully collude with patriarchal religion". The main ideas Brontë postulates in these scenes are the recreation of a maternal God and new Eve. Firstly, both the maternal God and Eve are portrayed in close connection with Nature. Shirley gets her religious inspiration from nature, thus nature itself becomes her scripture and religious agent. This depicts the strong influence of Romanticism on Brontë's writings and an understanding of nature as a manifestation of God. In a similar vein, Thormählen (1999:68) observes that Brontë's heroines tend to get religious inspiration from Nature rather than from the Church. Under the strong influence of Romanticism, Shirley attempts to re-write Milton's accusatory depiction of Eve as the source of original Sin, into one who is approved by "the pure Mother of God" (Brontë, 2006b:303). It further relates to the typical Protestant worldview that posits the entire universe as God's design. Since the Reformation, the presence of God is no longer limited within the sanctum, so, from the viewpoint of Protestant theology, it is possible to receive divine visions in everyday life. Therefore, closer connections can be drawn between Shirley's theological ideas for women and Nature, and the influences of Romanticism and Protestantism.

Shirley suggests that God and Mother Nature can heal the wounds of patriarchal Christianity. In this sense, Shirley's vision of a maternal God is basically an extension of *Jane Eyre's* God found in the nursery song and the guidance Jane meets in the wild. In Bessy's nursery song, God is described as a mother-like figure that takes a poor orphan girl to her bosom with mercy, thereby contradicting the punitiveness Jane experiences under the paternal God. Houston (2013:33) traces the idea of a "female god" from the juvenilia stories and argues that it is "a continuation of Brontë's supple aesthetic", and argues that the female god possesses a certain power to heal "the misogyny the author saw incised on the Victorian female body" (2013:27). I strongly agree with Houston's line of argumentation because, in *Shirley*, the vision of the maternal God alleviates the malaise of patriarchal Christianity. For example, when Caroline is suffocated by the death image of the church yard, Shirley suggests that she imagines that she is at the seaside to overcome it: "Will you think of Fitful-Head now, when you lie awake at night; of gulls shrieking round it, and waves tumbling in upon it, rather than of the graves under the Rectory back-kitchen?" (Brontë, 2006b:231) Similarly, in the field worship scene, Brontë describes the maternal God as an all-embracing God, that changes the colour of the "grey church and greyer tomb" into divine gleam by the setting sun (Brontë, 2006b:302). From these scenes, it is evident that the character of the maternal God in nature rejuvenates the female characters from their existential angsts and incubates every life including the patriarchal established church.

Brontë revises the story of the prelapsarian Eve, as a first woman. Eve is the first woman and the first sinner, but only the latter quality is often emphasised "to suggest the innate moral defectiveness of women" (Styler, 2010:78). Therefore, to reclaim a religious agency for both women and men, it is necessary to focus on the former character of Eve as the first woman. This

revisioning strategy is not exclusive to Brontë; 19th century biographers such as Lucy Aikin and Sara Hale also refuted Milton's Eve in favour of the prelapsarian Eve (Styler, 2010:79-80). During the field worship, Shirley likens the scenery to "what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth" (Brontë, 2006b:303). To further foreground Eve's prelapsarian condition, Brontë intentionally alludes to a verse from Genesis 1. Although Genesis 2 relates that Adam was created first and Eve was an afterthought, created to be Adam's comforter, chapter 1 already states that man and woman were created together. Moreover, Genesis 1:28 reads: "God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth". What this means is that God commissioned both Adam and Eve, hence the use of the word "them". Eve receives the same divine mandate and right to vocation from God as Adam. However, Shirley's Eve is still blamed for coveting an apple and being deceived by the snake. Even Caroline mentions it and criticizes Shirley's vision as a pagan mixture of the Bible and mythology. Shirley responds to her criticisms by presenting the image of a praying Eve, in deep communication with God: "So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was his son." (Brontë, 2006b:304) Despite her supposed sin in the Garden of Eden, Shirley confirms that Eve does not lose the status of being a daughter of God; neither is she stripped of her religious independence before God. In this way, Brontë counters Milton's Eve, who was erased and excluded from the communication between God and Adam.

In the same sense, Shirley's composition, "La Première Femme Savante", begins with a quote from Genesis 6: "And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." (Brontë, 2006b:452) It is vital to note Shirley's reference to this scripture, as it describes the sinful nature of the post-Edenic life and reverts the accusation of the source of sin—specifically sexual licentiousness—to men and not women, as it was the sons of God who took daughters of men to satisfy their lustful desires. In further rebuttal of this sexist theology that heaps all the blame on Eve, Shirley highlights another story from Genesis that ends in the narration of the great flood. By doing so, Brontë successfully overtakes the narrative of Milton's Eve and re-creates a her-story of Eve, positioning her as an equal human being who has the same religious agency as Adam.

Another crucial aspect about the creation of Eve that Brontë highlights is the fact that she is a mother. Shirley borrows the image of Titan from Greek mythology to describe Eve. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000:194) argue, Milton perceives Eve as a much younger woman, just as the male characters in *Shirley* infantilise the women characters, but Brontë presents Eve as a mature woman:

'and that Eve was their mother: from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus –' [...] The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, - the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, - the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which, after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation.' (Brontë, 2006b:303-304).

By using words such as fertility, maternity, strength and vitality, Brontë represents a more powerful version of Eve. To ensure her independent existence as a wholesome creation, not a mere appendage to man, Shirley presents Eve as being heaven-born, as Adam. In Shirley's vision, the mighty Titan Eve is qualified to claim the image of God. The crucial point Brontë makes here with her representation of Eve as a mother, is that the quality of motherhood exonerates her from Milton's blame and connects her to the other mother, the Virgin Mary. By foregrounding Eve's motherhood status, Brontë successfully inserts her into redemptive history and establishes Eve as the first mother in the Messiah's genealogy. Adrienne Rich (1972:18) defines revision as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" for women's survival. What Shirley does in this scene is the exact act of revisioning the book of Genesis and Milton's depiction of Eve to accentuate the concealed character of Eve as the mother of the Messiah, in order to liberate women from the archetypal accusations of disobedience and patriarchal imprecation.

Lastly, Brontë adopts a new metaphor to explain the relationship between God and humans from the perspective of women through Shirley's composition. Shirley's composition narrates the tale of Eva, the descendent of the Eve. Through Eva, Brontë suggests that women can positively inherit the feminine tradition of the first mother Eve. That is, Eva serves as a bridge between "the mythical origins of prelapsarian femininity" and Shirley's contemporary women (Marsden, 2011:241). Through the representation of Shirley's vision, Brontë presents an alternative relationship between humans and God the Father from a standpoint that differs from patriarchal theology. The fact that Brontë seeks for a female facet of God does not imply that she renounces the supremacy of God the Father. Rather, Brontë explores a positive understanding of the masculine God from a woman's perspective. The patriarchal theology inevitably explains the relationship between humankind and God from the male viewpoint, with a patriarchal genealogy comprising God the father and His sons. This makes it difficult for women to participate. Furthermore, the fact that only four women are mentioned in Christ's genealogy proves the deliberate exclusion of women from patriarchal narratives. To rectify this injustice, Brontë posits the metaphor of the bride and groom model as one in which women can freely participate.

To enhance women's religious experience using the bride and groom metaphor, Brontë suggests that women can be the beloved brides of the Son of God. In Shirley's composition, Eva is named, chosen, and claimed by the Son of God:

'A Son of God! Am I indeed chosen?'

'Thou only in this land. I saw thee that thou wert fair: I knew thee that thou wert mine. To me it is given to rescue, to sustain, to cherish, mine own. Acknowledge in me that Seraph, on earth, named Genius.'

'My glorious Bridegroom! True Dayspring from on high! All I would have, at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted. Thou art He I sought. God-born, take me, thy bride!' (Brontë, 2006b:456)

In this composition, Eva is not excluded at all; on the contrary, she becomes the only bride. While patriarchal theology emphasises the hierarchical relationship between God the Father and men, the bride and groom metaphor posits a horizontal, loving relationship with guidance and peace. Contrary to patriarchal theology, which is concluded with the final judgement on the last day, the relationship between the bride and groom exemplifies a perfect bond, one that ends in eternal perfection. Considering Brontë's terror of eternal punishment, it is essential for Brontë to sustain the belief in the Redeemer rather than the last arbiter. Thus, Shirley's composition ends with the glorification of Eva: "restored her, redeemed, to Jehovah - her Maker; and at last, before Angel and Archangel, crowned her with the crown of Immortality" (Brontë, 2006b:457). In this metaphor, a woman can be the Messiah's precious bride and enjoy fulfilment in divine love and joy, while the loving husband sanctifies His bride into the afterlife.

This calling of Eva does not only signify the loving call of the groom, it is also a divine call to one's vocation. Brontë believes that marriage is one of the most precious vocations, and this Protestant value is reemphasised in the tale of Eva:

'Eva!'

If Eva were not this woman's name, she had none. She rose.

'Here am I.'

'Eva!'

'Oh, Night! (it can be but Night that speaks) I am here!'

The voice, descending, reached Earth.

'Eva!'

'Lord!' she cried, 'behold thine handmaid!' She had her religion: all tribes held some creed. 'I come: a Comforter!'

'Lord, come quickly!' (Brontë, 2006b:455-456)

This scene depicting Eva's naming is reminiscent of the scene of Jane's calling in *Jane Eyre*, where Jane is called "Jane! Jane! Jane!" (Brontë, 2006a:483) Just like the calling scene in *Jane Eyre*, which represents both a divine calling and Rochester's calling, the calling of Eva symbolises both the divine naming of Eva and the groom's wooing call. The language with which Eva answers the calling is noteworthy. Her response, "behold thine handmaid!" echoes the Virgin Mary's response during the Annunciation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." (Luke 1:38) This reinforces the idea that, for Brontë, the calling is not a mere Romantic calling, but a divine calling comparable to that of the Virgin Mary and young Samuel in the Bible. This implies that the bride metaphor grants women the religious agency to be both a beloved one and to undertake vocation in fulfilment of God's plan.

Brontë projects the metaphor of Christ's bride upon the marriages of her characters. At the end of *Shirley*, Shirley and Caroline become devoted housewives to the two Moore brothers, who prosper in their respective fields, while at the same time, the beautiful natural environments around Hollow's Mill are industrialised. This explains why scholars critique the novel's ending. Zlotnick (1991:292), for example, remarks that it is failure of Shirley and Caroline being one of Milton's cook which means to submit to the patriarchal image of domestic woman. Gilbert & Gubar (2000:398) argue the ending marks "the myth of Mother/Nature has been betrayed in mercantile, postlapsarian England" and Marshden (2011:242) also insist what the narrative in ending reveals is the vulnerability of feminine mythology against "masculine discourses of economic, industrial, political, and scientific power". However, I contend that the marriage ending in *Shirley* can only be properly interpreted through the paradigm of the bride and groom metaphor. For Brontë, marriage is not synonymous with an unguarded submission to patriarchal systems. As I argued in the previous chapter—to the Protestant, marriage is as precious a vocation as St John's mission. Especially, through the perspective of the bride of Christ metaphor, the relation between husbands and wives is comparable to the relationship between Christ and the church as is recorded in Ephesians 5:

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church [...] Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies [...] This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverences her husband (Ephesians, 5:21-33).

The above passage proffers the ideal model and household code for Christian couples. In this model, submission to one's husband is an expression of love and devotion that differs from servility. It represents mutual respect and selflessness for each other before God. Pearson (2009:5) praises Brontë's pioneering interpretation of the household code presented in Ephesians as mutual submission. Although Pearson (2009:115) identifies *Shirley* as the weakest example of mutual submission in Brontë's works), she acknowledges that the couple, Eva and Genius, prove that Brontë understands the Ephesian model of marriage as Eva submits to Genius with devotion and joy, and Genius reciprocates by loving Eva to perfection.

For Charlotte Brontë, marriage is a sort of rehearsal of heavenly life in the future that all Christians will encounter. Husbands and wives should submit to each other, and advance through their relationships with their spouses. Similar to Brontë's other heroines, Caroline wishes "to become superior to her present self" (Brontë, 2006b:108), whereas Shirley anticipates a husband who is superior to her, "the higher above me, so much the better" (Brontë, 2006b:207). They expect their spouses to guide them towards self-advancement. This view does not apply to the female characters only, as Robert explains his marital incompatibility with Shirley as follows: "Nothing in her cherished affection in me—made me better, gentler." (Brontë, 2006b:504) Louis also mentions that Caroline could not become his wife because, despite their shared commonalities, there is nothing he can change in Caroline (Brontë, 2006b:490-491). But when Louis expresses his love for Shirley in his memo, he expresses the desire serve her, and asks, "is she [Shirley] conscious how my strength rejoices to serve her?" (Brontë, 2006b:490).

Therefore, to draw any reasonable conclusions about the marriage ending of *Shirley*, it is essential to assess how the characters' lives are improved through their marriages. Robert provides a partial glimpse into the lives of two couples:

Caroline, the houseless, the starving, the unemployed, shall come to Hollow's mill from far and near; and Joe Scott shall give them work, and Louis Moore, Esq., shall let them a tenant, and Mrs Gill Shall mete them a portion till the first pay-day [...] Such a Sunday-school as you will have, Cary! such collections as you will get! Such a day school as you and Shirley, and Miss Ainley, will have to manage between you! (Brontë, 2006b:606)

In his daydream-like vision, Robert cares for the workers and the poor—a remarkable ethical improvement on his part, and one that Caroline hopes for in the early chapters of the novel. It is also a meaningful achievement for Shirley, because she genuinely cares about the poor in Briarfield and even launches some charity work with Miss Ainley. Shirley also encourages her husband to use his talent as a magistrate. However, since Brontë does not reveal how far Robert's daydream is realised, it is hard to precisely evaluate the fruit of their marriage. Nonetheless, it

would be baseless to conclude, as the aforementioned critics insist, that *Shirley* ends with the failure of women's vision.

This chapter set out to explore Brontë's redefinition of theological ideas for women in *Shirley*. In *Shirley*, Brontë boldly espouses new Hermeneutics for women based on her vision of the maternal God, and reimagination of the first mother Eve, as well as the bride of Christ metaphor. The novel's setting in England in 1810, a period that was fraught with political and religious chaos, allows Brontë to criticise the prevalent religious and political issues of the time. The Church of England was unable to satisfy the multiplicity of opinions and beliefs and the idea of a universal Church became an illusion. Thus, Victorian Christians pursued their own religious affinities, which led to denominationalisation. As the foregoing discussions suggest, denominationalisation does not translate to the rejection of Christianity. Rather, in the process of secularisation, it denotes a new, active way of exercising individual religious agency to seek a religious option that is suited to the believer's individual needs. In *Shirley*, Brontë overtly criticises the submergence of women's voices and religious autonomy amid the prevailing religious and political pluralisation and attempts to reassert their agency on the basis of Biblical standards. Since the established patriarchal Christianity undermined women's religious authenticity and foisted the subjugating pre-Reformational position upon women in the Church, Brontë, like many of her contemporaries, sought out and depicted her own woman-empowering creed in *Shirley*.

CHAPTER 4 *VILLETTE*, LUCY SNOW'S JOURNEY BEYOND HUMAN FLOURISHING

4.1 Contextualisation

This chapter examines how *Villette* (1853) diverges from Brontë's previous creed by turning away from the secular and the affirmation of human flourishing. In this context, human flourishing refers to secularised modern society's efforts to achieve self-actualisation and fulfilment, which Charles Taylor (2007:430) defines as the individual's pursuit of "his/her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, a society of mutual benefit". In her previous works, *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849), Brontë espouses secularisation as she actively advocates for ways in which women could develop an independent relationship with God by discerning for themselves their own divine calling without the interference of patriarchal Christian dictates, whilst achieving their goals in society. In doing so, her Protestant belief that women deserve to exercise independent religious authority to seek their vocation and social roles remained the propelling factor of Brontë's textual activism. Therefore, Brontë's female protagonists consistently struggle with the ideologies of patriarchal Christianity, which strives to restrain women in the pre-Reformational, marginal niche. Since the institutional Church does not accord women the same independence of religious identity as men, Brontë tries to dismantle the existing strictures through her own creed, based on her own religious imagination and hermeneutics.

4.1.1 Thematic deviations in *Villette*

Even though there are some similarities between *Villette* and Brontë's previous works, the former deviates from some of Brontë's earlier thematic preoccupations. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë delineates the process for women's attainment of religious authority as independent individuals. In *Shirley*, she proposes an audacious imagination that ascribes to a maternal God and the new Eve in order to establish a redefined denomination for women. Her rejection of the religious strictures that diminish women and their active quest for actualisation of religious authority constitute Brontë's Reformation ideology for women and evinces her secularisation ideals.

Her last work, *Villette*, has some similarities with *Jane Eyre*. For example, both novels chronicle the female protagonists' spiritual growth from the first-person perspective. Like Jane, the protagonist of the novel, Lucy Snowe, loses her parents at a tender age and leaves England to settle in the imaginary European city of Villette. Just like Jane, Lucy becomes an English teacher at a girl's school. However, as a Protestant who is unattuned to the Catholic culture, Lucy experiences several ordeals exacerbated by extreme loneliness and a sense of alienation. Finally, she meets her worthy lover, Emanuel Paul, and their affectionate relationship seems to quell

Lucy's lifelong deprivation as she anticipates marriage and a happy life together. However, contrary to the more optimistic endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, Brontë concludes the novel with the ominous death of Lucy's fiancé, M. Paul.

Instead of protesting women's relegation from religious and social positions of authority, the protagonist, Lucy Snowe, recedes into the shadows and prefers to maintain an indifferent stance and—unlike Brontë's previous female protagonists Jane, Caroline, and Shirley—Lucy does not agonise much over her occupation or social position; instead, she is mainly concerned with her inner turmoil and existential suffering. However, this does not imply that she is unperturbed by women's issues as she overtly criticises the Catholic perspective on women's roles during the pious reading of Madame Beck's *Pensionnat*, or articulates the female artists' distress in the dramatic Vashti scene:

This said 'lecture pieuse' was, I soon found, mainly designed as a wholesome mortification of the Intellect, a useful humiliation of the Reason; [...] there were, besides, priestly matters, and the priestcraft of the book was far worse than its monkery. The ears burned on each side of my head as I listened, perforce, to tales of moral martyrdom inflicted by Rome; the dread boasts of confessors, who had wickedly abused their office, trampling to deep degradation high-born ladies, making of countesses and princesses the most tormented slaves under the sun. Stories like that of Conrad and Elizabeth of Hungary, recurred again and again, with all its dreadful viciousness, sickening tyranny and black impiety: tales that were nightmares of oppression, privation, and agony (Brontë, 2004:129).

Her agony did not pain him, her wild moan - worse than a shriek - did not much move him; her fury revolted him somewhat, but not to the point of horror. Cool young Briton!
[...] 'Hm-m-m,' was the first scarce articulate but expressive answer; and then such a strange smile went wandering round his lips, a smile so critical, so almost callous! I suppose that for natures of that order his sympathies were callous. In a few terse phrases he told me his opinion of, and feeling towards, the actress: he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment (Brontë, 2004:488-489).

In this sense, Lucy's attitude is socially and religiously distinct from that of Brontë's other female protagonists. Although Lucy upholds her Protestant values in the Catholic society of *Villette*, she does not evince any significant zeal for reformation like her precedents. Since *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* both depict radical feminist and religious ideals, one would expect *Villette* to espouse the same progressive ideas. As Pearson (2009:163) rightly notes, Brontë delineates a female protagonist whose "desires have been transported from the earthly to the heavenly realm".

Critics have acknowledged these divergences in *Villette*. For instance, Gilbert and Gubar (2000:403) observe that, through her portrayal of Lucy, who is Brontë's most submissive female character, she suggests that there is no "way out" for women "in the institutions of patriarchal

society". Through her previous protagonists, Brontë depicts women's repressed desire "to enter the competitive marketplace", whereas with Lucy's characterisation, she highlights "the destructive effect of the buried life on women" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000:402-403). Even though unjust suffering constitutes one of the main themes of the novel and Lucy constantly agonises about her continual deprivation, I disagree with Gilbert and Gubar's argument that *Villette* depicts the story of Lucy as a woman buried alive by patriarchy. As is the case in their analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Villette* follows the same conflicting logic: one in which a feminist and anti-Christian Brontë rebels against patriarchal Christianity. The problem with such a reading of the novel is that, since it excludes religious values from the critical reading, it fails to acknowledge the spiritual growth that results from Lucy's suffering. Consequently, Lucy becomes an icon of deprivation, "a woman without" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000:400), notwithstanding the fact that she achieves invaluable religious vision at the end of the story.

Maynard (2007:210) applauds *Villette* as Brontë's "last and greatest novel" and argues that the novel evinces her progression "towards a secular vision of human destiny, a vision that takes away possibilities of life beyond the everyday to restore meaning to ordinary experience". This means that, even though Brontë still uses religious language in this novel, she tends to convey psychological themes rather than metaphysical or transcendental issues: "As do later thinkers on religion in nineteenth century [...] Brontë in this novel looks at religious experience as a variety of psychological events." (Maynard, 2007:211) I agree with Maynard's analysis that Brontë presents an in-depth depiction of Lucy's inner status, but directly oppose his conclusion. Maynard asserts that Lucy accepts her destiny "without Calvinist faith in God's ultimate plan" (2007:211). Since Maynard regards Lucy's struggles not as spiritual agonies but as a psychological process towards control over her emotions, he argues that Brontë describes the inner world of Lucy, not a transcendental outside world. This suggests that, in the end, Lucy will find "only the magic of inner value, inner strength, without a new mythos" (2007:211). I disagree with his argument that *Villette* is only about Lucy's inner values and excludes transcendental meanings. Maynard's argument, which denies the spiritual elements of *Villette* and emphasizes only the psychological values, is similar to the method of Dr John who insists that Lucy's supernatural experiences are caused by psychiatric illness. In *Villette*, Brontë not only uses religious language, but also actively explores transcendental values. Moreover, Lucy's acceptance of her pain and suffering is not a secular destiny, but a spiritual realisation to accept the providence in her life. Based on her exploration of Lucy's suffering and loneliness, Brontë posits a transcendental vision for the afterlife.

Ultimately, an in-depth appraisal of Brontë's religious perspectives is crucial to understanding her work. In this sense, Irene Taylor's (1990) *Holy ghosts: the male muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* remains an outstanding critical work on *Villette* because it does not discount the religious

messages in the text. For example, Taylor argues that Lucy's two lovers, Dr John² and M. Paul, represent a man of earth and a Lord from heaven (recorded in 1 Corinthians) respectively. As Jane in *Jane Eyre* struggles against her earthly idols, Rochester and St John, to gain her authority from God, Lucy is equally encumbered with the task of freeing herself from the earthly love for Dr John and becoming the bride of M. Paul, who is to be Lucy's husband and true Christ-like redeemer (Taylor, 1990:256). Overall, Taylor makes a considerable effort to provide a detailed analysis of the text and its biblical metaphors and allegories. More importantly, Taylor refers to Brontë's biographical facts and previous works, including early works such as her poems or *The history of Anglia*, to trace the thematic progression from her earlier works to *Villette*. However, she examines *Villette* within the binary frame of spiritual devotion and earthly flourishing. From a Protestant point of view, this approach devalues the spiritual meaning of ordinary life.

In a similar vein, Pearson (2009:204) highlights the issue of idolisation and insists that the relationship between Lucy and M. Paul is "the only one in Brontë's novels that does not partake of a dangerous idolatry, an elevation of a human relationship above the worship of the divine". She argues that the Protestant Lucy and Catholic Paul epitomise an ideal equitable relationship, one that is based on mutual respect and submission to each other (2009:200). Although Timothy L. Carens (2010:349) also identifies the thematic issue of marriage idolisation in *Villette*, his interpretation of the novel's ending juxtaposes Pearson's view of Lucy's heretical love with "divine retribution". For example, Pearson reads the Christ-like description of Paul as an allegorical adaption of bridal mysticism, whereas Carens (2010:347) regards it as a sign of Lucy's idolisation of Paul. Since the issue of idolisation is a thematic concern that pervades Brontë's novels right from *Jane Eyre*, both Pearson and Carens' criticisms are noteworthy. Nonetheless, their premise that idolised love ends with destructive results or the loss of one's fiancé remains disputable. One of the core themes in *Villette* concerns the examination of suffering and happiness, and in my opinion, Brontë does not relate this issue to a causal relationship, but to divine providence. This assertion is discussed in more detailed later in this chapter.

4.2 Representing the secular in *Villette*

In the article entitled "Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Mid-Victorian Anti-Catholicism, and the Turn to Secularism", Clarke (2011:967-968) applies Taylor's secularisation theory to the analysis of *Villette*. He reads the Catholic country, Labassecour, as an enchanted world, while contradicting Lucy's disenchanting Protestant values. Although Clarke's analysis is insightful, his application of

² In *Villette*, Dr John is called by various names: John Graham Bretton, John Graham, Graham Bretton, young Bretton, Dr John, Graham, Isidore etc. In this chapter, I use the name Dr John, because his title of medical doctor (Dr), clearly embodies the rational and logical aspects of his character.

Taylor's secularisation theory proves problematic in some respects. I specifically disagree with his identification of Roman Catholicism in an enchanted world, "as existing within a hierarchical, communitarian world in which individual roles are determined by a pre-existing order of things" (2011:969) because, as I will explain, Labassecour is an extremely secularised and materialistic society. This is especially important because, even though Taylor expatiates the demarcation between the disenchanted and enchanted with specific reference to the Reformation, Roman Catholicism is secularised in its own way; for example, in the wake of secularist liberal and other radical movements, the Catholic Church was obliged to become less hierarchical and permissive of more a "democratic" constitution within the Catholic Church (Taylor, 2007:442). Taylor's interpretation renders Clarke's differentiation between Catholicism as enchanted and Protestantism as disenchanted, implausible.

Besides the religious features, several biographical facts from Brontë's life are also instrumental to an understanding of *Villette*, as Brontë adopts her experiences into the creation of her narratives. In this respect, *Villette* remains "the most explicitly personal of all her works, laying out scenes and characters in direct imitation of real ones, which would be instantly recognisable to anyone of her acquaintance" (Harman, 2016:317). Two major events in Brontë's life are portrayed in *Villette*: these include Brontë's brief stay as a student and a teacher at Madame Heger's boarding school in Brussels in 1842 and 1843, as well as her visits to London in 1849 and 1850 with George Smith after the loss of Emily and Anne. Obviously, the settings of the European Catholic country, Labassecour, its city, Villette, and Madame Beck's girls' boarding school are based on Madame Heger's school in Brussels. Similarly, Brontë's depiction of Lucy's visiting confession episode and her teaching English at the school are based on Brontë's personal experiences during that period. Furthermore, Brontë critics agree that her characterisation of M. Paul is partly based on her actual teacher, M. Constantin Heger, who she continued to write after her return to England, pleading for his reply to no avail. Additionally, Tayler (1990:203) mentions that another possible model for M. Paul is James Taylor, who loved Brontë but suddenly left for India, causing Brontë inexplicable pain and confusion. Another contextual angle concerns Brontë's visit to London with George Smith and his mother, who introduce Brontë to the cultural life in London, which she re-narrates through Dr John and Mrs Bretton in *Villette*. More importantly, Brontë nursed a deep admiration for Smith, one which he never reciprocated, and this is directly reflected in *Villette*.

Brontë conceived the idea for *Villette* during her first visit to London in the winter of 1849-1850 (Harman, 2016:304). At the time, Brontë was experiencing loneliness and grief after losing her beloved Emily in 1848 and Anne in 1849. In addition, she was nursing both the immense emotional turmoil of her unrequited affection for Smith, as well as James Taylor's sudden abandonment (Tayler, 1990:203). In fact, she wrote a letter to her publishers in the winter of 1851,

informing them that she could no longer continue writing *Villette* due to her deteriorating mental and physical states (Gaskell, 1997:373). These personal experiences are reflected in the novel, as Lucy compares herself to the biblical Job who, like Brontë, endures the devastating trauma of losing all his loved ones (sons and daughters), property, and even his health. This explains why she focuses more on her innermost suffering and divine providence than her social position or religious authority. Therefore, Brontë's personal traumatic experiences seem to inform her engagement with the Protestant belief that emphasises human capacity, disciplined life and human flourishing in *Villette*.

4.3 Secularisation and exclusive humanism

To fully contextualise the discussion in this chapter, it is important to examine the meaning of some terms relating to Charles Taylor's theory of secularisation. As previously discussed, Taylor's notion of secularity is tri-fold. The first conceptualisation of secularity concerns the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere; in other words, the separation of church and state. The second aspect of secularisation centres around the declining religious faith and practices, whereas the third focuses on the shift in "condition of belief", which implies "a move from a society where Belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others" (Taylor, 2007:3). The third dimension of secularisation constitutes the crux of Taylor's work. Taylor (2007:19; 1999:26) identifies the former society as the era of naïve religious faith in which the source of fullness connected to God by default. In such a society, people live a predetermined life in accordance with the worldview of the great chain of being (Taylor, 2007:12). Conversely, with the transition to secularised modern society, belief becomes optional, and the reflective framework of belief expands. Not only are the ideas of belief and unbelief discretionary, but individuals are also open to diverse standpoints within the belief systems. In modern society, religion is not the only source of fullness and fulfilment; instead, it tends to be found "deep in within a human" (Taylor, 1999:26).

The life of believers in a secularised world differs significantly from life in previous ages. In Protestant society, it was not possible to live a life within the God-given hierarchy, naively following His will and revelations through signs and symbols. Instead, it becomes the duty of humans to work "the system effectively in order to bring about God's purpose" (Taylor, 2007:98). The disciplined and civilised society emerges too, because to effectively pursue one's purpose in life, it is important to "act to benefit others mutually" and "offer them to mutual help" (Taylor, 2007:447). The typical Protestant zeal for order is also based on the objective of fulfilling God's design in this world through relentless reformation. Naturally, in secularized society, human flourishing becomes the final goal and any sense of further purpose, mystery, grace, and the idea

that God plans the transformation of human beings, disappear. (Taylor, 2007:222-224). Transformation is not achieved through God anymore, but through one's civilizing process that can be called "disciplined self-remaking" (Taylor, 2007:300). As a result, the conflict between two stances is concluded with the decline of "the perspective of transformation" to be pursued beyond human flourishing.

In this context, the third conceptualisation of secularity enables the possibility of exclusive humanism. Exclusive humanism, or self-sufficing humanism, means to turn away from transcendent goals or claims that are achievable beyond human flourishing (Taylor, 2007:21). At first, the reason for pursuing order was to glorify God, but "the goal for order is redefined" as a mere human flourishing (Taylor, 2007:84). Also, the power of pursuing order does not emanate from God but from "a purely human capacity" (Taylor, 2007:84). Ironically, the Protestant's pursuit towards "disenchantment, the active instrumental stance towards the world, and the following of God's purpose" (Taylor, 2007:98) in Reformation theology serves to accelerate the substitution of Christian faith with exclusive humanism (Taylor, 2007:300). Naturally, rationalised religion is reduced to moralism; for the duty of humans is not devotion to God but "establishing and conforming to the moral order", which God designed for human beings (Taylor, 2007:312).

4.3.1 The malaises of modernity

In the modern disenchanted world, individuals have an anthropocentric identity, which consists of "[p]ower, reason, invulnerability, a decisive distancing from age-old fears" (Taylor, 2007:301). Since the goal of the modern self revolves around human flourishing, the transcendent meaning—including social, political, and historical issues—is excluded. Moreover, the limits of this modern identity instigate a certain sense of flatness and emptiness, "a multiform search for something within, or beyond it, which could compensate for the meaning lost with transcendence" (Taylor, 2007:302). Basically, "life is narrowed or flattened" (Taylor, 1999:14) and is characterised by the "lack of meaning" (Taylor, 2007:303). Taylor identifies it as the malaise of modern identity, which is immune to threats beyond the material world, but vulnerable towards meaningless suffering: "This malaise is specific to a buffered identity, whose very invulnerability opens it to the danger that not just evil spirits, cosmic forces or gods won't 'get to' it, but that nothing significant will stand out." (Taylor, 2007:303)

4.4 Beyond exclusive humanism: *Villette*—a song of Job

4.4.1 Exclusive humanism: Dr John and Madame Beck

In *Villette*, most of the characters exhibit the traits of the buffered self who specifically pursues human flourishing and ignores transcendental meanings and possibilities. These characters include Dr John and Madame Beck, who are adherents of exclusive humanism. Both characters share a secularised buffered identity with slight differences. In this regard, Dr John evinces the exclusive humanism of a Protestant with disengaged and scientific thoughts and is “an example of humanity” (Tayler, 1990:224), whereas the Catholic Madame Beck espouses the extreme version of exclusive humanism aimed only at profit.

Firstly, Dr John is a well-disciplined and confident man who is aware of his will and abilities. He represents an exemplar of the modern self in a disenchanted world. As a trained and devoted doctor, he perceives himself as the master of his life and is confident that he can control his emotions and gear his life with his disengaged reason. He rises to success through his intellectual capability and self-discipline; hence, Lucy applauds him as “a man of success” (Brontë, 2004:353). She further extols his attractive physical attributes:

His stature looked imposingly tall in that little chamber, and amidst that group of Dutch-made women; his profile was clear, fine, and expressive: perhaps his eye glanced from face to face rather too vividly, too quickly, and too often, but it had a most pleasant character, and so had his mouth; his chin was full, cleft, Grecian, and perfect (Brontë, 2004:105).

Due to these features, Tayler (1990:226) evaluates Dr John as a materialist physical doctor who “embodies this world’s gift” but “has no transcendence” at all. In short, Dr John represents the embodiment of earthly values and human flourishing, a secularised identity with disenchanted views, one who is detached from the transcendental world, but focuses on pursuing his worldly flourishing.

As a buffered self, Dr John’s narrowed sense of self is oriented towards the physical world and his proclivity towards the relentless pursuit of reason is akin to selfishness. This makes Dr John the best guide for Lucy in the real world of *Villette*, because he is knowledgeable of the abundant sensual pleasures of the city. Lucy admires “his perfect knowledge of *Villette*”, his magical power that penetrates “all its galleries, salles, and cabinets” and opens “every door which shut in an object worth seeing” (Brontë, 2004: 221,233). Interestingly, despite his ability to penetrate closed doors for objects worth seeing, he fails to decipher Lucy’s desires; instead, he wants “always to give me a role not mine” (Brontë, 2004:352). In this regard, Tayler (1990:228) suggests that Dr John’s misunderstanding of Lucy stems from his inherent selfishness, which is a deeply rooted

attribute of worldliness. Although Dr John is a good man who cares about Lucy, his concern for her is limited to her physical wellbeing, as he remains indifferent to her inner spiritual desire.

The starkest evidence of Dr John's exclusive humanism is depicted in the episode of the ghost nun. At first, he sensitively catches her physical symptoms and logically concludes what has happened:

'You are in a highly nervous state. I feel sure from what is apparent in your look and manner, however well-controlled, that whilst alone this evening in that dismal, perishing sepulchral garret - that dungeon under the leads, smelling of damp and mould, rank with phthisis and catarrh: a place you never ought to enter - that you saw, or *thought* you saw, some appearance peculiarly calculated to impress the imagination. I know you *are* not, nor ever were, subject to material terrors, fears of robbers, &c. -I am not so sure that a visitation, bearing a spectral character, would not shake your very mind. Be calm now. This is all a matter of the nerves, I see: but just specify the vision.' (Brontë, 2004:277).

In this scene, he acknowledges the fact that Lucy might have encountered "a spectral character", but he also diminishes the validity of her experience by stating that it is not a real ghost but "a matter of the nerves" (Brontë, 2004:277). To him, the supernatural ghost is non-existent, so he tries to rationalise the incident not as an external supernatural occurrence, but as a nervous breakdown. Dr John's diagnosis speaks to the Victorian idea that "the roots of mental disease lay within the fabric of the body" (Wallis, 2017:4). At the same time, this is typical of the belief system of the buffered self on an immanent order. Exclusive humanism denies any existence of transcendent power, whether it is the evil that causes terror or the good that leads us to the fullness of life. It espouses the idea that the only plausible sources of such powers are found within us and that one can control them with reason. Therefore, Dr John regards Lucy's experience in the attic as a nervous disorder that can be treated medically. Clark (2011:978) similarly notes that Dr John exemplifies the post-Reformation buffered self who believes that "the cause must lie within" Lucy.

Dr John's prescription for Lucy further foregrounds his exclusive humanist confidence. He assertively tells Lucy, "You may trust me as implicitly as you did Père Silas. Indeed, the doctor is perhaps the safer confessor of the two." (Brontë, 2004:277) He is certain that, as a doctor, he is more knowledgeable than a priest and can displace Father Père Silas. As he is convinced he can deal with the issue more efficiently, Dr John encourages Lucy to adopt a cheerful disposition in order to avoid a nervous breakdown:

'Happiness is the cure - a cheerful mind the preventive: cultivate both.'

No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with

manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. She is a divine dew which the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise.

'Cultivate happiness!' I said briefly to the doctor: 'do *you* cultivate happiness? How do you manage?' 'I am a cheerful fellow by nature: and then ill-luck has never dogged me. Adversity gave me and my mother one passing scowl and brush, but we defied her, or rather laughed at her, and she went by.' (Brontë, 2004:278-279).

In this paragraph, Dr John pompously suggests that he can cultivate happiness. He believes that he has overcome his challenges due to his strong willpower and, based on this immanent power, he can evade bad omens and avoid melancholy. Charles Taylor (2007:234) argues that this kind of confidence is "reflected in the new harmonious, economic centred order, neither grace nor the nurture of God's power in us seem all that indispensable [...] the power to order will be seen as purely intra-human". On the contrary, Lucy believes that the grace and happiness are not man-made but come from God. This is indicative of Lucy's Protestant belief and disavowal of exclusive humanism views.

Dr John goes a step further and decides to compete with the ghost. Given his buffered identity and reliance on reason, he feels that he can confront the supernatural being:

I was visited, I was looked after; once a week I was taken out to La Terrasse; always I was made much of Dr Bretton failed not to tell me *why* he was so kind: 'To keep away the nun,' he said; 'he was determined to dispute with her prey. He had taken,' he declared, 'a thorough dislike to her, chiefly on account of that white face-cloth, and those cold gray eyes: the moment he heard of those odious particulars,' he affirmed, 'consummate disgust had incited him to oppose her; he was determined to try whether he or she was the cleverest, and he only wished she would once more look in upon me when he was present:' but *that* she never did. In short, he regarded me scientifically in the light of a patient, and at once exercised his professional skill, and gratified his natural benevolence, by a course of cordial and attentive treatment (Brontë, 2004:282-3).

Dr John awaits the ghost's reappearance in order to disprove the disgusting superstition by his reasoning power. To achieve his goal, he writes letters to Lucy, cares for her, and even invites her to his house to make her assume that this would dispel the fallacious story of the ghost and alleviate her depression. He is convinced that the cultivation of happiness is possible, so he tries to become the source of Lucy's happiness. This could be interpreted as Dr John's assumption of the role of an idol to Lucy, since happiness is in the realm of the divine for Lucy. Due to his self-confidence, Dr John denies the existence of the ghost, devalues the profession of the priest, and boasts of his capability, not God, to make Lucy happy. Initially, it seems effective as Lucy confesses: "[a] new creed became mine—a belief in happiness" (Brontë, 2004:281), implying that Dr John and his letters were her source of happiness. Despite his prideful attempts, however,

Lucy fails to adhere to Dr John's exclusive humanism. She realises that the new happiness caused by Dr John does not hold transcendental value and is unenduring; it changes tastes like an elixir at first, but swiftly mellows to a mild quality beverage (Brontë, 2004:281).

In *Villette*, the second representation of exclusive humanism is made evident in the character of Madame Beck. Lucy describes the head mistress, Madame Beck, as a woman of interest: "interest was the master-key of madame's nature—the mainspring of her motives—the alpha and omega of her life" (Brontë, 2004:81). When Lucy meets the ghost nun in the attic for the first time, Madame Beck does not feel any sort of vulnerability due to the presence of the supernatural being:

They talked, at first, of the cloaks being disturbed; but Madame Beck told me afterwards she thought they hung much as usual: and as for the broken pane in the skylight, she affirmed that aperture was rarely without one or more panes broken or cracked: and besides, a heavy hail-storm had fallen a few days ago. Madame questioned me very closely as to what I had seen, but I only described an obscure figure clothed in black [...] She charged me to say nothing on the subject to any servant, pupil, or teacher, and highly commended my discretion in coming to her private *salle-à-manager*, instead of carrying the tale of horror to the school refectory. Thus the subject dropped (Brontë, 2004:280).

Madame Beck remains unfazed by the supernatural event. She simply investigates the attic in a calm, logical manner and draws a reasonable explanation that the appearance of the ghost could be a natural phenomenon caused by the heavy hailstorm. From this perspective, Madame Beck is similar to Dr John, who outrightly rationalises the mysterious event. She is more concerned about the reputation of her school, in which she holds a direct interest. Lucy contemplates "whether the strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave" (Brontë, 2004:280), whereas Madame Beck dispels the possibility of the ghost's existence. Therefore, she nimbly tries to dismiss the ghost case, offers a rational explanation for its occurrence, and urges Lucy to desist from spreading the story.

To the modern secularised and buffered self, the transcendent powers are not considered the source of fullness anymore, as it is substituted with immanent power. In Madame Beck's case, her source of fullness is even narrower than mere human flourishing. The essence of her flourishing is manifested by the profits she accrues from the smooth operation of the school. Her attitude is rather similar to mammonism, which is more extreme than exclusive humanism; in her tenacious pursuit of profit, she forfeits other values for her interest. For example, Lucy mentions that "madam knew what honesty was, and liked it—that is, when it did not obtrude its clumsy scruples in the way of her will and interest" (Brontë, 2004:80). Madame Beck prioritises profit above moral values, which she regards as worthless obstacles. This explains why Madame Beck hires St Pierre to manage the school and her interests despite being privy to her lack of morals and principles.

In her narrow-mindedness, Madame Beck is fixed on material values; hence, she misses the essence of other emotional or spiritual values. For instance, Lucy observes that Madame Beck satisfies her children's physical needs but fails at providing for their emotional needs:

She was solicitous about her family, vigilant for their interests, and physical well-being; but she never seemed to know the wish to take her little children upon her lap, to press their rosy lips with her own, to gather them in a genial embrace, to shower on them softly the benignant caress, the loving word (Brontë, 2004:102).

Although Madame Beck is a responsive mother figure to the children at the school, her parenting attitude reveals her insensitivity towards their emotional, abstract, and immaterial needs. Since she is only perceptive to material values, she cannot identify the children's other necessities. The same principles are applicable to her management of the school. As a school mistress, Madame Beck excels at ensuring "the physical well-being of her scholars" so much that stress-triggering factors are carefully eliminated from school life: "no minds were overtasked; the lessons were well distributed and made incomparably easy to the learner" (Brontë, 2004:81). As Clark-Beattie (1986:833) rightly notes, for Madame Beck, "virtue consists not in inner rectitude but in outward propriety" and "discipline is a simple matter of exerting external control". Hence, she focuses all her attention and care on the satiety of physical needs.

In addition, Madame Beck's narrowed pursuit of exclusive humanist interests is further exacerbated by the Catholic culture, which fuels her mammonist character. Several critics have highlighted Brontë's unfavourable attitude towards Roman Catholicism in *Villette*. For example, Thormählen (1999:24) argues that Charlotte Brontë "evinces a degree of hostility to the Church of Rome" in her works, especially in *Villette*. Brontë's major grouse with the Catholic Church pertains to the Church's ritual of confession. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë uses Jane's experience with St John to excoriate her abhorrence of the Catholic doctrine of mediation between God and human beings. She detests St John's interference, and considers the explicit role of Catholic priests as mediator unpardonable. For Brontë, the Catholic doctrine of confession can be best described as a chain for "spiritual restraint"; one which engenders mental slavery (Thormählen, 1999:140). As Monika Mazurek (2014:47) rightly points out, from Lucy's Protestant viewpoint, the act of confession deprives believers from developing "a conscience of their own". In Lucy's Protestant faith, it is quintessential that believers confess their sins directly to God and experience the grace of forgiveness. Based on this experience, they can act responsibly in the light of conscience. However, in Catholicism, the priest usurps the role of God in the course of confession and restitution and this sacred aspect of the priest's work is thoroughly separated from the layman's individual responsibility.

In this context, Lucy notes that Madame Beck allows her pupils “large sensual indulgence” (Brontë, 2004:141) and connects the reason for this misgiving to the Catholic creed:

There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. 'Eat, drink, and live!' she says. 'Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. I hold their cure - guide their course: I guarantee their final fate.' A bargain, in which every true Catholic deems himself a gainer (Brontë, 2004:141).

Lucy's criticism of Madame Beck's school and the Catholic Church centre around both institutions' encouragement of debauchery in individuals. With the chasm between the sacred and secular, the spiritual and physical, and the priest and laymen, the execution of sacred spiritual works is assigned to priests, while laymen wallow in spiritual slavery. Charles Taylor expounds the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism by using the metaphor of an ecclesial ship:

I as a [Catholic] layman am as it were only half-involved in my salvation: both because I need to draw on the merits of those who are more fully dedicated to the Christian life, through the mediation of the church, and because in accepting this lower level of dedication, I am settling for less than a full commitment to the faith. I am a passenger in the ecclesial ship on its journey to God. But for Protestantism, there can be no passengers. This is because there is no ship in the Catholic sense, no common movement carrying humans to salvation. Each believer rows his or her own boat (Taylor, 1989:217).

The argument here is that believers must take individual responsibility for their salvation. Unlike Lucy's Protestantism, the Catholic Church collectively handles the issue of salvation whilst diminishing the spiritual obligation of individuals. Lucy avers that, in order to ensure the spiritual subordination of individuals, Catholic authorities manipulate laypersons to concentrate on their physical pleasure.

Brontë further ridicules the Catholic creed during Madame Beck's birthday fête. As a trick for the fête, a hairdresser is invited, and he settles into the oratory full of holy paraphernalia:

The great day arrived [...] About nine o'clock, A.M., an important functionary, the 'coiffeur,' arrived. Sacrilegious to state, he fixed his head-quarters in the oratory, and there, in presence of *bénitier*, candle, and crucifix, solemnized the mysteries of his art. Each girl was summoned in turn to pass through his hands; emerging from them with head as smooth as a shell, intersected by faultless white lines, and wreathed about with Grecian plaits that shone as if lacquered (Brontë, 2004:144).

Brontë comically compares the scene with the last Judgement day using the imagery of the girls lining up before the hairdresser in the oratory as a representation of human beings awaiting God's judgement. In 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, the apostle Paul predicts that “the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this the corruptible must put on in corruption, and the

mortal must put on immortality". However, the secularised version of physical transformation depicted in the quoted scene contradicts what is recorded in the Bible. By doing so, Brontë criticises the prevailing material indulgence that is upheld at Madame Beck's school.

The exclusive humanism evinced by the characters of Madame Beck and Dr John typifies the modern self. Madame Beck's Catholic/Jesuit creed, immorality or excessive materialism should be rejected, but Dr John's pursuit of success in this world corresponds with Jane and Caroline's wishes to find their profession in society. In this sense, Brontë's previous protagonists pursue exclusive humanism by seeking professional fulfilment in society through their relentless efforts to self-develop based on their Protestant belief. It is probable that the character of Dr John inspired Brontë's previous protagonists, who aspired to have a qualified profession while maintaining a deep sense of self, taking care of their families and living in good will with their neighbours. In terms of business, even Madame Beck would be highly evaluated for her ability in profession, because she achieves economic independence through sheer dexterity. Brontë broaches the subject of secularisation more positively in her previous texts by encouraging women to acquire modern identities outside of the prescribed pre-Reformational marginal roles. In *Villette*, Lucy is ambivalent towards Madame Beck and Dr John. Even though she initially feels intensely curious about their worldliness and seems fascinated by it, she refuses to become like them in the end. In the next section, I examine how Lucy's worldview differs from the exclusive humanism embodied by Madame Beck and Dr John.

4.4.2 Brontë and the question of human suffering

The narrative of *Villette* is mostly set in the imaginary European country, Labassecour, where the protagonist, Lucy Snowe, suffers intense existential angst and loneliness as a foreigner. Lucy's alienation is partly attributable to the differences between her Protestant faith and the widespread Catholicism in the country. However, her friendliness with the other English characters living in Villette—such as the Brettons, Ginevra, or Paulina—fails to develop into close relationships. Even while in England, Lucy is unable or unwilling to interact with the Brettons, so it is only logical to consider factors other than cultural and religious differences. I hold that the source of Lucy's unhappiness is her unique attitude towards the pursuit of human flourishing in a secularised modern society, which sets her apart from Dr John and Madame Beck.

The first six chapters of the novel describe Lucy's experiences in England at a young age at the Brettons and with Miss Marchmont, as well as her journey to Villette via London. As a young girl, Lucy's ego is porous—unlike the buffered self—and open to transcendent meanings or powers. However, this does not mean that she is susceptible to irrational superstition. Rather, she actively uses reason and good sense:

The next day, on my return from a long walk, I found, as I entered my bed-room, an unexpected change. In addition to my own French bed in its shady recess, appeared in a corner a small crib, draped with white; and in addition to my mahogany chest of drawers, I saw a tiny rosewood chest. I stood still, gazed, and considered.

'Of what are these things the signs and tokens?' I asked. The answer was obvious. 'A second guest is coming: Mrs Bretton expects other visitors' (Brontë, 2004:8)

In this passage, which occurs while at the Brettons, Lucy perceives the sudden addition of the crib to the bedroom as some sort of "sign[s] and token[s]" (Brontë, 2004:8). Her unconditioned response of interpreting it as a symbol implies that Lucy is not closed to "whatever lies beyond this ordered human world" (Taylor, 2007:302). However, right after her initial reaction, she adjusts her intuition and reasonably infers the potential arrival of a new guest.

Nevertheless, a few years later, on the night of Miss Marchmont's death, Lucy demonstrates an openness to the transcendental world when she senses inexplicable signs of death:

One February night - I remember it well - there came a voice near Miss Marchmont's house, heard by every inmate, but translated, perhaps, only by one [...] I had heard that very voice ere this, and compulsory observation had forced on me a theory as to what it boded. Three times in the course of my life, events had taught me that these strange accents in the storm - this restless, hopeless cry - denote a coming state of the atmosphere unpropitious to life. Epidemic diseases, I believed, were often heralded by a gasping, sobbing, tormented, long-lamenting east wind. Hence, I inferred, arose the legend of the Banshee (Brontë, 2004:42-43).

Lucy hears an ominous small voice in the stormy wind. The voice transcends the natural, as she is the only one who can hear it. Although this event seems supernatural, Lucy processes the information in a logical manner. She tries to rationalise the mystical voice with empirical theory and by relating it to the source of the Banshee story. Moreover, Lucy tries to draw a scientific conclusion:

I fancied, too, I had noticed - but was not philosopher enough to know whether there was any connection between the circumstances - that we often at the same time hear of disturbed volcanic action in distant parts of the world; of rivers suddenly rushing above their banks; and of strange high tides flowing furiously in on low sea-coasts. 'Our globe,' I had said to myself, 'seems at such periods torn and disordered; the feeble amongst us wither in her distempered breath, rushing hot from steaming volcanoes.' (Brontë, 2004:42-43)

Instead of being terrified by the supernatural power, Lucy observes the supernatural phenomenon from a distance, analyses it with empirical data, and forms her own theory about the phenomenon. In this way, Lucy proves to be as rational as her contemporaries, without denying the transcendental meanings of the occurrence.

Lucy's openness to transcendental reasoning is also revealed in her understanding of happiness. During the argument with Dr John about the attainment of happiness, Lucy posits a different viewpoint. Dr John perceives happiness and misfortune as man-made and urges Lucy to embrace happiness for her mental health. His experience of overcoming life's difficulties with Mrs Bretton reinforces his belief in his own immanent power. Lucy, on the other hand, recognises and acknowledges the intervention of transcendent meaning in her life. On the subject of happiness, she asserts that it is "not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure", but "a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven" or "a divine dew which the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise" (Brontë, 2004:279). She therefore strongly believes that happiness is a product of divine Providence.

The fact that Dr John's exclusive humanism cannot be applied to human suffering makes it more problematic than his conceptualisation of happiness. What this means is that the casual order, belief in immanent power, and the pursuit of human flourishing cannot console those who are suffering. For example, he can neither comprehend Lucy's view of happiness as a providential gift from God, nor the fact that calamity can be a random occurrence; he believes that there must be a cause for everything, one which can be located within ourselves. This explains why he probes Lucy to account for her melancholy: "why, Lucy, can't you look and feel as I do—buoyant, courageous, and fit to defy all the nuns and flirts in Christendom?" (Brontë, 2004:278) Within the limits of Dr John's disenchanting logic, since all transcendental sources are excluded, Lucy's own weakness is the only answer available to him.

Therefore, it is not easy for either Lucy or Miss Marchmont to adapt the cause-and-effect relationship to their loss of loved ones. From a young age, Lucy experiences difficult situations including the loss of her family members and Miss Marchmont. For Lucy, her experiences cannot be analysed on the basis of causal order, as is Dr John's tendency, especially because doing so would imply that Lucy or Miss Marchmont have done something to warrant the sufferings they endure. On her part, Miss Marchmont lives as "a woe-struck" woman for 30 years after her fiancé's death, constantly asking "[f]or what crime was I condemned"? However, as she clearly asserts, "I do not know" and "I cannot—*cannot* see the reason." (Brontë, 2004:44) In a similar vein, Lucy contemplates the inexplicable: "Was it their fault, Paulina, that they of whom you speak thus died?" (Brontë, 2004:416)

To apply causal order to Lucy and Miss Marchmont's suffering could be considered a violent interrogation of their personal responsibility and sanity. For instance, when Dr John identifies Lucy's vision as a spectral illusion, she is horrified by the idea that the ghost is not an external entity but part of her: "[S]he came out of my brain, and now is gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?" (Brontë, 2004:278) Originally, Lucy considers

the ghost as an external entity that she encounters by chance, but Dr John insists that the ghost is part of her; something she can control with her will. Moreover, the person in charge of the ghost is Lucy herself, because it is within her mental capacity to make such an illusion. Dr John further suggests that, if she meets the ghost again, it would be because of her venerable mental condition, which fails to cultivate happiness.

In a similar manner, Miss Marchmont's suffering could be labelled as the consequences of her private wrongdoings. Despite her deep introspection, Miss Marchmont concludes that she doubts she has committed any sin that justifies the loss of her fiancé.

'You see I still think of Frank more than of God; and unless it be counted that in thus loving the creature so much, so long, and so exclusively, I have not at least blasphemed the Creator, small is my chance of salvation. What do you think, Lucy, of these things? Be my chaplain and tell me.'
(Brontë, 2004:46)

The only sin she admits to is loving Frank more than she loves God. Some critics, such as Carens (2010:344-345) and Dale (1984:6) have read Marchmont's profession of love as a confession to idolatry. So Miss Marchmont pays the price for her sin with lifelong suffering, as Lucy does later in the chapter. Pearson (2009:204-205) offers a slightly different perspective: she juxtaposes Miss Marchmont and Lucy. She argues that Miss Marchmont and Lucy symbolise two disparate cases: the first portrays an idolatrous love that ends in painful life, whereas Lucy's love for M. Paul is non-idolatrous. The common premise here remains that the painful life the characters endure results from a sinful, idolatrous love.

I disagree with these critics, since their analyses deviate from the harmonious creed Brontë posits in *Villette*. From *Jane Eyre* to *Villette*, Brontë explicitly castigates the idea of a punitive God. As discussed in previous chapters, Brontë has never agreed with the idea of the punitive God as espoused in Calvinism. Rather, she refutes religious fear and punishment-based theologies. In *Jane Eyre*, for instance, despite Jane's struggle with idolatrous love, Brontë describes God as the merciful mother who is willing to help and encourages her to escape from the sin of idolatry. Therefore, it is incredulous to accept that Brontë would suddenly change her stance to support a punitive God in *Villette*. Moreover, throughout her letters and fiction, Brontë consistently portrays an image of a loving and merciful God. In this respect, both Perkin (2009:56) and Clark-Beattie (1986:822) insist that Brontë's theology is similar to Broad Church theology, which believes in a God who saves all people. On the other hand, Thormählen (1999:42) refutes the labelling of Brontë's theology as Broad Church theology, asserting that such labelling is problematic in terms

and in contexts³. Irrespective of whether Brontë espouses this belief or not, it is certain that Brontë believes in a loving God and rejects the concept of a punitive God.

Although Brontë undergoes several hardships before and during the writing of *Villette*, she does not deviate from her staunch belief in the merciful God nor regards her suffering as a punishment from God. For example, Brontë's letters to W.S. Williams on 4 and 13 June 1849 reveal the extent of pain she endures at the serial loss of Emily and Anne, but she still does not desist from loving God:

'Why life is so blank, brief and bitter I do not know—Why younger and far better than I are snatched from it with projects unfulfilled I cannot comprehend—but I believe God is wise—perfect—merciful' (Brontë, 2007:137).

It is over. Branwell—Emily—Anne are gone like dreams—gone as Maria and Elizabeth went twenty years ago. One by one I have watched them fall asleep on my arm—and closed their glazed eyes—I have seen them buried one by one—and—thus far—God has upheld me. From my heart I thank Him (Brontë, 2007:138).

These two letters—written in June of 1849, and right after Anne's death on 30 May—show the immense grief that Brontë suffers at the serial loss of her sisters. Also, she finds it difficult to comprehend the gap between the will of the merciful God and the misfortunes that befell her (Harman, 2016:271). Despite her pain and grief, as she confesses in her letters, she keeps her belief in the merciful God and appreciates his benevolence.

4.4.2.1 Lucy as the suffering Job

Brontë's belief in God is reflected in Lucy, whom she identifies with the biblical character, Job. In fact, Lucy introduces herself as Job, "[a]s poor as Job" (Brontë, 2004:61). By alluding to Job, she attempts to draw a link between her own hardships and the troubles of Job. In the Old Testament, Job loses all his possessions, including his children and his health as part of God's trial. When three of his friends visit him, they urge him to repent of his sins, because they imagine that his misfortunes result from his iniquities. Firstly, Eliphaz the Temanite asks Job "whoever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?" (Job, 4:7). Bildad the Shuhite accuses Job and his dead children, saying, "If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression" (Job, 8:4); and Zophar the Naamathite interprets Job's calamity as "the portion of wicked man from God" (Job, 20:29). From chapters 4 to 37, his friends continue to

³ Thormählen (1999:41-42) criticises two points: firstly, although Broad Churchmen's commitment to freedom and insistence on latitude for religious matters seem similar to Brontë's preoccupations, their lack of theological knowledge repelled Brontë. Secondly, she challenges the contextual problem of the term Broad Church because the term originates from around 1850 and given currency in 1853 in the *Edinburgh Review*, only two years before Charlotte's death.

accuse Job while he reiterates his innocence. Finally, God manifests himself and ends their arguments from chapters 38 to 42. In the last chapter of the book of *Job*, God scolds Job's friends: "My wrath is kindled against thee [Eliphaz], and thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right as my servant Job hath" in Job 42:7. God explicitly confirms that Job's troubles are not a consequence of his wrath, thereby dispelling the erroneous perception held by Job's friends about the punitive justice of God.

By paralleling Lucy's suffering with that of Job, Brontë delivers a two-fold message. Firstly, she suggests that human suffering is not often as a direct consequence of iniquity; secondly, she decimates the flawed idea of a punitive God. Since Job's calamities are a test "to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:4), Lucy can validate her own innocence by identifying with Job. If human happiness is not man-made but Providential, so too are her sufferings. However, this does not mean that Lucy is unwilling to admit herself a sinner. During one of her religious debates with M. Paul, she cries out: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Brontë, 2004:467) This plea for divine mercy certifies her awareness of herself as a sinner; nonetheless, she maintains that her sufferings are not a part of God's punishment for her wrongdoings. This manner of reasoning clearly differs from Dr John's, who analyses Lucy's symptoms and behaviours to find reasonable justification for her suffering.

From an alternative perspective, if Lucy regards her suffering as Providential, it is possible to infer that God has specially chosen her to be tested. Thus, the Protestant Lucy becomes a lonely stranger in the land of pagans and Roman Catholics, and her sufferings become the evidence of divine selection. Just like Job, who has to undergo calamities as an affirmation of his outstanding faith in God, Lucy does not belong to the secular world and her goal is not human flourishing. According to Wang (2001:347), Lucy's suffering is a reflection of the theological notion that regards Christians as strangers in exile. She aptly notes that "the use of this topos to describe Lucy's predicament opens up the possibility of a deeper religious significance to her suffering", because it resonates with the stories about wandering Israelites who are chosen and chastised by God in the book of Exodus (2001:347-348). For example, in the chapter entitled "Long Vacation", Lucy experiences severe mental illness while alone in the school. She describes her condition as follows: "My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords." (Brontë, 2004:172-3) During her period of loneliness and suffering, Lucy concludes that it is "a part of his great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one" (Brontë, 2004:174). She even relates her mental suffering to Christ's passion and, by doing so, she assigns religious meaning and significance to her suffering (Fimland, 1996:155). In a later part of the novel, Lucy reassures herself by saying: "I know that, amidst His boundless works, is somewhere stored the secret of this last fate's justice: I know that His treasures contain the proof as the promise of its mercy." (Brontë, 2004:418) Thus, in the first

paragraph of chapter 38, Lucy resolves, “to endure the suffering she recognizes as her lot in biblical terms” through the juxtaposition of hope and despair (Thormählen, 2009: 516).

Sufferer, faint not through terror of this burning evidence. Tired wayfarer, gird up thy loins, look upwards, march onward. Pilgrims and brother mourners, join in friendly company [...] Let us so run that we may obtain; let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course, and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors: 'Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!' (Brontë, 2004:484).

The religious significance of this passage avails hope and comfort to Lucy and allows her to embrace her suffering as a divine sign of selection, even though her fate is in direct contrast with the peaceful fates of Dr John and Paulina. Lucy describes them as a well-borne pair who is blessed “with great prosperity, great goodness” (Brontë, 2004:483).

4.4.2.2 Fate and Divine Providence

Through her life experiences, Lucy realises at a young age that there are two distinct fates in life: one is the blessed fate of “a great many women and girls” (Brontë, 2004:39) which is a fate of peaceful bark in a still harbour, while her fate is to survive a shipwreck. She realises that, apart from their abilities, endeavours, and faith, people have been handed their fates from a transcendental being, which to Brontë or Lucy obviously represents God—one that human beings can neither control nor understand. For Lucy, this is especially true because she is destined to be deprived and lonely. As the creator of Lucy’s world, Brontë purposefully assigns her a cruel fate. In her letter to Smith, Brontë reveals that she determines to be hard on Lucy from the beginning and has “never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places” (Gaskell, 1997:391). It is Brontë’s intention to impose peculiarly harsh trials on Lucy in contrast with Dr John or Paulina. Not only does she design Lucy as a suffering character, but Brontë also prepares a happy lot for Dr John. She declares, “Lucy must not marry Dr John” because “[h]is wife must be young, rich, pretty”, someone who will be able to make him happy (Gaskell, 1997:391). What this implies is that Lucy’s suffering is not by choice or in accordance with her deeds, but is predestined by her creator.

In this sense, Dr John’s exclusive humanism cannot be the appropriate creed for Lucy. Rather, he becomes an idol to misguide her. As previously stated, Dr John is closed to transcendental meanings and is a typical exemplar of the modern disciplined self, who fully trusts in his unceasing efforts and knowledge, and denies meanings beyond himself. Unbeknownst to him, however, he has been predestined to live a happy life according to his fate, which is not his own design. Pearson (2009:184) indicates that Dr John’s “religion is depicted as largely cultural—he is British; therefore, he is Christian” and “John’s conversation with Lucy do not include religious concerns.” In many ways, Dr John is reminiscent of St John in *Jane Eyre*, who equally demonstrates traits of exclusive humanism with trust in his reason and the pursuance of human flourishing. More

precisely, like Dr John, St John also tries to be an idol to Jane. However, Dr John seems a more secularised version of St John as his limit of exclusive humanism culminates in the loss of transcendental meanings. Without realising his limit, his advice to Lucy is invalid; her sufferings do not stem from her immanent problems. When Lucy experiences severe mental illness during her long vacation, she blames her fate, “I like to lay the mountains of blame they were sculptured to bear: me and fate” (Brontë, 2004:207), whereas Dr John looks for a human explanation for her condition: “Who is in the wrong then Lucy?” (Brontë, 2004:207) Evidently, Dr John cannot understand her providential sufferings, so—with typical masculine confidence—he offers to take better care of Lucy.

To keep his promise, Dr John tries to be the source of Lucy’s happiness by writing her letters and introducing her to several cultural places. In response, Lucy breaks her creed of divine happiness, allowing his creed to become hers: “A new creed became mine.” (Brontë, 2004:281) As explained earlier, this point is critical to Lucy’s identity formation, because Dr John’s exclusive humanism affects Lucy by superimposing a new creed onto her. This explains why Brontë critics pinpoint Dr John’s idol-like features and Lucy’s description of his appearance, which affirms this. As an older narrator, Lucy refers to Dr John as the “golden image” (Brontë, 2004:108) of King Nebuchadnezzar in book of Daniel. Pearson (2009:185) aptly indicates the reference to relate to “the image that (significantly) an Eastern potentate had set up to be worshipped in an act of idolatry”. In the same vein, Carens (2010:345) reveals that the size of the Nebuchadnezzar statue, “whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits” (Daniel, 3:3), comprised a modern unit height of 27m and width of 2.7m. He further argues that the enormous size of the idol suggests the intensity of Lucy’s erotic preoccupation with Dr John’s physical attractions (2010:345). To summarise, Brontë bestows upon Dr John idol-like qualities, and he intentionally assumes this position by trying to be the source of Lucy’s happiness. It is not surprising, then, that Lucy is fascinated by him and idolises him accordingly.

However, as an idol, Dr John misguides her with his exclusive humanism. Even though Lucy does not recognise Dr John as the young Bretton Graham, she inherently trusts him from the first time she re-encounters him in Villette:

[...] as to distrusting him, or his advice, or his address, I should almost as soon have thought of distrusting the Bible. There was goodness in his countenance, and honour in his bright eyes.

[...] He moved on, and I followed him, through the darkness and the small soaking rain. The Boulevard was all deserted, its path miry, the water dripping from its trees; the park was black as midnight. In the double gloom of trees and fog, I could not see my guide; I could only follow his tread. Not the least fear had I: I believe I would have followed that frank tread, through continual night, to the world's end (Brontë, 2004:70-71).

In this scene, Lucy follows Dr John as the narrator of Psalm 23:4 follows the shepherd or the Lord, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of the death, I fear no evil: for thou art with me”. This is an unquestionable sign of her idolisation of him. Nevertheless, since Dr John is not Lucy’s real Lord Shepherd, his guidance derails Lucy so she gets lost and wanders about the street at night. In addition, he misapprehends Lucy’s nature so that she complains that he always requires “a rôle not mine” (Brontë, 2004:352). Despite their differences, Lucy cannot resist him: “In a strange and new sense, I grew most selfish, and quite powerless to deny myself the delight of indulging his mood and being pliant to his will.” (Brontë, 2004:215) The inadequacies of Dr John’s exclusive humanism and its impact on Lucy are hinted at in the shipwreck allusion. After the loss of her kinship, Lucy alludes to the tragic accident and her fate with a shipwreck image:

However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time - a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished (Brontë, 2004:39).

In this scene, Lucy makes a biblical reference to Acts 27:11. When Paul was sent to Italy, the escort centurion “believed the master and owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul” and pushed ahead their voyage. As a result, they met tempest “when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared [...] all hope that we should be saved was then taken away” (Acts 27:20). The shipwreck in the Acts of the Apostles ended as the prophecy Paul had received from God stated: “I exhort you to be good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” (Acts, 27:22) What is significant in the biblical story is that the ship was in danger because they relied more on the knowledge and opinions of the experts than on Paul’s prophesy. In the same way, Dr John’s rationality and intelligent advice are useless to Lucy, for his way is that of the blessed while hers is that of a traveller who “encounter[s] weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable” (Brontë, 2004:418). Since Lucy’s lot is likened to the fate of “the life-boat” (Brontë, 2004:202), weathering turbulent storms, the guidance she requires is not the voice of reason and knowledge, but that of divine prophecy.

Three other characters offer Lucy the appropriate advice: M. Paul, Miss Marchmont, and M. de Bassompierre. The commonality among them is the fact that all three of them have suffered fates similar to Lucy’s in their bereavement for loved ones. Miss Marchmont loses her fiancé and spends the rest of her life in physical and mental pain, while M. de Bassompierre suddenly loses his wife during their separation and is perpetually racked with guilt and ill health. M. Paul, who is also the main male protagonist, experiences the loss of his fiancé, Justine Marie. Due to their shared experience of grief and emotional turmoil, they all understand that tragedy befalls

individuals without due reason. Naturally, their advice concerning Lucy's painful condition differs from that of Dr John. Miss Marchmont's admonishes Lucy to accept her cruel fate as it is and urges her to remember the mercy of God even though it may seem difficult to understand: "We should acknowledge God merciful, but not always for us comprehensible. We should accept our own lot whatever it be, and try to render happy that of others. (Brontë, 2004:46) On a similar note, M. de Bassompierre's encourages Lucy "to keep the course honestly straight" (Brontë, 2004:316) so that, in time, she will realise the essence of her suffering. Because they have undergone painful providential trials in their own lives, they are able to remind Lucy that humans have no option but to submit themselves to the providential tests while trusting in the mercy of God. This is the same lesson Brontë herself learnt from the tragic loss of her siblings: "I have learnt that we are not to find solace in our own strength, we must seek it in God's omnipotence. Fortitude is good—but fortitude itself must be shaken under us to teach us how weak we are." (Brontë, 2007:134) Here, Brontë wholeheartedly accepts her tragic experiences of loss as essential providential trials designed to teach her a priceless lesson.

Lucy acknowledges her tragedies as God-given trials beyond the distractions of lethargic fatalism or futile anger. Whilst living with Miss Marchmont, Lucy is tempted "to compromise with Fate"; "to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains" (Brontë, 2004:42). However, she soon realises that it is impossible to evade her fate by compromising, which to her lot is "shrinking sloth and cowardly indolence" (Brontë, 2004:42). After seeing the play entitled *Vashti*, Lucy decides to eschew being furious about her lot. In the play, the empress Vashti is struck with great suffering, but she fights doggedly to overcome her circumstances. Lucy is greatly impressed by Vashti's character, especially her strength and resilience in the face of adversities. Nonetheless, Lucy regards Vashti negatively as "a spirit out of Tophet" because her great ferocity seems "so much of unholy force" (Brontë, 2004:287) from below. Lucy wishes instead that "an equal efflux of sacred essence descend" from above (Brontë, 2004:287).

In the end, Lucy refuses Dr John's exclusive humanist solutions for her sufferings and embraces providential interference in her life. There are ample examples to prove that Lucy fully admits her lot and struggles not in despair, but in absolute surrender to the mercy of God:

Of course I did not blame myself for suffering: I thank God I had a truer sense of justice than to fall into any imbecile extravagances of self-accusation; and as to blaming others for silence, in my reason I well knew them blameless, and in my heart acknowledged them so: but it was a rough and heavy road to travel, and I longed for better days (Brontë, 2004:296).

While she is forgotten by Brettons for seven weeks, Lucy suffers from loneliness, but rather than blaming herself or others, she accepts loneliness as her destiny. In this passage, Lucy wishes for better days at the end of her painful fate, but not a reward for her efforts. Therefore, rather than insisting on her worthiness for a better life, she prefers to quietly walk the given path.

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters - to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain (Brontë, 2004:329).

After reuniting with Paulina, Dr John stops sending letters to Lucy, so Lucy buries her feelings for Dr John with his letters. In this scene, Lucy compares life to a war, and accepts that she is destined to fight this war alone without anyone's help. The only thing she can hope for is that God, who has pity on her, will help.

Some lives *are* thus blessed: it is God's will: it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden. Other lives run from the first another course. Other travellers encounter weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable - breast adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night. Neither can this happen without the sanction of God; and I know that, amidst His boundless works, is somewhere stored the secret of this last fate's justice: I know that His treasures contain the proof as the promise of its mercy.' (Brontë, 2004:418).

When Dr John, whom she once admired, falls in love with Paulina, Lucy also accepts it. Just as a traveller cannot choose the weather, humans cannot choose their destiny, so she declares that everything is under God's control and leans on His mercy.

As the quoted passage suggests, Lucy manages to disengage herself from the idolising influence of Dr John. Her overall attitude towards her lot evinces that she strategically receives advice from others besides Dr John, who share her Protestant values. Rather than seeking measures to save herself within herself or through any other human being, she relies solely on divine guidance. In this regard, Lucy's attitude is quite similar to Job's, who regards his sudden suffering as a divine test and does not blame God for it. Since Lucy refuses to adapt to exclusive humanism, the goal of human flourishing also cannot be attained. In the next section, I examine Lucy's re-envisioning of her eternal goal and vision.

4.4.3 Lucy's re-envisioning: A new creed for the eternal Bridegroom

Instead of the human, secular flourishing that exclusive humanism espouses, Lucy chooses to seek her own creed that acknowledges the transcendental interference in her life. In this sense, the ending of *Villette* differs significantly from Brontë's previous works, which often end with the marriage of the female protagonists. Apart from *Villette*, Brontë's other three fictional works namely *Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Shirley* advocate for the prosperity of the female protagonists in married life. In *Villette*, this ending is thwarted with the death of Paul, and it seems to reiterate Lucy's faltering belief in the merciful God. According to Freedman (2008:416), Paul's death can be interpreted as "the eventual failure of God's grace". For Dale (1984:21), the ending represents "the ultimate object" of Lucy's expectations—both religious and romantic. Gilbert and Gubar

(2000:403, 427) regard *Villette* as an elegy for the repressed woman who is forced to reject her romance. However, whether Lucy marries or not is unrelated to the exploration of the mercy of God in *Villette*. What Lucy unearths from her suffering exceeds the mere reward of her flourishing in this world. Instead, she also discovers her own creed; one that differs remarkably from the secularised belief in human flourishing, but also seeks fullness from her vision of the transcendental world.

Despite the influences of the secularised and materialistic Dr John, Brontë presents M. Paul as the perfect partner for Lucy. While Dr John represents the typical hero and the proverbial prince charming to whom almost all the female characters are attracted to, M. Paul is initially described as an eccentric and tyrannical little man, a devout Roman Catholic with no fortune. Although M. Paul seems more like a foil character (until the end of the second volume), Brontë chooses him as more appropriate spouse for Lucy, probably because of his spiritual values. Moreover, his death symbolises the promise of the coming of Christ, the eternal bridegroom of every Christian. By transcendentalising M. Paul to the Messiah, Brontë eliminates any possibility of the progression of the idolatrous relationship between Lucy and M. Paul, and proposes a new Christian belief in the secularised world, which dwells on the pursuance of human flourishing only.

The character of M. Paul is clearly revealed when contrasted with Dr John. Tayler (1990:222-225) offers in-depth analysis of Dr John and M. Paul. While Dr John personifies the materialist “physician of bodies” and symbolises secular seductions, M. Paul represents “the fiery physician of souls” whose husk is unattractive man, but whose kernel is full of divine beatitudes to fulfil her desires. Therefore, Dr John and Paulina are examples of the supreme bliss in this world, as Lucy aptly puts it, “[t]his pair was blessed indeed, for years brought them, with great prosperity, great goodness”. Their blessing is sanctioned by God— “[i]t was so, for God saw that it was good”— despite Dr John’s insistence (Brontë, 2004:483). On the contrary, M. Paul and Lucy epitomise a pair of providential sufferers who lack earthly attractions. Both of them possess a moderate fortune, plain looks, are stubborn, and have a furious temper. In her letter, Brontë reveals that M. Paul’s unattractiveness was intentional, and that it worked so well because her contemporary readers disliked M. Paul: “You see how much the ladies think of this little man, whom you none of you like.” (Gaskell, 1997:405)

His physical unattractiveness notwithstanding, M. Paul possesses several qualities that position him as the worthiest partner for Lucy. Firstly, unlike Dr John, M. Paul is not insensitive to spiritual, supernatural, or transcendental issues. It is important to note that M. Paul is the only character who actually is not dismissive about Lucy’s encounter with the nun ghost:

‘Bon! I am glad of it. I knew it somehow before you told me. I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery;

you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike - there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine - that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. Yes, you were born under my star! Tremble! for where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle; knottings and catchings occur - sudden breaks leave damage in the web. But these "impressions," as you say, with English caution. I, too, have had my "impressions" (Brontë, 2004:407).

Lucy circumvents her vision of the ghost nun, but M. Paul grasps the point. He understands the nature of transcendental interference on human existence and realises that sometimes humans cannot solve the entanglements of their destinies. In this regard, his openness to the intricacies of the spiritual world stems partly from his Roman Catholic background, but also from the painful experience of losing his lover, Justine Marie. This is not because of M. Paul's lack of rationality, because M. Paul is as rational as Dr John is in his field: M. Paul is an erudite scholar, a renowned intellectual and a regular invitee to academic events in Villette. The loss of his fiancé imbues him with an understanding of the inevitability of divine events and a sense of indifference to worldly fulfilment. M. Paul strongly believes that if "the mortal will have put on immortality - it will rise, not for earth, but heaven" (Brontë, 2004:383). Since they share similar experiences of life's trials, one could argue that he is the perfect fit for Lucy, unlike Dr John and Paulina, whose "stars must be fortunate" (Brontë, 2004:479).

Secondly, M. Paul penetrates Lucy's hidden desire and gifts, and stimulates her to perceive them. For example, during her early days at Madame Beck's *Pensionnat*, Lucy is passive and prefers to remain on the margins of society. She purposefully aims to "escape action", believing that "the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness" (Brontë, 2004:85). She demarcates her existence into two spheres, one being "the life of thought" and the other "that of reality" (Brontë, 2004:85). On the one hand, Lucy acts as "a shadowy spot on a field of light" (Brontë, 2004:146) and chooses to live in "the dimness and depression" (Brontë, 2004:331). On the other hand, her life of thought is "nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joy of fancy" (Brontë, 2004:85). This places her on the path of passivity and lethargy, which misleads others, such as Dr John, who regards Lucy as "quiet Lucy Snowe" or "his inoffensive shadow" (Brontë, 2004:351). However, M. Paul awakens Lucy's dormant desires. The typical example is the event of Madame Beck's fête, during which M. Paul puts Lucy on the stage. On that day, while Lucy is alone and "down into some deep dell of dream-land", as usual, M. Paul appears with "the sharpest ring" and awakens her (Brontë, 2004:146). M. Paul forces Lucy to participate in the play: "Play you must. I will not have you shrink, or frown, or make the prude. I read your skull, that night you came; I see your moyens [abilities]: play you can; play you must." (Brontë, 2004:147) As the result of his defiant encouragement, Lucy realises that she fears her own voice and while

on the stage, the quiet Lucy overcomes her fear by finding her innate voice, she acts “as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer” (Brontë, 2004:155-156). After the performance, Lucy is certain that she has dramatic prowess. As Tayler (1990:242) rightly asserts, M. Paul arrives in Lucy’s life “to shake the foundation of Lucy’s prison” and “loose the band of her huddled soul by means of his ardent and fiery spirit”.

Since M. Paul’s role focuses on awakening Lucy’s innermost potential, and Lucy’s desire centres around her spiritual and intellectual development more than an erotic relationship, he could be considered her mentor rather than her romantic lover. In this respect, Menon (2003:121) argues that Lucy and M. Paul’s relationship exudes less sexual intensity than Dr John and Mrs Bretton’s. The fact that Brontë has the tendency of positing mentor-lover relationships in her other novels, it is not surprising that M. Paul forms a mentorship with Lucy, rather than an amorous relationship. Even though it is hard to find erotic intensity between them—*Jane Eyre* calls Rochester ‘Master’, after all—the erotic tension is not entirely absent. Menon specifically criticises the fact that M. Paul becomes an “asexual nurturer” (2003:121) during his three-year absence in the last chapter of *Villette*.

I argue that Brontë intentionally controls the sexual connotations in Lucy and M. Paul’s relationship. She consciously prohibits Lucy from gaining satisfaction from anything in the secular world, including the fulfilment of romantic love. Instead of slotting him into the role of a romantic lover, Brontë lends M. Paul a messianic image through his death. He unites with the Messiah, who is the ultimate groom for every Christian. From the third volume of the novel, Brontë represents M. Paul with messianic features, while he is described as an eccentric professor of literature in the first two volumes. Tayler (1990:250) also notices that “the signs of Paul’s divine dimension rapidly accumulate” in Volume 3. Volume 3 starts with chapters entitled “The Watchguard” and “Monsieur’s Fête”, which narrate the events of M. Paul’s birthday party and Lucy’s gift. In this part of the narrative, M. Paul holds a birthday fête, which differs from that of Madame Beck. Unlike her fête, during which she requires an expensive present from the school, M. Paul prefers moderate but heartfelt birthday greetings:

Yet he liked a slight tribute; the cost, the money-value, did not touch him: a diamond ring, a gold snuff-box, presented with pomp, would have pleased him less than a flower, or a drawing, offered simply and with sincere feelings. Such was his nature. He was a man, not wise in his generation, yet could he claim a filial sympathy with ‘the dayspring on high’ (Brontë, 2004:373).

In this scene, Brontë alludes to the Gospel of Luke by relating M. Paul’s humble nature to that of Christ. He is more pleased with his pupils’ thoughtful gifts than with the expensive ones; this is reminiscent of Christ’s teaching on the value of heartfelt offerings, with the poor widow’s two mites more precious than the rich man’s abundant offering in Luke 21. Furthermore, Lucy describes M.

Paul as a man who is “not wise in his generation” (Brontë, 2004:373), a direct reference to the quotation from Luke 16:8: “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”. This implies that M. Paul’s identity is similar to the child of the light, who has spiritual strength but is blind to secular values. She also affirms that M. Paul could “claim a filial sympathy with ‘the dayspring on high’” (Brontë, 2004:373). In this passage, “the dayspring on high” refers to the Messiah and originates from the prophecy of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Brontë (2006b:456) used the exact same expressions to indicate Genius, who is the bridegroom of Eva and son of God as well in *Shirley*. Lucy considers M. Paul to be morally and spiritually grounded, and her use of the same phrase reinforces his Christ-like character.

The depiction of M. Paul’s character changes considerably through the narrative, and Brontë is also aware of this inconsistency as she cautions readers “not to be in any hurry with his kindly conclusions [...] that from that day M. Paul became a changed character—easy to live with, and no longer apt to flash danger and discomfort round him” (Brontë, 2004:386). Lucy criticises M. Paul’s personality and teaching methods, especially as a mentor. She complains that at the beginning, he teaches her kindly with patience, but as she progresses in knowledge, when he becomes a stern teacher: “[T]he light changed in his eyes from a beam to a spark; he fretted, he opposed, he curbed me imperiously.” (Brontë, 2004:390)

During his picnic with his pupils, M. Paul replicates Christ’s Last Supper. Like Jesus, who sent his disciples to prepare the last supper, M. Paul asks Lucy to prepare breakfast in the farmhouse. The Last Supper denotes the preparatory notification of Christ’s Passion and death. Similarly, during the picnic, M. Paul notifies Lucy of his intention to go abroad for years: “[H]ow long could you remember me if we were separated?” (Brontë, 2004:425) In this way, Brontë reiterates the messianic image of M. Paul. At the end of the picnic, Lucy refers to M. Paul as a shepherd, a title that remains one of the most revered appellations of Jesus Christ: “[O]ur shepherd collected his sheep from the pasture and proceeded to lead us all softly homes” (Brontë, 2004:425) At this point, M. Paul assumes the figure of a messiah to Lucy, but since he is mortal, the relationship risks becoming idolatrous.

Before solving the immanent problem of idolatry, Brontë assigns trials to Lucy, such as the disruption of the relationship by the evil trio of Madame Beck, Madame Walravage, and the priest Père Silas. They unanimously scheme to separate Lucy from M. Paul, citing the irreconcilable religious difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as the reason for their scheming. However, the real reason for their actions is that they need M. Paul’s financial support. The positive aspect of their action is that it reinforces Lucy’s conviction about M. Paul’s personality and the fact that they share the same creed, irrespective of their denominational differences. Although conceding to cater for the dependents of Madame Walravage, her handmaid, and Père

Silas would leave M. Paul poor, Lucy regards it as proof of his merciful, Christ-like nature. Pearson (2009:196) argues that M. Paul's submissiveness towards the Catholic Church makes him even more attractive to Lucy, so the union between the independent Protestant woman and the submissive Catholic man is accomplished. Therefore, their schemes only serve to affirm the similitude between M. Paul and Lucy as they propound the same creed, similar belief in the mercy of God, reliance on Biblical principles, and the remission of their own sin.

M. Paul's departure for Europe constitutes another trial for Lucy as she is cast into emotional turmoil after the loss of her companion. Lucy panics and struggles to make sense of the disaster by pursuing her vision with renewed intent. According to Freedman (2008:412), "Lucy is driven by a desire to penetrate the space reserved for future knowledge, [...] the space where grace will be fulfilled". There are two ways of achieving the vision in *Villette*: one is divine revelation, which ensures the achievement and full understanding of the future via grace, and the other is surveillance, a human way of receiving partial knowledge. In the novel, Madame Beck uses surveillance to control her school and interests. Similarly, Lucy uses this method from time to time to avoid Madame Beck's diverse schemes. In overcoming the loss of M. Paul, Lucy relies on surveillance to get the information she requires about M. Paul. When Lucy sets out to look for M. Paul, Madame Beck sedates her to stop her from meeting M. Paul, but Lucy wanders around Villette in ecstasy. Lucy describes this wandering in biblical terms as a part of her vision; however, it is not a divine vision, but a sort of surveillance that equips her partial understanding. This is because, even though she gains a partial understanding of the evil group's scheme during her wandering, she could not fully grasp the truth about M. Paul. Instead, she misunderstands the relationship between M. Paul and his goddaughter. This places the trust and unity between Lucy and M. Paul at risk, just as the evil alliance desires. This misunderstanding is only resolved after Lucy meets M. Paul face to face.

Evidently, whenever her romantic love is in danger, Lucy pursues human flourishing. Rather than rely on the divine grace, Lucy calculates how she can achieve her independence. Firstly, she buries Dr John's letters together with her love for him, and then, whenever she has troubles with M. Paul, she reverts to her previous position:

I paced up and down, thinking almost the same thoughts I had pondered that night when I buried my glass jar - how I should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position; for this train of reflection, though not lately pursued, had never by me been wholly abandoned; and whenever a certain eye was averted from me, and a certain countenance grew dark with unkindness and injustice, into that track of speculation did I at once strike [...] Madame Beck's commencement was - as I have often heard her say - from no higher starting-point, and where is she now? All these premises and this garden are hers, bought with her money; she has a

competency already secured for old age, and a flourishing establishment under her direction, which will furnish a career for her children (Brontë, 2004:400).

The problem here is that this dream is based on exclusive humanism, which relies solely on the human capacity to pursue one's material success. The role model of this vision is Madame Beck, who goes to extremes in the pursuit of her own interests. Therefore, Lucy is also aware that, to adhere to this exclusively humanist way of life, the span and meaning of her own life will be narrowed:

“[I]s there nothing more for me in life - no true home - nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only? Nothing, at whose feet I can willingly lay down the whole burden of human egotism, and gloriously take up the nobler charge of labouring and living for others?” (Brontë, 2004:400-401).

This way of life is unsuited to the trajectory of Lucy's existence because her predestined achievement is spiritual. Hence, it is not surprising that the exclusively humanistic goal of flourishing in this world seems unappealing and unfulfilling to Lucy.

M. Paul visits the dejected Lucy, supports her to rise above the goal of human flourishing, and leads her to a higher vision because the diligent pursuit of her own interests deviates from her fate. His approach is interesting because he prepares Lucy for the visions that would gain her the independence she seeks by establishing her own school with four initial students. Lucy's sense of independence, although often restrained, is captured in these lines: “Venture not to complain that such an object is too selfish, too limited, and lacks interest; be content to labour for independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher.” (Brontë, 2004:400) By supporting her to run her own school, M. Paul provides her with the requisite foothold to attain higher visions. In this scene, M. Paul explains that he is repairing Lucy's cot during his three-week absence. This alludes to the Last Supper scene before the passion of Christ, in which Jesus predicts his death: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John, 14:2-3)

This messianic vision of the preparation of the bride's home by M. Paul resonates with the Genius from Shirley's composition discussed in the previous chapter. In *Shirley*, Brontë represents her relationship with God through the imagery of the messianic bride and groom, as well as the patriarchal father and son relationship. In Shirley's composition, the crux of bride and groom relationship is the fact that the Genius selects Eva, claims her as his own, and glorifies her. In the end, he guides her to their Heavenly home for immortality. Tayler (1990:224) observes the similarity between *Shirley's* Genius and *Villette's* M. Paul and insists that, as Genius is Eva's

revelation, M. Paul is “what Lucy had sought—fulfilling God’s promise”. In addition, Lucy confesses, “I will be your faithful steward” and “I trust at your coming the account will be ready.” (Brontë, 2004:537) This shows Brontë tries to unite the mortal M. Paul with the eternal bridegroom (Messiah) in Lucy’s vision. Lucy’s confession in this scene is ambiguous because it is unclear whether this confession is a romantic confession to M. Paul or a religious confession to the Messiah. This suggests that Lucy perceives the symbolic union of M. Paul with the Messiah as imminent by the end of *Villette*.

As messianic images are imbued into the character of M. Paul, so too does the risk for idolatrous love increase. This explains why Brontë resolves this problem and pre-empts the further foregrounding of the affection between Lucy and M. Paul through his death. In the last chapter of the novel, Lucy implies that M. Paul’s ship has been wrecked and hastily ends the narrative. Hence, M. Paul becomes Lucy’s messianic groom with whom she will be reunited in an unknown future. Ironically, through his death, he assumes a state of immortality. The distinction between the mortal bridegroom (M. Paul) and the eternal, immortal bridegroom (Messiah) is blurry and the object Lucy awaits remains ambiguous. This sense of ambiguity is further exacerbated by Brontë’s use of apocalyptic language and mood in the final part of the novel:

Be ready for me. Ere I sail, I must see you at leisure, and speak with you at length. Be ready; my moments are numbered, and, just now, monopolized; besides I have a private business on hand which I will not share with any, nor communicate - even to you. - PAUL.' (Brontë, 2004:492)

The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but - he is coming. Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance; the wind takes its autumn moan; but - he is coming (Brontë, 2004:545).

In his note, M. Paul repeatedly urges Lucy to ‘be ready’, and she notes that “he is coming”. These references to the biblical terms of preparedness and return echoes Christ’s promise of His second coming, and reiterates the fact that the Christian’s faith is anchored in His promise.

Another significant fact is that, by using this device, Brontë reverses the structure of the romantic genius. For example, Jasper (2012:37) explains that “the concept of genius comes to describe a creativity that in some way parallels divine creativity” which “inevitably reflects the normative male gender of God within this tradition”. The achievement of the Romantic masculine genius necessitates women’s self-sacrifice as is exemplified in Rousseau’s *Emile* (Jasper, 2012:38). However, Brontë subverts this male tradition by sacrificing M. Paul instead, and conferring the divine creativity onto Lucy. As I previously mentioned, not only does M. Paul prepare the school for Lucy to prevent her from being stuck in the pursuit of exclusive humanism, but by his death, he also becomes the stepping-stone for Lucy to actualise her goal of becoming a writer and

attaining greater heights. As soon as Lucy accedes to becoming a recorder for M. Paul upon his request, Brontë craftily eliminates him from the plot so that Lucy can utilise her skills to write her own story. Although she suffers immense pain due to his absence, she is now able to look within herself and to rewrite her own story. Thus, she reinforces her vision of the returning bridegroom, the Messiah. In this way, Brontë devises M. Paul as the springboard for the blooming of Lucy's creative genius.

At the end of the text, Brontë suffuses Lucy's Protestant vision with an apocalyptic tone. Brontë's previous male protagonists, such as Robert and Rochester, had to prove the legitimacy and solidity of their marriages through their conversion, while female protagonists Jane, Caroline and Shirley had to show some sort of improvement after marriage to prove that their marriages are part of their vocation sanctioned by God. However, in *Villette*, Lucy is not burdened with secular achievements. Lucy achieves her success through her school business only as a loyal steward of M. Paul. More importantly, her success diverges from both Madame Beck and Dr John's human flourishing. What she pursues is not an exclusive humanist interest but her love for the messianic husband. Her success can be defined as a by-product of her loyal stewardship to a loving husband; she clarifies that "the secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart" (Brontë, 2004:544). In a similar vein, in a letter on 21 September 1849, written after the loss of Emily, Brontë attributes the success of her vocation as a writer to the benevolence of stewardship:

The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking three months ago, its active exercise has kept my head above water since [...] I am thankful to God who gave me the faculty—and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift and to profit by its possession (Brontë, 2007:144).

In this letter, she acknowledges that her creativity is a gift from God and recognises it as a religious responsibility. Rather than humanistic materialism, what she reveals here is the pertinence of humble stewardship and loyal dedication towards one's God-given duty. So, while Madame Beck and Dr John regard their successes as the rightful reward for their efforts and capabilities, Lucy understands that her success is a gift as much as a source of happiness. This evinces Lucy's staunch adherence to her Protestant creed; she determines to remain a Protestant just as M. Paul encourages her to in his last letter: "Remain a Protestant. My little English puritan." (Brontë, 2004:545) Her Protestant creed of the 'affirmation of [the] ordinary' aims specifically at accentuating the transcendental ending, the coming of the Messiah, and the eternal bridegroom. Therefore, her Protestant belief neither pursues human flourishing nor seeks to prove its output.

Villette closes with Lucy's appraisal of the narrative's evil characters: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before

she died. Farewell.” (Brontë, 2004:546) By highlighting the prosperity of evil-doers in the novel, Lucy invalidates the conformity to casual order. Lucy does not agonise over those who baselessly mistreat her, nor does she envy their prosperity, despite their wickedness. This is because, in true Protestant fashion, her hope is founded not in the secular world but in the benevolence of God. Ultimately, instead of achieving romantic love with a mortal husband, Brontë grants Lucy a higher promise and a vision: Lucy becomes a faithful steward to care for the Lord’s household until his return (Luke, 12:42-44). She remains the epitome of the wise virgin who goes out to meet the bridegroom with her lamp (Matthew, 25:1-13).

Throughout her novels, Brontë advocates for women’s religious authority and profession in society based on her Protestant belief. In *Villette*, she shifts her focus from the affirmation of the ordinary, which pursues human flourishing in this world, towards the apocalyptic vision of the coming of the Messiah and the realisation of His promises. So, while her previous protagonists struggle with the prescriptive restrictions of institutional patriarchal religion and only achieve self-actualisation and the fulfilment of their passion through matrimonial union, Lucy accepts her life’s challenges as part of her divine fate, or Providential trials, and lives in anticipation of her transcendental rewards: the coming of the bridegroom, the Messiah. In this respect, Lucy’s creed clearly diverges from the tenets of secularised Christianity and exclusive humanism as illustrated by characters such as Dr John and Madame Beck. Conclusively, *Villette* represents a fictional reassertion of Brontë’s faith after her numerous experiences of grief, pain, and inexplicable desolation. In this sense, the novel can be read as Brontë’s re-echoing of Job’s confession “I have heard of thee [God] by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.” (Job 42:5)

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This thesis sought to illustrate how Brontë's literary oeuvre debunks the critical labelling of her literary creativity as anti-Christian by demonstrating that the Protestant faith enable her female protagonists to pursue their own creed and strive towards the attainment of self-fulfilment.

5.2 Brontë's creed that no one ever taught to her

The central argument in this thesis posits that Charlotte Brontë has been erroneously labelled as an anti-Christian writer by both her contemporaries and modern critics for her dissenting feminist critique of institutional religion. However, as the foregoing discussion has shown, Brontë's criticism against patriarchal Christianity was founded on her Christian conviction that she possessed as much religious authority as men. Therefore, her faith obliged her to achieve her vocation in both her private and public lives. Although the core value of Protestant Christianity is the elimination of the division between sacred priests and secular laymen in the sense that everyone is equally called by God, patriarchal Christianity discriminates against women by restricting their religious authority and perpetuating their subordination to male authorities. Through her female protagonists, Brontë refuted the prescribed pre-Reformational roles designated to women in patriarchal Christianity and sought a new creed to affirm women's spiritual authority. However, her censuring of patriarchal Christianity was not destructive to her faith, as Brontë viewed the pursuance of a new female creed for women as mutually constitutive with her Protestant faith. In other words, to overcome the pre-Reformational marginalised status of women, Brontë daringly explored the possibilities of new theological ideas whilst adhering to Christianity and remaining a member of the Church of England.

To establish how Brontë postulated her theological ideas for woman, I utilised Charles Taylor's (2007:26) secularisation theory because it is instrumental in the understanding of the interrelatedness between the religious motive that inspired the Reformation in the 16th century, and the resultant secularisation of western Christendom. Instead of perceiving secularisation as an aftermath of the development of science, Taylor (2007:27) argues that it is a linear movement, a new positioning of self. Since the level of secularisation differs according to one's position and Victorian women were foisted into a pre-Reformational position in the church, they naturally stayed in the marginal niche of secularisation. Therefore, the seeming radicality of Brontë's advocacy for women's assertiveness within patriarchal Christianity does not only stem from her religious conviction, but it also serves as her own means of engaging in secularisation.

The introductory chapter provided the contextualisation of Christianity in Victorian England and the religious background of the Brontë family. In the Victorian era, the Church of England experienced a period of depression due to the Civil war and extensive corruption amongst its leadership. To overcome this spiritual decline, different religious movements arose in 18th and 19th century England, such as the Evangelical revival movement, the Methodist movement, and the Oxford movement. As Melnyk (2015:3) rightly notes, “Victorian England was not a religiously-homogenous nation” and possessed a “multiplicity of faith”. The Brontë family was particularly open to the various Victorian theologies and discussions on diverse religious and theological issues; this explains why Brontë audaciously challenged patriarchal theologies and explored the possibilities of a new creed for women. In addition, this chapter presented an overview of the history of religion and literature, especially regarding the study of Charlotte Brontë’s literary works. As the discussions in this chapter have shown, due to the previous uneasy relationship between feminism and institutional religion, Brontë critics and scholars eschewed the discourse of her literary creativity from the interrelated standpoint of faith and feminist ideals. The paucity of academic inquisition into Brontë’s understanding of religion has resulted in her misappraisal as a radical anti-Christian feminist writer. However, since the late 1990s, there has been a remarkable increase in the examination of the significance of Christian belief in Victorian women writers by several researchers, including Thormählen, Jenkins, Melnyk, and Oh. This renewed criticism of Victorian women’s writing through fresh feminist perspectives has led to the significant re-evaluation of the role of the Christian faith in Brontë’s works.

The second chapter locates *Jane Eyre* within the Reformation tradition and examines how Victorian Christian women strove to achieve the new modern social imaginary for themselves, in spite of the prevailing discriminatory gender strictures that sought to keep them in the marginal niche. In the analysis of *Jane Eyre*, I highlighted the fact that the novel has been subject to extensive criticisms from both Brontë’s contemporaries and modern feminist critics as anti-Christian fiction. However, I argued that Brontë clearly asserts in the preface of *Jane Eyre* that her fiction railed not against “the world-redeeming creed of Christ” (Brontë, 2006a:6), but only against “bigotry” and “narrow human doctrines” (Brontë, 2006a:5-6). From this viewpoint, what Brontë problematises is the conventional Christianity that caters only to the spiritual needs of a designated group—specifically the male elite—and unscrupulously excluded the rest (in this case, women). Furthermore, the motivation for Jane’s relentless resistance against the patriarchal suppression of women is inspired by the exact religious zeal that led to the Reformation in the 16th century, which resulted in the dissolution of the segregation between lay people and priests and empowered lay people to also pursue God’s will of ordinary life with instrumental reasoning (Taylor, 2007:98). In this regard, *Jane Eyre* represents the narrative trajectory of an orphan girl towards the redefinition of a new creed; one that not only differs from “the narrow human doctrines”

extolled in institutional Christianity, but also recognises the divine humanity of women and enables them to assume an authentic position other than the marginal niche.

The initial stage of Jane Eyre's life occurs at Gateshead, a place that symbolises the old system, which Jane must discard to discover her own social imaginary. At this stage, the young Jane experiences the injustices of the Gateshead society to such an extent that she is willing to repudiate her membership of this society together with its archaic ideals and undergo the disenchantment that would ignite her new sense of self. As a penniless orphan girl, the young Jane is embedded in the Gateshead society and required to submit to the patriarchal hierarchy that demands from her to be docile to Mrs Reed and call her cousin Master. The most crucial aspect of Jane's life at Gateshead concerns her confinement in the red room where she experiences the punitive nature of the patriarchal God. Although the aim of the confinement is to tame Jane into the stoic acceptance of her marginalised position, it accelerates Jane's sense of disembeddedness from the Gateshead society because she realises the sheer unjustness of the penalty of confinement. In addition, Mr Brocklehurst's visit further assures Jane of the discordance between herself and the hyper-Augustinian doctrine. Here, Jane experiences the merciful nature of the maternal God from Bessy's nursery song, an encounter that can be interpreted as her personal understanding of and encounter with God. In summation, Jane's experiences at Gateshead instigate her disconnection from the constricting social matrix of Gateshead, and propel her to seek for a new social position through education.

Initially, Jane chooses to attend Lowood School with the hope of evading the strictures of the marginal niche and acquiring a new identity and social status through the discipline instilled at the school. The core aim of the school, according to its supervisor, Mr Brocklehurst, is to tame the sinful nature of the girls, based on the typical modern Christian belief that pursues human flourishing and believes in the power of innate human will for self-transformation. Under his auspices, Jane reencounters the injustice of patriarchal Christianity. However, through her engagement with the two female characters of Miss Temple and Helen Burns, who she meets at Lowood, Jane is able to overcome the injustices and challenges she faces at the school. For instance, Miss Temple—the headmistress of the school—represents an embodiment of the ideal disciplined Christian woman. From her, Jane learns how to manage her anger with disengaged reason and evolve into “a disciplined and subdued character” (Brontë, 2006a:100) who can live harmoniously within the order of society and take financial responsibility for herself as a teacher. Similarly, Helen Burns shares her faith in the God of love with Jane and, by doing so, she hints at “another creed, which no one ever taught” her (Brontë, 2006a:70). This version of God as a loving father is similar to the God sung about in Bessy's song, but it differs from the image of God depicted by Mr Brocklehurst's Calvinist patriarchal theology. However, at this stage, Jane does not yet fully accept the new creed. After 8 years of instilling discipline at Lowood School, Jane

becomes as much a civilised Christian woman as Miss Temple; however, unlike her, she is overwhelmed by a sense of disillusionment as she realises that she is still marginalised and embedded in the patriarchal society with its stereotypical expectations of women.

Since patriarchal Christianity only allows women to exist within the confines of marginal identities, it is pertinent for Jane to acquire her own creed, one that supports her new social imaginary. During the process, Jane experiences two kinds of spiritual ordeals in Thornfield and Marsh End, respectively: a re-embedding and an idolatrous relationship. Despite venturing into the outside world, Jane realises that she remains constricted to the marginal niche. At Thornfield, she is faced with either the option of being a mere governess or becoming Rochester's mistress. Similarly, whilst at Marsh End, St John compels her to accept his proposal and become the wife of a missionary. She would be subordinated to his vocation and transfer her spiritual sovereignty to him, as he assumes the roles of both her husband and her pastor. Through Jane, Brontë strongly criticises the prioritisation of male authority and the relative regulation of women's spiritual autonomy in patriarchal Christianity. As an independent individual and a Christian who is aware of her equal status before God, Jane strives towards the limitless pursuit of her own vocation. She is convinced, because of her Protestant belief, of the value of ordinary life—not from the binary viewpoint of the secular versus the sacred—but in alignment with her desire to please God through a devotion to ordinary life. Through her ordeals, Jane experiences divine calling both as a literal transcendental calling to guide her, and as a calling to pursue her vocation of married life with Rochester. In other words, she finds her own creed, which affirms women's religious autonomy without the mediation of patriarchal authorities.

During the final stage of the narrative, which is set at Ferndean Manor, Brontë juxtaposes Jane's marriage with St John's unmarried mission work. By doing so, she proffers the typical Protestant message that ordinary married life could be as valuable as the mission work of a martyr. Therefore, from Gateshead to Ferndean, Jane becomes gradually disembedded from the patriarchal society and its restrictions, and transforms into an independent individual with a personal sense of religious autonomy, a process that is reminiscent of the Reformation. This process can further be likened to the secularisation, as it postulates a new social imaginary for women's spiritual independence.

Interestingly, although Brontë highlights the necessity of a new creed for women in *Jane Eyre*, it is only in her next work, *Shirley*, that she boldly criticises institutional Christianity and confidently propounds her theological ideas for women. As the discussions in the third chapter of this thesis have illustrated, Brontë's theological ideas for women deviate radically from the limiting patriarchal theology of institutional Christianity. The complexity of Victorian Christianity has been noted by several researchers, especially with regard to the prevailing religious pluralisation at that period. Considering Taylor's (2007:437) definition of secularisation as a new placement of the spiritual in

individual and social life rather than as a simple decline of belief, the chaotic state of religion in the Victorian era can best be described as the ongoing process of active secularisation that leads to transformation in people's belief systems. Therefore, the shift from the ancient-régime model of baroque Catholic society that adopts one national Church to the disenchanting, secularised model modifies people's state of belief such that faith becomes a matter of choice, allowing one to choose between several denominations or even between belief and unbelief (Taylor, 2007:450). Taylor (2007:450) locates denomination to an affinity group; by applying this notion of denomination to the reading of *Shirley* in this chapter, I foregrounded Brontë's pursuit of her own creed and practice of her Christian belief without abandoning her beloved Church of England.

Brontë opens the first chapter of *Shirley* with a satire about the curates of the Church of England. Despite knowing that the inclusion of the chapter would attract criticism and lead to her being labelled as anti-clerical, Brontë defiantly included the satire scene without modifications to deliberately castigate the spiritual inertness and narrowmindedness of the Anglican Church. This writerly act of defiance is in ideological alignment with Brontë's grouse against Patriarchal Christianity, which she criticises earlier in *Jane Eyre* as the "narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few" (Brontë, 2006a:6). Not only the first chapter, but the Whitsunday marching, sermons, and in scenes of conflict between workers and the owner over the mill, most of the clergies are described as to ostracise dissenters, working class, and women. The patriarchal theology has a very dichotomous perception of women—either as selfless saints like Miss Ainley, or as monstrous sources of corruption like Eve. Under this socially designated structure, it is impossible for women to achieve their own religious autonomy because, if they are saints, they would have to submit to male authorities and transfer their autonomy to them. If they are Eves, they would still be deprived of religious autonomy for their evilness. What this implies is that the patriarchal Church requires women to accept the old, pre-Reformational ideology without attempting to pursue their individual vocation. In this way, Brontë debunked the erroneous belief that the Church of England was the only national Church that embraced all people. By delineating the failures of the Anglican Church, Brontë laid the groundwork for the discussion of women's affinity to religion and advocacy of her own theological ideas for women through Caroline and Shirley.

The Bible is a text that can be interpreted from various perspectives, and the male characters in the novel—both the clergy and laymen—do not hesitate to interpret it in a way that suits their economic interests or political positions. In a similar vein, the suppression of women in the Church is justified through patriarchal hermeneutics such as Milton's Eve. This further necessitates the interpretation of the Bible for women and the acquisition of new theological ideas for women. In *Shirley*, Brontë accomplished this task through the character, Caroline. Although both Caroline and Shirley criticise the androcentric hermeneutics, it is Caroline who re-interprets the Bible and,

just like her Protestant forbears, she refutes the restrictions placed on women in patriarchal Christianity. For example, Caroline proffers a new interpretation of the character of the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31, which has been used to justify the relegation of women to the private sphere. Instead of reading the passage as the prerequisite gender manual, which enforces a life of domesticity on women, Caroline redefines it as a scriptural base for advocating women's social advancement. Regarding the misogynistic passage from Paul's epistles, Caroline aptly points out that Paul's teachings were designed for specific situations and could have been generalisable in its application of restrictions against women; she furthermore highlights the possibility that there could have been errors during the translation stage of the Bible.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Brontë is not excoriating Christianity itself; her displeasure is directed at the absence of theology for women and the dearth of Biblical interpretations that accommodate women in patriarchal theology. Therefore, Brontë argues that this issue could be adequately resolved if women had their own religious autonomy to interpret the Bible and lead independent religious lives. If Caroline portrays her theological ideas for women through a new interpretation of the Bible, Shirley depicts her re-envisioning of a women's creed through her audacious creative reimaginings. Shirley's theological reimaginings are presented in three main ways. Firstly, instead of the patriarchal and punitive image of God the Father represented by the institutionalised church, Shirley presents a benevolent and maternal God who is revealed in Mother Nature. While the church's version of God the Father is filled with schism and pungent speech, the maternal God revealed in nature is imbued with the capacity of healing the wounds caused by patriarchal Christianity. Secondly, Shirley reinterprets the biblical representation of Eve, who has been historically indicted as the cause of the fall of humankind and employed as the basis for women's religious subjugation. In this respect, Shirley focuses on Eve's prelapsarian condition, by emphasising that, as the first woman, Eve was created as an equal to Adam rather than his appendage. In addition, she demolishes the myth of Eve in the patriarchal discourse as a young woman who commits sins while possessed by foolish desires. Shirley re-imagines Eve by bestowing her with the significant image of the first mother. Finally, Shirley replaces the father-son ideology of traditional patriarchal theology with the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom, which centres on the Messiah. Although it was difficult for women to participate in the father-son metaphor, the metaphor of the bridegroom Messiah and the Christian bride is advantageous for women as it encourages them to participate independently. Therefore, despite the marginalisation of women in patriarchal theology, in Shirley's metaphor of the new bride and groom, they occupy central positions as chosen, loved, and glorified by the Messiah. Shirley's theological imagination also applies to the characters, as Brontë makes the marriage ending between Caroline and Shirley a practical rehearsal of their upcoming marriage with the eternal groom and Messiah.

Taking advantage of the disintegration of the Church of England and the divergent religious ideas that arose during the Victorian Era, Brontë actively explores a creed for women and, in doing so, she participates in denominationalisation. This means that she proactively redefines women's quest for individual religious agency, which entails seeking for religious options that are best suited to a believer's individual needs in the process of secularisation. At the end of *Shirley*, Brontë proffers the possibility of biblical interpretations that are centred on women and posits the validity of women's theological imagination. Evidently, in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, Brontë actively pursues women's religious authority in alignment with secularisation. More importantly, she espouses a new creed—one that affirms the vocation of women based on Protestant beliefs.

In her last novel entitled *Villette*, Brontë cautions against the possible consequences of secularisation. Brontë supported the Protestant values of every individual, including women, and advocated for the fulfilment of their own vocations in everyday life. However, the new modern social imaginary was identified by an inevitably anthropocentric aspect. The new goal of human flourishing given to Protestant Christians in relation to vocation and the affirmation of ordinary life engendered a positive perception of productivity in life that was previously considered secular. However, the issue here pertains to the "anthropocentric shift" (Taylor, 2007:222) of the 17th and 18th centuries in Western countries that produced exclusive humanism. This new perspective on immanence sets the "highest goal in terms of a certain kind of human flourishing, in a context of mutuality, pursuing each his/her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, in a society of mutual benefit" (Taylor, 2007:430-431). Since exclusive humanism excludes the transcendent meaning beyond human reason, the width of the life of the modern self inevitably becomes narrow and flat, resulting in a lack of meaning (Taylor, 2007:302-303). Taylor refers to this phenomenon as the malaise of modernity (2007:303). My argument in this thesis is that, although Brontë supports the values of Protestant faith, she is not sympathetic towards exclusive humanism; in fact, she proactively cautions against it. Being privy to the complexity of the problem, Brontë posits her own belief as one who affirms the transcendent value and the incomprehensible providence of God in *Villette*.

In *Villette*, Brontë uses the characters of Dr John and Madame Beck to illustrate her negative appraisal of exclusive humanism. Dr John epitomises the modern Christian who believes in the power of human reason, while demonstrating his firm worldly confidence and his ability to control his life through reason. For him, the world is limited to the material present, and even when he experiences a supernatural phenomenon, he tries to explain it with the logic of causality. His confidence is reflected in the fact that he believes that happiness is also man made, and—as a doctor—he egoistically considers himself more qualified than a Catholic priest to listen to confession. In a similar vein, Madame Beck's character goes beyond materialism and approaches mammonism due to her extreme pursuit of prosperity. From a Protestant standpoint, Brontë

therefore problematises the Catholic culture for its weak attitudes towards self-discipline and enablement of sensual indulgence. These criticisms of Catholic culture are further made evident by Madame Beck's excessive pursuit of human prosperity, which coalesces with her other Catholic traits to confirm her staunch mammonist aspirations. Although Dr John and Madame Beck excel in their fields, they both demonstrate ignorance of the transcendent world.

On the other hand, the main character, Lucy, had experienced both the transcendent and the worldly since childhood. Like Brontë, who lost three siblings in a row before writing *Villette*, Lucy constantly suffers the loss of loved ones, family, acquaintances, and lovers. This immense sense of loss in her life explains why suffering constitutes a central aspect of the theological perspective of this work. An attempt to understand Lucy's suffering through reason and logic, especially causation, would inevitably lead one to arrive at the conclusion that Lucy deserves her predicament. This understanding is consistent with the understanding of the punitive God that Brontë previously denies in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. Moreover, Brontë boldly repudiated Calvinist theology throughout her life. Therefore, exclusive humanism, which strives for human flourishing and denies transcendent values or meanings, is not suitable for Lucy. Similarly, the guidance Dr John offers her is based on the values of exclusive humanism and further confuses her. In this regard, only those who have experienced suffering like M. Paul, Miss Marchmont, and M. de Bassompierre seem equipped to give her appropriate advice about her suffering. Lucy compares herself to Job, and regards her suffering not as a divine punishment for her wrongdoing, but merely as the providential design for her life. She accepts her predicament as part of divine refinement of those chosen by God and, by doing so, Lucy can anticipate a future grounded in the merciful God.

In her previous novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, Brontë ends the narratives with the female protagonists' marriages in tandem with their Protestant values, which affirm the ordinary life. However, in *Villette*, Brontë offers a different ending after the exploration of the transcendental meaning and the essence of divine providence. It is only in the last volume, for instance, that Brontë establishes M. Paul, whose character does not play any significant role towards Lucy in the previous story. As Tayler (1990) states in her book entitled *Holy ghosts: the male muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë*, M. Paul is a contrasting character to the more worldly Dr John. Brontë particularly gives M. Paul many attributes that correspond to that of the Messiah, and as M. Paul suddenly disappears at the end of the novel, the subject Lucy awaits is naturally transferred from her human fiancée to the Messiah—the bridegroom who will come again. Instead of the traditional marriage plot depicting the happy couple, Brontë presents the vision of marriage between the Messiah and the Christian that represents the fulfilment of the apocalyptic vision. She also subverts the patriarchal support of the male genius through the sacrifice of women, and presents a vision in which the bride becomes whole through the sacrifice and effort of the Messiah. In the

end, not only does Brontë successfully redefine theological ideas that affirm the vocation of women based on their Protestant faith, she also attains a deeper understanding of God as the eternal bridegroom who will lead her to a state of ultimate self-fulfilment.

5.3 Concluding remarks

This study examined the theological ideas proposed for women in Brontë's novels and explored how women's creeds lead to their self-realisation within the context of their Christian faith. Brontë's work has been erroneously criticised for being anti-Christian and depicting heretical ideals due to its unconventional espousal of a feminist vision, the resilient spirit of her female characters, and her unapologetic criticism of patriarchal Christianity. This study provides a fresh insight into the examination of Brontë's unique subversive feminist vision without compromising her religious values. The established churches of the Victorian era devalued and marginalised women by prioritising patriarchal theological ideals such that it was difficult for women to envision a new, modern self-imaginary and assert their spiritual agency. Brontë brilliantly pursues and redefines a creed for women based on core Protestant values that affirm women's own vocation and independent religious authority, encourages feminist hermeneutics, and presents a new and feminine metaphor that views the relationship between God and humans as that of a bride and groom, rather than a patriarchal father-son relationship. Since Brontë was open to various theological perspectives, it is difficult to fixate her theological ideas into any specific classification. What this implies is that there are numerous aspects and dynamics to Brontë's theological theorising that are yet to be fully explored. Therefore, it is pertinent to not only study her novels, but to further explore other genres of her literary output, such as her poetry and letters. This would provide invaluable insights into Brontë's various ideas and other theological ideas of the time that transcend classification into specific denominations. More importantly, Brontë's understanding of the relationship between God and humans in terms of the bride and her groom rather than a patriarchal father-son relationship justifies further exploration. It would be interesting to explore the works of other Victorian Christian female writers for the same metaphor. This is particularly important because this metaphor serves as a framework for women to participate independently in religious discourse. Lastly, Charles Taylor's theory of secularisation used as the theoretical framework of this thesis is inevitably limited by his Roman Catholic perspective, so it would be especially meaningful to analyse Brontë from a more Reformist perspective in future studies.

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