

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

A. Charlotte Brontë and Her Personal Life

Charlotte Brontë, married name Mrs. Arthur Bell Nicholls, pseudonym Currer Bell, was born in Thornton, Yorkshire in April 21, 1816. Her father was Patrick Brantý or Brunty (changed to Brontë after Lord Nelson's Sicilian dukedom), he was an Anglican clergyman. Her mother was Maria Branwell Brontë. After serving in several parishes, Patrick Brontë moved with his wife and their six small children to Haworth amid the Yorkshire moors in 1820, having been awarded the rectorship there. After the death of Charlotte's mother in 1821, her mother's sister, Elizabeth came to look after the family, and the children, five daughters (Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne) and one son (Patrick Branwell), were left with a solitary father, a disciplinarian aunt and only each other for company.

In 1824, all the girls but Anne were sent to Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. The fees were low, the

food unattractive, and the discipline harsh. Its poor conditions hastened the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth (who died from tuberculosis in the same year) and damaged Charlotte's health permanently. Charlotte and Emily returned home in June 1825, and for more than five years the Bronte children learned and played there, writing and telling romantic tales for one another and inventing imaginative games played out at home or on the desolate moors.

In 1831 Charlotte was sent to Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, near Huddersfield, where she stayed and made some lasting friendships. Her correspondence with one of her friends, Ellen Nussey continued until her death and has provided much of the current knowledge of her life. In 1832 she came home to teach her sisters but in 1835 returned to Roe Head as a teacher. She wished to improve her family's position, and this was the only outlet that was offered to her unsatisfied energies. The work, with its inevitable restriction, was uncongenial to Charlotte. She fell into ill health and melancholia and in the summer of 1838 terminated her engagement.

In 1839 Charlotte declined a proposal from the Rev. Henry Nussey, her friend's brother, and some months later one from another young clergyman. At the same time Charlotte's ambition to make the practical best of her talents and the need to pay Branwell's debts urged her to spend some months as governess with the Whites at Upperwood House, Rawdon.

Meanwhile the Brontë sisters had planned to open a school together, which their aunt had agreed to finance, and in February 1842 Charlotte and Emily went to the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels as pupil to improve their qualifications and acquire some German. Emily stayed but a few months; Charlotte however returned for a second year. The personality and intellect of Constantin Heger, the husband of the headmistress, made a profound impression on her. There was no reciprocation although she wrote moving letters after her return to Haworth. The plan for a girls school came to nothing, and the sisters turn to writing. However Charlotte's experiences at Brussels were crucial for her development.

In the autumn of 1846 the Bronte published the *Poems of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, and retained

these masculine pseudonyms (the initials corresponding with their Christian names) throughout their careers.

Charlotte's first novel, *The Professor*, was rejected by a number of publishers, and appeared in print only after her death in 1857. The story itself shows her sober reaction from the indulgences of her girlhood. Told in the first person by an English tutor in Brussels, it is based on Charlotte's experience there, with a reversal of sexes and roles. Much of its matter was reworked to far better effect in her latter novel about Brussels, *Villette*.

Instead of coming before the public with an undistinguished work, she began her career with the resounding success of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. The realism and psychological insight in the representation of the governess heroine—small, plain, and plainly clad, like Charlotte—the brilliance in the description of nature, the force and quickness of narrative, the startling incidents and surprising complications, make *Jane Eyre* one of the most variously interesting of English novels.

Charlotte next novel was *Shirley* (1849) in which she attempted something quite different, a realistic

panorama of Yorkshire life. *Villette* (1853) was her last work that she lived to finish. It was in *Villette* that she poured out her excited responses to the many aspects of her life in Brussels.

Meanwhile Charlotte should face so many sadness of losing Branwell who died in September 1848, Emily in December, and Anne in May 1849. A quick succession of their deaths darkened for Charlotte the dawn of her fame but the following years were peaceful and in June 1854, after rejecting three proposals, she finally married Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls who had been a curate at Haworth and who now return to aid her father. They seemed moderately happy in this union. The marriage, however, was short lived, for the following year, March 31, 1855, Charlotte died in Haworth, Yorkshire because of an illness associated with pregnancy. Meanwhile she had already written two chapters of a promising fifth novel, to be called *Emma*.

B. Charlotte Brontë, Her Idea and Her Thought

Charlotte Brontë can be noted as one of the women writers who tried to struggle for the better position

for the women in her society by arguing new approaches to women's traditional needs through her novels. *The Professor* as her first work contains an embryo of all that she wanted to say about the women in her society which she expanded in her later novels.

As a woman author she seeks to redefine feminine selfhood, freed from restricting images and assumption. Her way to present this idea is especially effective, because she formulates it from within a conventional framework. Therefore she could not adopt the strident feminism as her friend, Mary Taylor. She suggested an equality between men and women without neglect women's traditional need [The New Encyclopaedia Britannica],

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS