

Bringing the Madwoman Out of the Attic: Nostalgia and
Time in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*

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Written in 1848, *Shirley* is Charlotte Brontë's attempt at writing her version of the Industrial Social Problem novel, which so many other writers, like Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, and Charles Dickens, had written or were writing during the time. The purpose or aim of the Social Problem novel was to capture the mechanization of people and society that resulted from the Industrial Revolution, showing how people in general were impacted by the gross changes of this era. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, interacts with the question of the state of women, as it was in the Victorian era, and demonstrates much about the relationship between men and women at that time.

Charlotte Brontë, like many other women of the time, felt that there was something wrong with women's current position in society. Unable to see women in their true forms, men would place women into two static categories – “angel” or “monster.” Good women are unrealistic beings of perfection, and any woman who doesn't fit in this category must be a part of the other. Using literature as their medium, men have created their versions of the ideal woman for other men to praise and compare real women to. Women have been left out entirely. It demonstrates the position that women have occupied in society, not as companions to men, but as subjugated beings held up to impossible standards, unable to achieve them and unable to truly speak out against

them. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* reveals the way men and women have related to each other in the past, and then advocates for changes to this paradigm in the present in order to create a future where women are educated, companions to men – where men and women both can be of value and significance. Only when the false ideals are forgotten and the current troubles of real women are understood can the gap between the sexes close and society progress forward.

The past works on several levels in the novel. Brontë's readers experience the past by setting the novel in an earlier period of the industrial age. Characters also experience the past by visiting the ruins of an old convent and reflecting on earlier ages and texts. Through this, Brontë brings the past, history, and nostalgia to the forefront of the reader's mind. This has special significance in the Victorian era as readers at that time thought of the past and particularly the medieval era as a golden age; they thought negatively of modernity. There is a longing for the past. Not the reality of the past, but a past that is created from memory and desire. From the very beginning, nostalgia is placed at the forefront: "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" (3). Already Brontë is setting up the contrast between present and past. This is a novel, an escape from reality into something better, so Brontë can take the reader back to the beginning of the century; evade the mid-day or the present and dream of dawn or the past. There is this longing for the past, and Brontë is willing to give her readers the past that they so desire. However, it is not a romantic past, but a past "as unromantic as Monday-

morning,” as Brontë herself calls it (3). While we may long for the past and view it under a cloud of Romance, excitement, and better days, the reality is much grimmer.

According to Susan Zlotnick, Brontë's *Shirley* uses nostalgia as a jumping off point for an exploration of women in history and women's exclusion from history. History and fiction are very similar, as both are influenced by their author's perspective on the world and on the events that took place. So, there is no one correct way to read and interpret past events because of how often they are reinterpreted and repurposed in order to best serve the present. However, history is a powerful tool because it is used to justify present actions and thus has a strong influence over the present and the future. This is demonstrated in the novel when Joe Scott, who is the overseer of the mill, uses St. Paul's maxims to justify and continue the subjugation of women, “Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (247). The Bible has long been used to justify women's inferiority, and Joe Scott represents the perpetuation of this. However, *Shirley* refutes this popular interpretation of St. Paul's epistle by stating that each person can have their own private interpretation and all have the right to judge meaning for themselves. The emphasis is that there are other readings of these maxims, ones that don't promote female subjugation, but instead may promote more freedoms for females.

The main female protagonists of the novel, Shirley and Caroline, are willing to reinterpret the historical context and the original text of St. Paul's epistle and by doing so these women “act as revisionist historians and rewrite history from a female

perspective” (Zlotnick 89). By arguing against the common reading and offering a new reading, Caroline and Shirley are changing the way people view these old texts and so they are revising the historical meaning of the text. So, they seem to be rewriting history as Zlotnick argues. However, it is not going to have that much effect on the past. The past is done and they cannot change how that text has been used up until this point and they cannot rewrite the events of the past. But, by refuting old justifications and providing new ideas, women could potentially change the way they are viewed and treated in the future.

One of the unique features of this novel is that it projects into the past in order to comment on the present. While *Shirley* was written in 1848, the setting of the novel is the Luddite riots of 1811. The Luddites were a group of textile workers in England who would destroy machinery, in response to being displaced by machines which could more efficiently manufacture the cloth (“Luddites”). Brontë experienced one of the Luddite riots when she was young and this influenced and perhaps inspired her to place her novel during this period and show the early effects of the Industrial Revolution. By basing an event in the novel on an actual historical event, Brontë demonstrates that women have traditionally been on the margins of history, but by writing her own version of the event through Shirley and Caroline’s point of view, she corrects this – giving women the power of their own history. During the riot in *Shirley*, Caroline and Shirley watch and listen from a space far removed and hidden from the actual action of the riot down at the mill, as “for women like Caroline and Shirley, history is heard, or to be precise, heard about. Even their limited participation as ear-witnesses is a stolen

pleasure” (Zlotnick 91). The men do everything they can to prevent the women from gaining knowledge of the raid beforehand and keep them away from the action, safeguarding Shirley at Caroline’s house for the night to keep her out of hearing-distance. According to Zlotnick, Brontë emphasizes that women often hear about events secondhand, through perspectives that misrepresent the events and so are often unreliable. While the servants tell Caroline and Shirley that twenty men were killed, Robert Moore says that no one was hurt or killed on their side. The accounts that the women hear are both exaggerations; they come from humans who each have their own perspective which gets written into their re-telling of events. Brontë accentuates the fact that history can be unreliable, but women traditionally have had to rely on these unreliable narratives; they have been unable to form their own account of events because they are kept out of history.

Unlike many Victorians of the time, Brontë seems to be in favor of the fall into modernity, which was the change from medieval and renaissance lines of thought into modernism. Brontë rejects the popular idea that the medieval past was a golden age that needs to be returned to in order to “fix” the present, as she condemns the medieval era as a dark age for women. At one point in the novel, Shirley and Caroline propose a visit to Nunnwood, as Caroline tells Shirley “To penetrate into Nunnwood, Miss Keelder, is to go back into the dim days of old. [...] The very oldest of the trees, gnarled mighty oaks, crowd about the brink of this dell. In the bottom lie the ruins of a nunnery” (158-9). The biggest representation of the medieval past in the novel is the ruins of a nunnery. The nun and the nunnery of the medieval era can sometimes represent a different path

for the women of that era; it can represent a freedom from their customary choice of marriage. However, it freed women from marriage by irrevocably linking them to God and the church, another kind of symbolical marriage. Thus, the use of the nun in this novel represents the sexually repressed, useless, angelic figure of women. All around her, Caroline can see the women of the present day are still nun-like figures and seem to be stuck in a “virtually medieval role for women” (Maynard 154). This is represented primarily by the characters of Hortense Gerard and Mrs. Yorke. Hortense Gerard, Robert Moore’s sister, takes care of him and his household. Doing everything according to the customs of their homeland, she spends her life sewing and cooking, coming across more as a statue than as a real human character. The other major figure of women in the novel is Mrs. Yorke, who is a hardworking and practical wife and mother. However, she is very hostile to the other members of her sex, especially to women like Caroline who still have idealistic visions of romantic love and marriage. These figures of women represent two sides of a spectrum. Hortense is not a married woman, but she is stone-like and unreal, focused only on domestic life, while Mrs. Yorke is married and competent, but she is aggressive and bitter, alienating others of her sex. Neither paints a very good picture of life, married or unmarried, for women, so “For Caroline to wish a return to the past – whether to the nunneries of the medieval past or to the modern nuns in her more immediate and personal past – would be to invite her own death, or more accurately, her own death-in-life. Brontë does not want women to turn back to the medieval past; she wants them to turn their backs on the medieval past” (Zlotnick 93). A

day trip to visit the old ruins of Nunnwood may seem like a pleasant outing to Shirley and Caroline, but they would not want to go back there to stay. No – none would.

The women of the past were trapped in a useless existence, and the women of the present seem to be trapped as well. Repeatedly throughout the novel, Shirley and Caroline remark on how they would like to have something to do to occupy their time, busy their hands, and absorb their thoughts; they wish for a profession. Women want the same things that men do, as Shirley puts it: “That music stirs my soul; it wakens all my life; it makes my heart beat – not with its temperate daily pulse, but with a new, thrilling vigour. I almost long for danger – for a faith, a land, or at least a lover to defend” (226). Women, as exemplified by Shirley and Caroline, long for something that makes their lives worth living and they want and need a change in their position in society. Women’s voices in the novel demonstrate that women are ready for change, but Brontë seems to believe that women also need the help and support of the men around them. After being rejected by Robert Moore, Caroline finds that her life has no meaning. Almost wasting away from her meaningless existence, she longs for an occupation and decides that she will become a governess. The only problem is that the people around her do not support her in this decision, and particularly because her uncle will not allow her to become a governess, she is forced to remain stagnate in Briarfield. While women are ready to have an occupation, men are holding them back. They are keeping women in their old roles instead of allowing them to expand into new ones.

The narrator introduces an aside to the audience by first analyzing the standard that women have been given through the introduction of Solomon’s “virtuous woman”

Lucretia. The woman who is often said to be what the female sex ought to be was not a simple housewife. She contributed more; she was praised by her husband and children and she was heard, whenever she spoke people would listen to her wisdom. The narrator points out that she is pointed to as the model all women-kind should aspire to, but women today are not even given the chance to be like her. Women cannot reach the standard that men have given them because they have no occupation with which to cultivate their minds, so they are unable to be a companion to men like the ideal Lucretia. Without occupation women have either fallen into consumption or decline, or they have degenerated “into sour old maids – envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied” (194). While brothers are in professions, sisters have no employment and must content themselves with sewing, household chores, visiting, with no hope to achieve something greater. The lack of work causes their physical and mental capacities to decline. The only goal in life women have is marriage, and so their every effort has turned to plotting and scheming in order to ensnare a husband. The narrator calls to the men of England and informs them that if they continue to “Keep [their] girls’ minds narrow and fettered; they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them – give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age” (194-5). Women could be companions to men, and they want something to occupy their time besides domestic chores and socializing. Instead of burdens, they could be

productive members of society, but there must be those to foster and initiate this change and the narrator calls to men here to help with this. Women will need the support and help of others in order to make this change for their situation in the present and bring about greater change in the future.

Perhaps this is one reason for the character of Shirley in the novel: she represents an imagination of what might happen if women's position in society was drastically changed. Many critics of this novel have focused on the character of Shirley in their analysis, due to the fact that she is a very progressive female character with a somewhat ambiguous gender identity due to a masculine persona that is developed throughout the course of the novel. While she is physically described as a very effeminate female, as when the reader gets their first description of her she is described as being gracefully made and in possession of a certain charm, with her eyes of the darkest grey and her hair of the darkest brown and her features small, delicate, and refined. Yet, even with her outward appearance, she is an outspoken, independent, and strong figure. Her name gives the first hint of her masculine persona, while known to modern readers as a name traditionally given to girls, to Victorian readers Shirley is a name given exclusively to male children. The parents of Shirley Keelder, "who had wished to have a son, finding that after eight years of marriage, Province had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy" (151). Given a man's name, Shirley is also granted a man's profession, in that, as their only child, she inherits her father's expansive land and ample money after the death of her parents, thus giving Shirley the freedoms of a man.

In Susan Gubar's analysis of *Shirley*, she agrees that Shirley "is not a dependent inmate or a passive suppliant, not a housekeeper or housewife. She is a wealthy heiress who owns her own house, the ancestral mansion usually allotted to the hero [...] she clearly enjoys her status as well as its ambiguous effect on her role in society" (Gubar 381). She often plays with her ambiguous gender role, and calls herself Captain Keelder. Other characters join in as well, Mr. Helstone, Caroline's uncle, says this to Mrs. Pryor regarding Shirley: "take care of this future magistrate, this churchwarden in perspective, this captain of yeomanry, this young squire of Briarfield, in a word. Don't let him exert himself too much; don't let him break his neck in hunting; especially let him mind how he rides down that dangerous hill near the Hollow" (154). Mr. Helstone describes Shirley as a young male youth and attributes to this female character the scrapes and escapades that young men often get themselves into.

However, despite the fact that Shirley and Mr. Helstone joke about her being a man and that she has the name and responsibilities of a man, it becomes obvious that the men in the novel don't actually view her as masculine figure. In one scene of the novel, there is a raid on the mill, which is located on land that Shirley owns and is renting to Robert Moore. The men obviously know about the raid beforehand, at the party the night of the suspected raid, Shirley observes the men talking close together about something important. Shirley senses that, "there is some mystery afloat; some event is expected; some preparation is to be made, I am certain. I saw it all in Mr. Moore's manner this evening. He was excited, yet hard" (236). Right up until the start of the raid, even, Mr. Helstone continues the jest that Shirley is a man. He asks her to take

his place as the gentleman of Briarfield for the night in order to protect Caroline and keep her safe, yet it becomes obvious after the raid that he only has her stay at Briarfield and “protect” Caroline in order to keep her away from the fighting at the mill, or anything from which they could possibly need protection. Even though, Shirley has a right to know about the raid, as it is her property, the men keep her out of it. It seems to be a way of keeping Shirley out of the masculine role in actuality, away from all the rights and responsibilities that come with being a property owner, although the men allow her to occupy the position in jest.

The figure of Shirley represents quite the abnormality of women in Victorian society, as she owns the land that the mill occupies and thus she is in a position of power, even over Robert Moore, the man that runs the mill. Traditionally, women would pass from the control of their father or other male guardian to the control of their husband. Women were in a position like Caroline’s, always under the control of a male figure and never allowed any power of their own. By having power in her own right, Shirley represents a kind of threat, as she is not under the control of a man, but makes decisions for herself. In not informing Shirley about the raid, the men are not giving her the same respect that a male would garner. It demonstrates a way of tempering Shirley’s power and an attempt to keep her regulated in the position that they perhaps believe that she should occupy as a woman. Women have not traditionally held the position of power and responsibility that Shirley occupies, so the men in a way regulate her to women’s traditional position – a position of inaction, on the margins of history. The men in the novel may joke about Shirley’s masculine persona, but in reality they

simply view her as a woman who should be kept out of men's business and kept from knowing important information despite the fact that it pertains to her own land.

Although Shirley may seem to be the madwoman brought out of the attic and into the world, many critics and readers have had problems with her character as well as the ending of the novel. While Brontë states at the beginning that this novel will be as "unromantic as Monday morning," it still ends with the wedding of both strong female protagonists. For some, one of the biggest disappointments in the novel is that both of the main female characters end up married. Shirley is an independent, strong, courageous, and clever female character, with the freedom and power that, at the time, was only allotted to men. Yet, at the end of the novel she marries, in effect giving all the freedom and power that she once had to her husband. Shirley has the power to choose her own path in life, yet she doesn't end up with the profession that she seeks and instead is relegated to the traditional role of women as wife.

But in fact, Shirley is not relegated to the role of wife, as that implies that she has no power or control over the situation, instead the marriages of Shirley and Caroline represent their own choice, the execution of their power. Critics like Susan Gubar have argued that despite the fact that Shirley seems to represent a woman free from the constraints that restrain other women like Caroline, instead of Caroline becoming more like Shirley, Shirley becomes more like Caroline. This is the problem many critics have had with her character. Shirley enters the scene right when Caroline is deep in emotional paralysis, suffocating from her lack of mobility and forced to remain stagnate at Briarfield. Serving as a kind of beacon of hope, it is Shirley's friendship that brings

Caroline back to life. However, Gubar argues that once Caroline is brought back to life, Shirley “becomes enmeshed in a societal role that causes her to duplicate Caroline’s immobility [...] Shirley begins to resemble Caroline in the course of the novel until she finally succumbs to Caroline’s fate. And, for all her assertiveness, she is shown to be as confined by her gender, as excluded from male society, as her friend” (Gubar 383).

Gubar argues that Shirley doesn’t reach her potential, maintaining her freedom and bringing Caroline up out of the confinement within her gender. Instead, Shirley becomes trapped along with Caroline and thus they both succumb to the role of wife.

In the novel, Caroline occupies the conventional position of women; she is not the outspoken, financially independent Shirley, yet she is still also an intelligent, strong female character. Caroline does know her own mind; she knows, for instance, that she loves Robert Moore. Although demure and neat, moreover, she criticizes Robert’s cruelty toward the workers and tries to teach him the evils of pride” (Gubar 377). While Caroline may not have financial independence and the flexibility to choose her own path in life like Shirley, Caroline does represent the power that the everyday woman can still garner, in that she has the power of knowing herself. At one point in the novel, the reader sees that she very clearly and rationally weighs and judges the feelings that she has for Robert. She comes to the conclusion that she loves him and logically analyzes possible reasons for this love. This scene has a particular resonance for the reader because women were generally portrayed as irrational creatures, focused only on sentiment. While Caroline does focus on sentiment, she is also quite rational about her feelings, showing that the two can coexist together. Robert is indecisive about his

feelings for Caroline and must figure them out, but she very clearly knows how she feels and it is this that makes her a strong figure in the novel, a representation for the average woman.

Both Shirley and Caroline are strong women and neither succumbs to marriage as Gubar argues, but instead they choose this fate for themselves. Caroline knows how she feels about Robert; it is her choice to marry him and she will not marry anyone else. Shirley rejects countless marriage proposals over the course of the novel. Her uncle, Mr. Sympson, comes to stay with her in order to see her married, pressuring her to accept a proposal that will enhance her fortunes and status, but Shirley will only marry for love. She does not have to marry and she rejects many offers, but she accepts Louis' proposal because he is her choice. Both these women choose marriage, despite the fact that both women have the option to remain unmarried. They choose to marry for love and companionship, and this doesn't mean that they are no longer the strong characters that they were before marriage.

In the past, men have forced women into two categories – either “the angel in the house” or “the madwoman in the attic,” but women are more than these two categories; they are people who have human needs, desires, and personify a variety of traits and temperaments. In the beginning of the novel, Shirley is held up as an ideal of the madwoman – a woman who is unable to be confined by her gender. However, just as women cannot stay within the “angel” category, they also cannot stay within the “madwoman” category; instead they have elements of both and Shirley is no exception. Caroline is characterized as docile and demure and in this way she is like the “angel.”

Yet, at the same time, she has the power of knowing her own mind and she is confident enough to criticize Robert for his treatment of the workers in order to try and change his behavior; she knows that his treatment of them is wrong and is not afraid to speak up; in this way she is also the “madwoman.” Just like Shirley, she embodies a combination of the elements of both the angelic or good woman as well as the monstrous or evil woman. Their decision to marry for sentiment represents the very human need for love and companionship, and so these characters do not give up their power and become enmeshed within the confines of their gender through marriage, but instead they become more fully fleshed out human characters.

Although, marriage in the novel is primarily portrayed negatively, as it represents how marriage in the past has not been for love, but for money and status. Many of the images of marriage throughout the novel demonstrate how the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution has seeped into how people relate to each other. Living has become to be about obtaining a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions; it is about perfect control over one’s feelings. Many negative sentiments about the perils of marriage are given throughout the novel and the reader is given many examples of failed marriages as well. One sentiment on marriage is given near the very beginning of the novel by Mr. Yorke to Robert Moore that differentiates between types of marriage: “If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage – I mean marriage in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment – two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling” (17-18). According to Mr. Yorke, marriage should not be for sentimental reasons; it should not be two people who love

each other. Instead, he advocates for Moore to marry to improve his fortunes. Marriage should be a business arrangement – mechanical and without feeling. With this view of marriage in mind, the ending of the novel does seem grim.

However, Brontë makes it clear that at least these marriages, Robert and Caroline and Shirley and Louis, are of sentiment and companionship; the kind of marriage that society should be moving towards in the future. Against the mechanical business-like marriages of the past and the present, Brontë moves her reader towards a future where husband and wife are each other's counterpart; influencing and equalizing the other. Despite the fact that Robert and Caroline have feelings of love for each other at the beginning of the novel, Robert decides that he must marry for money and rejects Caroline. He sets his sights instead on Shirley, but Shirley has made it clear she will only marry for love and Robert doesn't come to her with love, he comes to her with a business arrangement. It takes the embarrassment of Shirley's complete rejection of his proposal for Robert to realize that he should be proposing out of love. Shirley is not a match for Robert, but Caroline is and as such she is able to influence and affect him. In the beginning of the novel, Robert is very harsh towards the workers in his mill – a Coriolanus figure unyielding to the starvation and desperation of the working class. Through reading him the play *Coriolanus* by William Shakespeare and making comparisons between the personalities of the two men, Caroline hopes to make him aware of his faults so that he might correct them. By the end of the novel, he has finally taken what Caroline has said to heart and he states that "The machinery of all my nature; the whole enginery of this human mill; the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is

fit to burst” (395). It is a mechanization of the human – Robert was a machine, without empathy, but now the machinery is breaking down. It is Caroline who influences him to become more empathetic and in the end she succeeds, as Robert decides to make changes that will be of great benefit to his workers. In this way, Caroline is a companion to Robert, just like Louis and Shirley are to each other.

Unlike Robert, Louis offers Shirley love and he would take her without her fortune and will take her just as she is. In fact, he wants a woman that will test his patience, who needs to be taught and tempered. And Shirley will accept no man who cannot hold her in check, as she knows that “any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me” (410). She wants a husband who will be able to control her – equalizing her strong personality. Louis, her old tutor, is just the person to do it. And in return, she also influences Louis, in that she leads him to begin to take more control. Before their wedding, Shirley becomes very passive, forcing all wedding questions to go through Louis and postponing the wedding date. In explanation, she remarks that Louis “would never have learned to rule if she had not ceased to govern. The incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier” (476). Shirley teaches Louis how to rule by refusing to make any decisions. So, while the novel does end in marriage, it seems that the reader is led to believe that it is not the typical marriage of unhappiness and subjugation that we have been given as past examples, but marriages of companionship and love. The present can move us into a future where women are the companions of men and not kept subjugated.

There are many images of the past status of women and different versions of the future for women that are scattered throughout the novel. They differ from each other, interact with each other and some even counter each other. Change generally occurs gradually and this novel represents a step towards the future that Brontë envisioned for women. Brontë has given us the past status of women, and advocates for changes to make for a better life for women in the future. History has been used to keep women subjugated and since history has traditionally excluded women, they have been without the power to have their own interpretation of history. Brontë works to correct this by writing Caroline and Shirley into the riot at the mill and by having these women give their own interpretation of texts. Brontë does not favor the Victorian ideal of a return to the medieval era, as any change in the role of women will be in the future not in the past. But, in order to bring about change in the future, there must be changes to the present. Women have a want for something to occupy their time, for a profession, but according to Brontë the support of men is also needed for this to occur. Women cannot do it alone. Shirley and Caroline are an important step toward the change they would like to see in that they voice their need for a profession; although they don't ultimately end up attaining it.

The issues and problems of women's status in society and feminism are complicated today and they were complicated in Brontë's time as well. Brontë was brought up with certain societal norms and these effected and interacted with her idea that something was just not quite right with the current status of women. Women are not only trapped by patriarchal society, but they are also trapped by their own attitudes that

they have absorbed and internalized. Brontë believed that women need love and recognition and so were influenced by their “search and desire for a ‘master.’ With a few exceptions (Rose and Jessy Yorke typified these), only those who are rejected and desperate would cry out for social and political change. The others would bend to the system” (Moglen 175). Believing in the idea that the oppressed conspire with their oppressors, perpetuating the system, Brontë didn’t seem to be optimistic that changes in the status of women would occur anytime soon. To the problems she sees in the status of women, Brontë is unable to offer any grand solutions; the problems are too big to be solved with any one simple remedy. Instead, Brontë is able only to give her reader compromises, or ways of working within the system, toward a better future for women. Shirley and Caroline exemplify Brontë’s idea that women are human and thus most women have a human need for love and companionship, it is this basic need that draws them back to marriage despite the utter subjugation characteristic of many marriages during this time. Women cannot simply abandon men, society, and marriage, and so the compromise for Brontë is to have a future where marriage is for love, instead of the marriages of the past which, based on money and status, cannot yield companionship. The picture of women and their relationship to men as it is represented in *Shirley* may seem a little disjointed or unstable with many problems and questions offered and left unanswered, but it does represent the problems and concerns of women at the time and envisions possible changes to make gradual changes toward a different future for women.

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