



# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## The “Bitter Herbs” of Revisionist Satire in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*

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<1>The current trend in criticism of *Shirley* (1849) is to emphasize Charlotte Brontë’s Tory and paternalist view of working-class reform over and above the novel’s subversive arguments. Many critics, it seems, have lost sight of the audacity of Brontë’s satiric criticism of mid-Victorian, gendered ideological systems and structures.<sup>(1)</sup> Due to *Shirley*’s variable narrative voice, dual subjects (historical and domestic), and parodic mode of feminism,<sup>(2)</sup> it has been regularly cast as a species of the “problem novel” in the Brontë canon. I argue that the novel’s generic links with satire, a genre or mode regarded by many critics (then and now) with general ambivalence and gender-coded anxiety, is an important source of long-standing interpretive confusion.<sup>(3)</sup> Northrop Frye, a pre-eminent twentieth-century theorist of satire, asserts that satire is a highly “intellectualized” mode that “assum[es] a special function of analysis, ... breaking up the lumber of stereotypes [and] fossilized beliefs” (“Nature” 79); it focuses on mental attitudes and intellectual trends (*Anatomy* 309). This is particularly true of the ancient genre of Menippean satire, which Frye renames “Anatomy” in order to emphasize its organizing principle of dissection or analysis. This form of satire, like Mikhail Bakhtin’s “menippea,” is “genetically related” to the Socratic dialogue—a philosophical form invested in the dialogical pursuit of the truth (*Dialogic* 26, *Dostoevsky* 109-10); for both Frye and Bakhtin, satire de-idealizes and subverts the “habitual matrices” (*sosedstva*) of a culture (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 169), unsettling systems of knowledge. *Shirley*’s satiric critique of totalizing systems, including High Toryism, undermines a myriad of inimical social, political, and literary conventions. Moreover, as the “adventur[e] of an idea” (to use Bakhtin’s phrase [*Dostoevsky* 115]), it recounts “the condition of women in the English middle-class” (Forçade, qtd. in Allott 143).<sup>(4)</sup> Yet, unlike Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), with its bachelor narrator and demonized female satirist (Becky Sharpe), Brontë’s social satire undermines the conventional subjects of misogynist satire.

Nussbaum's landmark study *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750* (1984) identifies the key "anti-feminist" myths of satire: misogamy (the rhetorical tradition against matrimony), monstrous old maids, an undiscerning Eve, and the unsexed bluestocking. In *Shirley*, I argue, such patriarchal myths are interrogated to expose their social destructiveness and artificial basis in convention. As well, gendered divisions of labour and love are contested, as *Shirley* satirizes a cornerstone of patriarchal culture: the denial of female intellectuality.

<2>*Shirley's* trespass into a customarily masculine genre constitutes both a tribute to and a revisionist critique of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*—a novel recently dubbed "the last instance" of "narrative satire in early Victorian Britain" (Palmeri 367). In her 1847 preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* (written during the composition of *Shirley*), Brontë commends "the satirist of *Vanity Fair*" for being "the first social regenerator of the day" (2). Approvingly, she likens Thackeray to an Old Testament prophet who displays "the Greek fire of his sarcasm" and the "levin-brand of his denunciation" in order to "restore to rectitude the warped system of things" (2). In a letter to W. S. Williams (11 December 1847), she commends Thackeray for waging "war against the falsehood and follies of 'the World'" (*Letters* 1: 571). Thackeray, who did not regard satire as a genre compatible with female writers or readers, may have been surprised at Brontë's enthusiasm for his "scalping humour" and his "keen, ruthless" satire (Brontë, *Letters* 1: 571).<sup>(5)</sup> But not only did Brontë value the socially curative possibility of Thackeray's satire, she attempted in *Shirley* to similarly expose inimical social and literary conventions for the purpose of social regeneration.<sup>(6)</sup> Unlike Thackeray's Augustan *Vanity Fair*, however, with its derisive critique of women's innate monomania for love, matrimonial mercenariness, false friendships, and Eve-like duplicity, Brontë's satire assails such stereotypes for being the product of societal convention.<sup>(7)</sup> As well, Brontë attempts to revise Thackeray's Juvenalian misanthropy in favour of a more Horatian humanism.<sup>(8)</sup> Tellingly, in a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell (22 May 1852), she advises that Thackeray should learn from Gaskell "how to be satirical without being exquisitely bitter" (*Letters* 3: 47). Encouraged by *Jane Eyre's* acceptance by pre-eminent critics—"Sir John Herschel, Mr Fonblanque, Leigh Hunt and Mr Lewes" (Allott 76)—Brontë braved the "avenging stones" (*Shirley* 352) of her censors (the Elizabeth Rigbys), and staged the private satire of her heroines Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar in the public and traditionally masculine form of panoramic social satire. Brontë's novel appropriates Thackeray's Carlylean prophetic and comprehensive register (that of the "legitimate High-Priest of Truth")<sup>(9)</sup> to threaten a *gendered*, as well as a working-class, "spirit of disaffection against constituted authorities" (*Shirley* 54).

<3>Satire is perennially charged with inartistic disunity and *Shirley* is no exception.

*Fraser's Magazine* (December 1849) declared that the novel was “deficient in connexion and interest” (Allott 153); *The Britannia* stated that “[m]ore than one half of the work has little or no connection with the main story” (Allott 139); and G. H. Lewes found “all unity... wanting” (159). Similarly, the influential twentieth-century critic Terry Eagleton maintains that “formally, the book is ripped apart between poetry and documentary” (85). Countering this time-honoured consensus, Andrew and Judith Hook argue for a unifying theme: the denial of sympathetic understanding between the middle-classes and the working classes, and also between men and women. This overarching theme, they propose, conjoins the topic of Luddite unrest with the novel’s feminist criticisms.<sup>(10)</sup> Yet a more formal answer to the charge of disunity—one that does not obviate the novel’s narrative changeability—is offered by Gisela Argyle in her exploration of the “distinct” novelistic subgenres present in *Shirley*: historical romance, psychological romance, and comedy of manners. Argyle proposes that the novel shifts between genres, thereby altering the narrator’s relation to the characters and to the reader (744).<sup>(11)</sup> Argyle’s assessment of the novel’s use of the comedy of manners, however, does not accommodate its various *satiric* modalities (Menippean, Juvenalian, and Horatian), which dominate the opening and closing chapters and which consistently resurface, not only in the narrator’s moral and political commentaries, but also through characters’ internal monologues and sustained colloquy. In fact, direct and indirect satiric registers permeate the novel, even in Shirley Keeldar’s mystic vision of Eve, a textual moment that Argyle classifies as belonging to “psychological romance,” but which also serves to parody the misogyny of Judeo-Christian traditions. A more capacious view of *Shirley*, one that emphasizes its Menippean qualities, serves both to accommodate its generic variability (intertwining novelistic and non-novelistic genres) and to highlight its trenchant ironic and parodic representations of literary and social convention. *Shirley*’s formal miscellaneity, dense intertextuality (ranging from the Bible to Shakespeare and French and English poetry), historical allegory,<sup>(12)</sup> and, above all, its ascendant Menippean theme of the limits of ideological systems and conventions, are all narrative dimensions that are reconcilable with both Frye and Bakhtin’s conceptions of Menippean breadth and parodic criticism.

<4>*Shirley*’s characters, engaged in explorations of what Forçade termed a “thousand moral situations” (Allott 145), typically express allegiance to mind-narrowing social ideologies, political factions, and religious sects. Through extended colloquy (a Menippean technique), characters reveal their restricted and recurrent habits of thought, and are at once satirized for, and humanized by, their imperfect judgments and perceptions. Reverend Matthewson Hellstone, for example, is a hero-worshipping “high Tory” and “a man almost without sympathy” either for operatives, or for women

(“he neither respected nor liked the sex”) (*Shirley* 37, 114-15).<sup>(13)</sup> His opponent, Hiram Yorke, is a Whig who favours revolt and speaks of equality, but lacks an “organ of Veneration”—and “there are many Hiram Yorkes in the world” (*Shirley* 46, 48). Politically inconsistent, Robert Moore will support any party that promotes his “own interest” as a tradesman and “thoroughgoing progressist” (*Shirley* 37, 31). Robert discovers that ignoring his affection for Caroline is a “new system” that is “easier to practise” in “his mill-yard, amidst busy occupations” (*Shirley* 122). In the novel’s opening chapters, the three men assert their political positions in “wordy combat” (*Shirley* 56), only to find unanimity on one subject: women and marriage. Each is a misogynist who mistrusts marriage for other than mercenary purposes. Helstone and Yorke’s ambivalence towards Mary Cave and matrimony in general is echoed by Robert, who reveals, in a chapter-long conversation with the ostentatiously misogynist Peter Augustus Malone, that his antagonism to the mill workers is equal to his antipathy to domesticity and matrimony. There are shades of Pope’s “Epistle II: To a Lady” in Robert’s condemnation of the “tribe of the Misses Sykes”—“first the dark, then the light one. Now the red-haired Miss Armitage”—and in his curse: “*Oh, que le diable emporte—!*” (“the devil take them away”) (*Shirley* 23, 25).<sup>(14)</sup> Each man’s views are patriarchal, revealing that misogamy, unlike Toryism and Whiggism, is a unifying historical and rhetorical practice.

<5>Other characters, endowed with even more of what Northrop Frye would classify as “Menippean blood” (*Anatomy* 309), represent diverse forms of bigotry. The Luddite rebel and religious zealot Moses Barraclough predictably delivers his hate-inciting invectives; Michael Hartley, the drunken Antinomian and “violent Jacobin” weaver, is particularly maddened by fanaticism (“his mind is always running on regicide” [*Shirley* 15]). The Sympsons are “Church people” who are caricatured for their “narrow system”; they exhibit “exactly-regulated lives, feelings, manners, habits,” and their daughters follow “a certain young-ladies’-school-room code of laws” (*Shirley* 453-54). Additionally, Hortense’s hope to reform Caroline’s “ill-regulated mind” through proscribed feminine practices (such as day-long sock-darning) is represented ironically: “I will give her a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions” (*Shirley* 68). Yet, despite the narrator’s Horatian reluctance to curse and condemn characters for their habits of thought, the text alternates between gently rebuking and acridly denouncing figures such as the “Puseyite” curates, who epitomize a general social practice: the habitual loss of sympathy to narrow systems and selfish interests. *Shirley*’s Menippean satire also fluctuates between alienating Horatian analysis of Robert’s Smilesean materialism and knee-jerk misogyny, and a comparatively Juvenalian denunciation of the mental rigidity of those such as Mrs. Yorke, Barraclough, Malone, and Mr. Sympson. In summary, the majority of *Shirley*’s characters express a reductively prejudicial and restrictedly sympathetic approach to their many-sided social milieu; their dialogic interactions

dramatize the dangers of monologic, systemically truncated thought.

### “Levitical”: A *Précis* of *Shirley*'s Satire

<6>Not surprisingly, given how forcefully it establishes the overarching satiric tenor of the novel, *Shirley*'s archly scornful first chapter, “Levitical,” raised a critical storm that, in retrospect, reveals a great deal concerning mid-Victorian anxieties about female-authored and feminist satire.<sup>(15)</sup> *Shirley*'s battle against conventionality is formally apparent in the initial chapter's parody of novelistic decorum. The narrator lampoons the representational systems of both romance and realism by abandoning the realist illusion in order to warn readers not to expect sensational romantic subjects, but “something unromantic as Monday morning” (*Shirley* 5). Moreover, the novel is offered as a “meal” in which the “first dish” will be ungarnished “cold lentiles and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs and no roast lamb” (*Shirley* 5). This can be read not only as a reference to the iconically unappetizing seasoning of the first Passover meal (Exodus 12:8), but as a classical gesture of satire. The word *satire* is derived from the Latin, *satur*, meaning *full*, and is associated with food: specifically, the *lanx satura*—an overflowing platter offered to the gods (Van Rooy 18-19). In this way, the narrator promises the reader a satire filled with unappealing but nourishing truths. Along with the characters, the reader is implicitly accused of being “starved on a few prejudices” (*Shirley* 453). The narrator returns to this blatantly ironic metafictional mode in the final chapter, “The Winding-up,” in order to dispose of both the reader and the characters in the crass language of a business contract: “Yes, reader, we must settle accounts now” (*Shirley* 632). Additionally, the narrator proposes a challenge to the reader—more solemn than playful—to discover a moral. This gesture is very much an attack on convention-bound moralists like Rigby. How could critics who wished to avoid “coarse” and “vulgar” subjects (and genres, such as satire), and who chastised Caroline Helstone for the “unfeminine display of her feelings,”<sup>(16)</sup> comprehend the “moral” of a text that asserts, to quote Brontë's 1847 preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, that “conventionality is not morality” (1)? Both at the outset and the conclusion of the novel, *Shirley*'s predominantly satirical narrator mocks a hidebound readership that will resent and resist unromantic truths.<sup>(17)</sup>

<7>“Levitical” describes not a sacred, but a satirical feast. Providing a spectacle of unruly convivial habits, Joseph Donne, Davy Sweeting, and Malone demonstrate both their lack of basic table manners and their ineptitude as curates who “ought to be doing a great deal of good,” but instead quibble routinely over ecclesiastical “frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves” (*Shirley* 5, 9). Inveterately negligent, the curates debase their link to the apostolic dignity of the honorable Levites (priests

of Israel). Even Helstone regards his curates “sardonically,” condemning their lack of “chivalric sentiments” (*Shirley* 18). Thus, *Shirley*’s opening satiric feast displays a perennial theme of satire: “the disappearance of the heroic” (Frye, *Anatomy* 228). Discredited in spiritual, intellectual, and moral stature, the curates are stripped of patristic authority. In their unsympathetic insularity, they symbolize the clerical and patriarchal structures of England that are systematically blind to the “moral earthquake” that is brewing. And, as the narrator cynically observes, “as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice” (*Shirley* 30).

<8>Importantly, “Levitical” adumbrates *Shirley*’s exposure of another bad habit of England’s patriarchy: misogyny. The first consciousness the satiric narrator focalizes is that of Mrs Gale. “[A] spark of the hot kitchen fire is in her eye” (*Shirley* 7) as she privately condemns the curates’ scornful, misogynistic ways. Tellingly, among the first words spoken in the text are Malone’s rude demand for more bread—“Cut it, woman”—but the housekeeper revolts privately: “Had she followed her inclinations, she would have cut the parson also” (*Shirley* 8). The trenchantly satiric treatment of the curates in “Levitical” is carried forward in the narrative through Caroline and Shirley’s disdain for this chorus of unsuitable bachelors. Buffoonishly, Donne (and Malone) attempt to court Shirley for her money; however, Donne’s anti-Yorkshire egotism and crass materialism spur Shirley to evict him from her home. Sustained satirical representation of the curates encapsulates the text’s anatomy of both public and domestic patriarchal authority.

<9>G. H. Lewes, among others, did not appreciate the opening chapter’s allegory of derelict patriarchal authority; instead, he argued that the “offensive, uninstructional, and unamusing” (159) representation of the curates, among other crimes against “*vraisemblance*,” “betray[s] a female and inexperienced hand” (168). With its portentous page headings, “Mental Equality of the Sexes?” and “Female Literature”, Lewes’s review of *Shirley* demonstrates his own curate-like sexism (155, 157). The critique begins with the argument that because maternity is women’s chief biological function, women’s intellectual and artistic achievements are necessarily curtailed.(18) Significantly, Lewes (in his pre-George Eliot era) discredits the possibility of an intellectually authoritative female novelist, for he dismisses both Brontë’s subject matter and the novel’s aggressive style as expressions of “over-masculine vigour”—inexcusable in a “lady like” novelist (158).(19) Revealingly, Lewes stipulates that women cannot be successful humourists; they have never matched Swift, Fielding, Smollett, or Thackeray, for they are incapable of “comic energy.” At the very most, they can achieve a “quiet smile” (157). In both “Levitical” and the novel as a whole, Lewes disapproves of Brontë’s unladylike, satiric representations of historical and political subjects.(20) Furthermore, as his

preoccupation with “sex in mind” debates suggest, Lewes is stung by *Shirley*’s ridicule of misogynistic myths, particularly the one in which he is so clearly invested: female unintellectuality.(21)

### Caroline and Shirley’s “Bluestocking club”

<10>Satiric inclination and intellectual affinity are central to Caroline Helstone’s character and her friendship with Shirley Keeldar. Thus, not surprisingly, Lewes denounces the verisimilitude of both Caroline’s character and her relationship with Shirley, pronouncing Caroline’s meditations on the condition of women to be radically discordant with her quiescent character. He considers Shirley’s “remarkable tirade” against Milton to be “destroy[ed]” by the unlikelihood of it occurring in the context of a “quiet conversation between two young ladies” (166-67). Lewes’s negative review inadvertently uncovers the degree to which Caroline and Shirley’s satiric colloquy subverts culturally current and masculinist notions of realism structured upon the assumed general weakness of the female intellect. Fundamentally, Lewes rejects Caroline and Shirley’s intellectual rapport (their like-minded engagement with literature and politics) as an affront to verisimilitude.(22) Yet their mental connection is praised by the narrator: “The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony, often chimed very sweetly together” (*Shirley* 225).

<11>Despite her gentle demeanour, Caroline scorns mindless custom. Her thoughts are consistently unconventional and frequently satiric; she disdains the curates, the genteel Misses Sykes, and the mindless “feminine” tasks of darning and sewing (especially the coercive charity of the “Jew’s Basket”). Hortense observes that her student is “not sufficiently girlish and submissive”; in fact, she catches Caroline “curling her lip, absolutely with scorn” at Racine’s poems (*Shirley* 67-8). Although not formally educated, Caroline is self-taught and “ha[s] a knowledge of her own—desultory but varied” (*Shirley* 76). Her energetic, amateur intellectualism jars with her culture’s feminine ideal of being “uniformly sedate and decorous, without being unaccountably pensive” (*Shirley* 67). A key illustration of Caroline’s intellectual rigour is her instruction to Robert to read “the haughty speech of Caius Marcius to the starving” in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, hoping that his identification with the inflexible hero will expand his moral sense and help him to “ste[p] out of the narrow line of private prejudices... [and] revel in the large picture of human nature” (*Shirley* 91). Essentially, Caroline warns Robert of the bad mental habits that undermine his character: “Certain ideas have become too fixed in your mind” (*Shirley* 72). Nancy Armstrong regards Caroline’s (and also Shirley’s) moral redemption of Robert as a prime example of the ideological role of domestic fiction to redeem the middle-class capitalist male through

the moral discourses of domesticity. Yet Caroline's instruction is not solely based upon sentiment: it is philosophical, political, psychological, and literary. Externally and superficially, Caroline is regarded by her community as an exemplary young lady, docile and gentle; yet privately, she is an "intellectual boa-constrictor," (23) who rages against the status quo. Both Shirley and Robert are aware (and Mrs. Yorke learns) that Caroline is not as tractable as she appears. "I have seen her flash out," Robert insists (*Shirley* 363). Caroline's enraged criticism of life-curtailling convention is comparable to what Brontë observes of the surprising severity of Thackeray's satire: the "electric-death spark" is hidden by "lambent sheet-lightning" (Preface 2).

<12>In her fearless clear-sightedness, Caroline shares with the narrator the stern vow of a satirist: "to see things as they [are]" (*Shirley* 172). Juvenalian inclinations surface as she ruminates (in a series of Wollstonecraftian internal monologues) upon the instituted inequities of her social environment. Mainly, she resents the "wide and deep chasm" (*Shirley* 102) that exists between the male public domain (rich with varied interests) and the female domestic realm (characterized by a "mental condition" of "wondrous narrowness" in which love "always" dominates [*Shirley* 172, 391]). She meditates continually upon the culturally entrenched mental estrangement between the sexes. Evincing what Herbert Spencer regarded as an exclusively masculine trait, the "questioning habit" (133), she spends "long, lonely" days "talking inwardly in the same strain" (*Shirley* 389, 175). In the commanding monologue that provides the climax to Volume Two, Caroline denounces the complacency with which social "ills" are regarded; she apprehends that social habit supports the "stagnant state of things," ironizing the ascendant view:

Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood.... The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing.... This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness.... The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they hold them very cheap: they say—I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time—the matrimonial market is overstocked. (*Shirley* 391)

Caroline discredits the logic of her society's misogynistic practices, including the commodification and destruction of women ("they are never well"). In classic satiric



form, her anatomy of inequitable society accrues angry rhetorical questions, and culminates in an admonishing and prophetic apostrophe to the “Men of England,” demanding that they unfetter the minds of their daughters for society’s well-being (*Shirley* 392). Caroline holds that women have the right to self-improvement, economic self-sufficiency, and mental culture. Importantly, her angry meditation also demystifies chivalry, the crux of masculine heroism. Instead of adoring and protecting women, men satirize them with “sneering laughs” (*Shirley* 391). In this philosophical tirade, Caroline’s ireful contempt for social injustice matches the comprehensive criticism frequently displayed by the omniscient satiric narrator. For example, in the Carlylean chastisement of the English merchant classes that launches the chapter “Old Maids,” the narrator diagnoses England as being sick “at heart” from the class-estranging cant of “cold-hearted” Mammonism (*Shirley* 166-7). Epitomizing *Shirley*’s persistently gendered satire on political (and mental) economy, the chapter then shifts to focalize Caroline’s assessment of Robert’s unsympathetic “state of mind” as a “man of business” whose “thoughts were running in no familiar or kindly channel” (*Shirley* 171-72). In a way that typifies the text’s dialogic interaction between the narrator’s satire and Caroline’s, the evaluation of the habitual intellectual and emotional estrangement of the sexes merges with the narrative’s class criticisms. Both Caroline and the narrator are critics of the dehumanizing socio-economic habit of “Cash Payment” as the “universal sole nexus” of human relations (Carlyle 193).[\(24\)](#)

<13>In keeping with the traditional position of the satirist as a partial outsider, Caroline’s satiric acuity is catalyzed by social entrapment and marginality. As a woman, not only is she a “cheap” commodity, but by remaining single she will “come under the lash of [society’s] sarcasm” (*Shirley* 391, 177). Voicing the “going opinion,” for example, Robert demonizes the “old maids” Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, calling them monstrous Medusas. Caroline confesses that she too accepted this stereotype, but upon visiting Miss Ainley (“the complete old maid” in appearance), she realizes that “in real life” Ainley has a “serene, unselfish, and benignant mind” (*Shirley* 181-83). Miss Mann, however, is a fiercely retaliative satirist who routinely “flay[s] alive certain of the families in the neighbourhood” with “pitiless... moral anatomy” (*Shirley* 179). Redolent of the fact that Juvenalian satire from John Dryden’s theory of satire onwards shares a kinship with tragedy, the narrator cautions readers to remember that cankers naturally grow in those inured to long suffering, declaring that only those who lack a proper sense of truth would find Miss Mann herself “a proper subject for satire” (*Shirley* 182).

<14>Caroline’s affinity with the bitter Miss Mann, through her own Juvenalian insularity and apocalyptic pessimism (*Shirley* speculates that her friend “might weep gall” (*Shirley* 233]), is countered by her hope for curative social change. She predicts that

new practices will slowly alter the malaise of mill-workers and women. In the meantime, she prescribes for herself a life of self-sacrifice which “needed only habit to make it practicable and agreeable” (*Shirley* 183). It becomes clear, however, that for Caroline, a regime of self-denial is untenable. Caroline’s despair, it is crucial to note, is not rooted exclusively in unrequited love. Instead, it is catalyzed by the “brain-lethargy” (*Shirley* 120) created by her lack of vocation and compounded by the absence of parental love. Starved on the “light literature” of her uncle’s library, and “[c]loseted” in the “narrow chamber” of her bedroom at the Rectory, her daily life offers a limited range of habitual associations (*Shirley* 389, 172-73). Despising the death-like monotony of her life, she insists, “I am not well, and need a change”: “I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts” (*Shirley* 189, 229). Prohibited by her uncle from seeking “a situation,” she resolves, at the very least, to have agency over her habitual thoughts. For example, she trains her mind not to think of her affection for Robert: she “always now habitually thought of it and mentioned it in the most scanty measure” (*Shirley* 189, 228). Yet without other “absorbing and compulsory” pursuits, she succumbs to “old associations” and the “power of habit,” routinely walking by Hollow’s Mill and waiting by the window to catch a glimpse of Robert (*Shirley* 229, 233). The power of disciplinary habit proves insufficient to “stun” her anguish (*Shirley* 184), and, true to the axioms of Victorian phrenology, her body and mind decline in unison. Interrupting this debilitating trajectory, however, Caroline’s Horatian hopes materialize through the “happy change” of meeting Shirley Keeldar (*Shirley* 223).

<15>The narrator imports the language of nineteenth-century habit theory (channels, pathways, currents) to describe how the friendship gives “a turn... to [Caroline’s] thoughts; a new channel was opened for them, which, diverting a few of them at least from the one direction in which all had hitherto tended, abated the impetuosity of their rush, and lessened the force of their pressure on one worn-down point” (*Shirley* 223). Shirley, a “gallant little cavalier,” functions (in conjunction with Mrs. Pryor) like a romance hero to save Caroline from what Rose Yorke refers to as her “long, slow death... in Briarfield Rectory” (*Shirley* 199, 399). In doing so, she parodies defunct masculine heroism. Their friendship, which develops in the natural setting of Nunnwood (where, both agree, the “presence of gentlemen dispels the... charm” [*Shirley* 214]), permits the exploration of their feminist and satiric inclinations, which are prohibited in public. (Even Mrs. Pryor wishes to censor their subjects.) Shirley’s declaration to Caroline summarizes the license of their privacy: “Cary, we are alone: we may speak what we think” (*Shirley* 320). In multiple scenes involving extensive and rapid verbal exchanges, the friends

dismantle their culture's misogynist stereotypes.

<16>In contrast to Caroline, however, Shirley is typically a light-hearted critic. This is exemplified by her attempt to alleviate Caroline's gloominess by proposing an excursion to the Faroe Isles; proud of her fanciful efforts, she exclaims, "I made her laugh; I have done her good" (*Shirley* 244). Caroline, with her faded appearance and bitter wisdom—"[w]inter seemed conquering her spring" (*Shirley* 184)—is reminiscent of Frye's association of winter with annihilating irony and satire, whereas Shirley's vibrant appearance signals the regenerative, spring-like Horatian mode. She gives Fieldhead's workers a "good-humoured rating" (*Shirley* 355), and similarly rebukes the curates and their rector, while offering them nosegays of spring flowers. Importantly, when she upbraids Robert for proposing to her like a "brigand who demanded [her] purse," she shames and reforms him: "Her words were a mirror in which I saw myself" (*Shirley* 534). In her habitual persona of "Captain Shirley Keeldar, Esquire," she exposes, through mimicry, the substantially economic nature of masculine authority. Having been ostracized from decisions made by the district's male authorities regarding the Luddite unrest, she realizes that, despite her monetary power, her authority in Yorkshire's West Riding is merely titular. In retaliation, she attempts to avert an uprising through the domestic means at her disposal: "good works" (*Shirley* 264). Shirley is transgressively active and opinionated (even Helstone enjoys her repartée, despite his fear "that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence" [*Shirley* 272]). Yet, despite Shirley's merry plotting, socially unifying spirit of charity, and outspoken reprimands to Donne, Malone, Yorke, and Sympson, she remains, on balance, immured in the domestic world—compelled to keep a covert "sentinel-survey of life" (*Shirley* 273). As Gilbert and Gubar cogently state, "Shirley seems condemned to play the roles she parodies" (388). Ultimately, Shirley's clipped freedom (as the mistress and not the master of Fieldhead) dramatizes that female social and political authority is, at best, inescapably indirect. Her steadfast belief in the goodness of humanity, however, is thoroughly Horatian—as is her role as guardian of her beloved Yorkshire community.

<17>Counterposing the indignancy of Caroline's rant against the mental gulf between the sexes, Shirley playfully denounces misogynist literary mythography. Agreeing that poetry should avoid "false sentimentality and pompous pretension," she and Caroline are clandestine literary critics (as well as potential poets) (*Shirley* 225). Caroline, for example, is merciless in her biographical criticism of Cowper and Rousseau: "I scorn them. They are made of clay and gold. The refuse and the ore make a mass of weakness: taken altogether, I feel them unnatural, unhealthy, repulsive" (*Shirley* 228). Shirley mimics masculine surprise at Caroline's verdict and wonders who taught her

such ideas; Caroline replies that “[t]he voice we hear in solitude” told her all that she knows, and returns the masculinist jab: “you are not learned, Shirley” (*Shirley* 228, 352). Shirley’s reply is a hyperbolic and self-parodic contestation of men’s estimation of women: “I’m as ignorant as a stone” (*Shirley* 353). Undercutting such overstated modesty, Shirley stands before her looking glass and anatomizes literary convention. The context of her critique functions to reclaim the mirror, a customary symbol of both female vanity and satire (Jonathan Swift’s famous metaphor for satire is that of a glass “wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own” [1]), for feminist critical reflection:

‘If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into extasies with each other’s creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem—novel—drama, thinking it fine—divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial... [I]f I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour.’  
(*Shirley* 352) (25)

This disquisition identifies a systematic error across most literature: a mythical evaluation of women. Such falsifying patriarchal fantasies, she asserts, often impede the judgment of “the cleverest, the acutest men” (*Shirley* 352). Shirley’s speech not only contests the exclusivity of the masculine capacity for “first-rate” genius—cavalierly insisted upon by Charles Darwin, George G. Romanes, Lewes, and others—but charges all literary patriarchs with the habituated incapacity to comprehend half the human race. Although the allegorized poet, whom the narrator associates with originality and truth, is figured as a man who “laugh[s] in his sleeve” (*Shirley* 49) at the folly of the world, *Shirley* typically associates women with the truth-seeking poetic imagination. In the Yorke family, for instance, it is Rose and Jessie whose original ideas are “trampled on and repressed”—Jessie, in particular, “had something of the genius of humour in her nature” (*Shirley* 148, 407). Shirley will never write the poems of which she is capable (or the magazine article), but in the company of Caroline, she is a secret bluestocking whose feminist criticisms are freely expressed.(26) Her hyperbolic argument concerning the certainty of public execution if she were miraculously to print her literary criticism of the “first-rate” male authors of the day satirically foregrounds the mid-Victorian textual necessity of disguising feminist dissent.

<18>The chapter title, “Which the Genteel Reader Is Recommended to Skip, Low Persons Being Here Introduced,” ironically and self-reflexively announces the chapter’s heterodoxy to conformist readers who deny rationality to both the “lower” classes and to women. Fulfilling its promise of subversion, the chapter showcases Shirley’s vision of Eve as a powerful Titan, who, being Adam’s equal, is “not Milton’s Eve” (*Shirley* 319):

‘Milton’s Eve! Milton’s Eve! I repeat. No, by the pure Mother of God, she is not! ... Milton was great; but was he good? His brain was right; how was his heart? 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.’ (*Shirley* 320)

Caroline is awed by her friend’s literary heresy: “You are bold to say so, Shirley” (*Shirley* 320).<sup>(27)</sup> Implicitly referencing Book V of *Paradise Lost*, in which Eve prepares “dulcet creams” and various refreshments for Adam and the Archangel Raphael, Shirley proposes with satiric bathos: “It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill” (*Shirley* 320). Eve was not a secondary creation, Shirley insists, but a “heaven-born” Titan who “yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence” (*Shirley* 320). After this satiric disclaimer of Milton’s decree that, as Eve is Adam’s intellectual inferior, “nothing lovelier can be found / In Woman, than to study household good” (*PL* 9.232-3), Shirley falls into rhapsodical contemplation of her matriarchal progenitor.<sup>(28)</sup> Her vision, rather than an instance of “embarrassing” visionary feminism (Eagleton 58), is an excoriating feminist exegesis of Milton.<sup>(29)</sup> Once again, *Shirley* offers satirical criticism of public patriarchal traditions from the margins of the private sphere.

<19>Aptly, following Shirley’s (re)vision of Eve and rebuke of Milton, the friends encounter the misogynist Joe Scott, who rails against “petticoat government” (*Shirley* 327) and refuses to talk to them about politics. Citing Pauline disparagement of the female intellect, Joe declares that women lack judgment, because Eve was the first to sin. Shirley retaliates by stating, “More shame to Adam to sin with his eyes open!” (*Shirley* 329). Caroline is then provoked to reject St Paul’s injunctions, insisting on the possibility of wrongful translation from the original Greek.<sup>(30)</sup> In this chapter, signaled as being subversive, Miltonic and patristic exegesis are satirized for misrepresenting female intelligence. It must be emphasized that Caroline and Shirley’s mutual vow to marry men whom they intellectually esteem—men to whom “mind is added” (*Shirley* 219)—and the scarcity of contenders for their respect, is a narrative choice that rebelliously contravenes Victorian assumptions concerning women’s inherent (and “scientifically” proven) intellectual inferiority.

<20>In *Shirley*'s notoriously ambivalent final chapter, Horatian and Juvenalian elements exist in tension. The metafictional narrator expresses parodic awareness that the implicit rules of the nineteenth-century novel militating against satire mandate that "the unvarnished truth does not answer" and that "plain facts will not digest" (*Shirley* 632). Unpleasant social facts remain as unpalatable as Malone's debauchery and the "dark truth" (*Shirley* 541) of Yorke's, Helstone's, and others' misogyny. If temporary peace exists between managers and the operatives in the West Riding, nineteenth-century readers would have known that unrest would be reborn in the Chartist agitations of the 1840s. The equivocal narrator hints that the economic stabilization from the repeal of the Orders in Council "might be delusive" (*Shirley* 637). Furthermore, the perpetual social grievances of women are hardly palliated by Caroline and Shirley's successful marriages to men who are not of the Helstone type. Critics such as Juliet Barker, who argue that the feminist trajectory of the novel is overthrown by Shirley's protracted, even masochistic, submission to her "master" Louis, ignore the narrator's flagrant narrative advice to read the ending suspiciously.<sup>(31)</sup> The final chapter's Juvenalian implications are well-supported by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's excavation of the "ominous" inferences surrounding Robert's proposal to Caroline; for example, he likens her to the Virgin Mary, recalling Madonna-like descriptions of the condemned Mary Cave. Thus, in the imperfect social landscape of the text, where the "powerful effect of public myths" holds sway, Shirley and Caroline's relationship is relegated to its socially sanctioned, secondary place (397, 374). Likely, trips to Nunnwood and the Faroe Isles will never materialize. Instead, the friends assist with one another's wedding dresses and, rather than embarking upon "learned professions" (*Shirley* 229), they will teach Sunday school. Through the quotidian future of its heroines, the narrative tacitly acknowledges the lack of a social place for a re-visioned Eve in "mercantile, postlapsarian England" (Gilbert and Gubar 398). As Sally Shuttleworth acutely argues, the text "persistently offers radical visions of female potentiality... only to then expose the illusory nature of such dreams" by leaving Caroline and Shirley as "rigorous guardians" of the edicts of the male order (213)—rather than its satirical censors. In addition, the narrator apocalyptically predicts that nature itself, which is consistently feminized throughout the narrative, will be further trampled upon by "manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes" (*Shirley* 645).

<21>At one level, then, the stifling of feminist possibility in *Shirley* is itself the "bitter herbs" of satiric realism promised in "Levitical." Yet, amid these signs of social stasis and the industrial destruction of nature, *Shirley*'s conclusion simultaneously provides evidence of social amelioration. Robert and Caroline's courtship is represented through the surprising medium of Martin Yorke's inward reflections as he embarks upon a conversion from misogamy and misogyny to non-sexist sympathy. Temporarily, Martin

becomes a central character as he gains affectionate sympathy for Caroline—and, by extension, her sex. His original vow—“I mean always to hate women; they’re such dolls: ... I’ll never marry: I’ll be a bachelor” (*Shirley* 158)—is broken, and he becomes an adoring groomsman at Caroline’s wedding. His “transfiguration” (*Shirley* 151) parallels and invokes the text’s primary one: Robert Moore’s retraction of misogyny and lack of general social sympathy. Even Helstone, sobered by the near-death of his niece, condescends to make her tea; and Shirley rebels against ascendant class bigotry and the domestic practice of mercenary marriages to wed for love. Arguably, what Forçade refers to as the novel’s “satirical shafts” at the institution of marriage, are, on balance, Horatian, for the “young marry just the same” (Allott 145). As well, the novel’s Juvenalian rage and pessimism are countered by demonstrations of curative sympathy, for many events within the narrative function rhetorically to moderate the “temper” of overly bitter satire, the kind of satire that the narrator implicitly (and rather hypocritically) censures. Miss Mann, after all, is chastised for performing her satire “like some surgeon practising with his scalpel on a lifeless subject” (*Shirley* 179). Thus, the seeming victory of domestic novelistic convention and Horatian satire permits the passage of the novel’s more ideologically disruptive and Juvenalian satire past the “violent censure” (Forçade, qtd. in Allott 145) of critics, safely into literary history. Replete with Menippean themes, *Shirley* links the domestic and public social spheres in overarching ideological and social criticism, and conducts, through a subversively intellectual female friendship, a scathing satire of literary and social misogyny.

### Endnotes

(1) Critics who assail Brontë for her High Tory partisanship frequently ignore the gender politics of *Shirley*. For example, Terry Eagleton’s influential Marxist argument concerning the novel’s socio-political conservatism is, by his own admission, “pre-feminist” (xiv). Recently, Philip Rogers, who explores Brontë’s “gradualist paternalism” and support for the anti-Chartist Duke of Wellington, cites the narrative’s approval of Mrs Pryor (a strident Tory) as evidence of Brontë’s own arch-Toryism (165). In doing so, he ignores the condemnation of Mrs Pryor’s unsympathetic assertion of the “great gulf” between William Farren’s “caste” and her own. Caroline rebukes her: “You don’t know him” (*Shirley* 445-46). Criticism stressing Brontë’s tendency towards conservative political views tends to obviate the text’s dizzying dialogism. (▲)

(2) Elizabeth Langland, for example, evaluates Louis Moore and Shirley Keeldar’s dynamics of “masculine” mastery and “feminine” subordination within the context of

parody and mimicry—strategies in which “the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within... discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her” (Luce Irigaray, qtd. in Langland 5).<sup>(△)</sup>

(3)As early as the eighteenth century, writers valued amiable humour over wit and satire; continuing this trend, countless Victorian writers and critics were distrustful of satire. Regardless of their ambivalence, however, many novelists embraced satire’s literary and social possibilities in their narrative practice. Yet many twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics concur that the novel of comic realism engulfed satire by the 1830s. Gary Dyer, for example, argues that satire petered out in its distinct prose incarnations after the 1820s and 30s, having been consumed by “predominantly non-satiric genres” like the realist novel (139, 14). In terms of the gendered history of satire, the eighteenth-century trend to distance women from satire increased in the nineteenth century. Given its subversive content, satire was, for many Victorian novelists and their critics, an uncouth, improper genre. Feminine and genteel values were considered incompatible with ridicule, and women were thought to be too good-natured to comprehend “masculine cynicism” (Martin 8). Satire was also regarded as being highly intellectual and vigorous, and therefore manly. In either incarnation, satire was deemed an improper form of expression for women, for, as Eileen Gillooly observes, “humor that was sympathetic and restrained, tender and tactful—came to signify ‘the feminine note in fiction’” (4).<sup>(△)</sup>

(4)Forçade’s article in *Revue des deux mondes* (15 November 1849) was described by Brontë as the “best critique which has yet appeared” (Allott 142).<sup>(△)</sup>

(5)Brontë attended and critiqued four of Thackeray’s lectures on the eighteenth-century humourists (1851). Fielding’s personal vices and excesses, in her opinion, were not sufficiently reprimanded by Thackeray. Moreover, Brontë was also critical of Thackeray’s representation of women; responding to *Henry Esmond*, she concludes, “As usual—he is unjust to women—quite unjust” (letter to George Smith, 14 February 1842, *Letters* 3: 18). Thackeray’s private criticisms of Brontë affirm her pronouncement. His letter (11 March 1853) to Lucy Baxter concerning *Villette* epitomizes the “sex in mind” assumptions about female intellectual limitation that saturated the literary *milieu* at mid-century: “The good of *Villette* in my opinion Miss is a very fine style; and a remarkable happy way (w. few female authors possess) of carrying a metaphor logically through to its conclusion—And it amuses me to read the author’s naïve confession of being in love with 2 men at the same time; and her readiness to fall in love at *any* time. The poor little woman of genius!” (*Letters* 1: 547).<sup>(△)</sup>



(6) A contemporary critic, in “Thackeray and Currer Bell” (*Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, June 1856), notes that the same aversion to hypocrisy and the valuing of appearances forms the “prevailing undercurrent of their works”; “[b]oth satirize existing features of society” (Allott 315, 317).<sup>(△)</sup>

(7) Penny Boumelha observes that *Shirley* is Brontë’s social panoramic or Thackerayan novel (78). Langland also notes that *Vanity Fair* is a “key precursor text,” because *Shirley* “absorbs and transforms” Thackeray’s “key passages of narrative commentary on the ideology of womanhood” (5).<sup>(△)</sup>

(8) The satires of Juvenal and Horace have been contrasted for centuries. The terms Horatian (for genial and conciliatory satire) and Juvenalian (for harsh and pessimistic satire) evolved from the debates of grammarians, practicing satirists, and literary critics about the relative merits and features of each satirist’s work. The rhetorical dichotomy was alive and well in Victorian literary culture—Horatian satire being valued over and above Juvenalian. Generally speaking, however, as Chauncey C. Loomis, Jr. argues, “in spite of the existence of some fine contemporary satirists,” the Victorians “were excessively distrustful of the satiric spirit” (1).<sup>(△)</sup>

(9) Letter to W. S. Williams, 14 August 1848 (*Letters* 2: 98).<sup>(△)</sup>

(10) Gilbert and Gubar note the text’s illustrations of the “inextricable link between sexual discrimination and mercantile capitalism” (375). Sally Shuttleworth also affirms that the economic dilemma of an overstocked market, and the class antagonisms stemming from technological invention and the Corn Laws, parallel the gendered problem of the surplus of marriageable women and the lack of female vocation. The novel’s preoccupation with Caroline’s psychical states also demonstrates that “circulating economies of psychological and social life are directly interwoven” (Shuttleworth 183).<sup>(△)</sup>

(11) Argyle finds it fitting that the “male narrators of the historical romance and the comedy of manners” reveal that historical and social forces must curb the female protagonists (754). By contrast, the “psychological romance” mode challenges the “‘naturalness’ of the political, social, and psychological assumptions which the two ‘male modes’ champion” (749-50). In this way, Argyle masculinizes the satiric strains of the novel.<sup>(△)</sup>

(12) The Chartist agitation of the 1840s, Eagleton argues, is transfigured into the Luddite context of 1812-13: “Chartism is the unspoken subject of *Shirley*” (45).<sup>(△)</sup>

(13) Helstone's misogyny, rooted in the scorn of female intelligence, is explicit: "At heart, he could not abide sense in women: he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be,—inferior: toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away" (*Shirley* 116). The narrator's assessment of the murderous misogyny of the institution of marriage is unsparingly Juvenalian: "the second Mrs. Helstone, inverting the natural order of insect existence, would have fluttered through the honeymoon a bright, admired butterfly, and crawled the rest of her days a sordid, trampled worm" (*Shirley* 117). This arresting metaphor may be an allusion to Wollstonecraft's description of women as the "insect whom [men] keep under [their] feet" (175).<sup>(^)</sup>

(14) Pope's famous insult to women is that they are "Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear, / And best distinguish'd by black, brown, or fair" ("Epistle 2: To a Lady," lines 3-4).<sup>(^)</sup>

(15) The advice of Brontë's publisher to remove "Levitical," or at least to lessen the harshness of its ironies (as well as those of the last chapter), is imbued with implicit censure of satire. Williams's concerns proved accurate. The reviewer for the *Atlas* (31 October 1849) resents the "extraordinarily unreal and repulsive" curates, pronouncing the chapter to be "very coarse—very irreverential"; in fact, he posits that satirical improprieties tarnish the novel as a whole (Allott 121). Similarly, the *Daily News* (31 October 1849) determines the curates to be "monstrosities" (Allott 118). Williams's advice to remove the novel's satirical preface, "Note to the Quarterly," also reflects a cultural resistance to satire. In a letter to Williams (31 August 1849), Brontë argues that her preface should be "fearlessly" printed, pleading that it contains "the lightest satire" (*Letters* 2: 246). The preface includes not only a general satire on status quo moralism, but a blatant attack on Elizabeth Rigby—whose notoriously searing review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review* (1848) contains implications that female-authored satire is unacceptable. Rigby argues that *Jane Eyre* is inferior to *Vanity Fair*. Its heroine (and implicitly its author) is an "uninteresting, sententious, pedantic thing; with no experience of the world" (Allott 107).<sup>(^)</sup>

(16) From the *Spectator*, 1849 (Allott 131).<sup>(^)</sup>

(17) Tim Dolin accurately observes that *Shirley* "anticipates, partly combatively and partly defensively, its own critical reception" (201).<sup>(^)</sup>

(18) Although he bars women from first-rate achievements in higher forms of literature

(prefiguring both Darwin and Romanes), he concedes that a mental aptitude for minutiae renders their success in the novel unsurprising, as it is a form dedicated to observation rather than intellectual abstraction. In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, Lewes recalls that he had asserted that “in the *highest* efforts of intellect women have not equalled men,” but that this was not meant to be disrespectful or offensive “on the personal” or “general ground” (Allott 330).<sup>(^)</sup>

(19) Brontë was appalled by Lewes’s review: “after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an author not as a woman, you so roughly—I even thought—so cruelly handled the question of sex” (*Letters* 2: 332-33).<sup>(^)</sup>

(20) Noticing the philosophical and satiric pronouncements that saturate *Shirley*, the reviewer for the *Critic* (15 November 1849) implicitly categorizes the novel as a masculine satire: “In almost every page of *Shirley*, there are scattered... the utterances of a reflective mind, which almost assume the shape of aphorisms. These are so unlike the usual writings of a lady, they are so comprehensive in their views, so terse in their expression, that ... we should have received them as conclusive testimony to the masculine gender of Currer Bell” (Allott 141).<sup>(^)</sup>

(21) Rachel Malane suggests that Herbert Cowell’s 1874 question is central to the “Woman Question” debates: “Is there such a thing as sex in mind; and, if so, what mental characteristics correlate the differences in sex?” (qtd. in Malane vii). Numerous scientists proffered evidence that men’s brains were superior to women’s. Darwin asserted that men’s brains will always out-evolve women’s, for the competitive struggles of men will perpetually “keep up or even increase their mental powers” (631). Lewes, in company with Darwin, George G. Romanes, and others, agreed that women’s limited accomplishments in literature—their lack of true originality or “poetic genius of the first order” (Romanes 384)—provided further evidence of their innate mental deficiencies.<sup>(^)</sup>

(22) Eagleton disregards the intellectuality of the friendship by categorizing it as being “latently sexual”; *Shirley*, he argues, provides for Caroline a “kind of sexual surrogate” (58).<sup>(^)</sup>

(23) Brontë’s epithet for Thackeray in a letter to W.S. Williams, 11 December 1847 (*Letters* 1: 571).<sup>(^)</sup>

(24) Both Caroline’s and the narrator’s social criticisms embody the satiric and prophetic rhetoric that, according to George P. Landow, characterizes the Victorian “sagistic”

tradition (of Arnold, Ruskin, and Carlyle). The sage interprets the “signs of the times,” and offers an “attack upon the audience (or those in authority), warning and visionary promise” (22-24).(^)

(25) Shirley’s pronouncement incisively satirizes the literary double standard of her day. She proposes to prove her point by writing a “magazine paper some day” on the subject of male writers’ false estimation of women, knowing all too well that “it will never be inserted: it will be “declined with thanks,” and left for me at the publisher’s” (*Shirley* 352).(^)

(26) It is the feminized (marginal and sympathetic) Henry Sympson whom the narrator suggests will actually, through Shirley and Louis’s aid, transgress his family’s materialism to become a poet.(^)

(27) Milton met with ubiquitous mid-Victorian approval. For example, Matthew Arnold asserts: “Milton is of all our gifted men the best lesson, the most salutary influence” (“Milton,” 330).(^)

(28) Eve is represented by Milton as being intellectually inferior to Adam: she is “Too much of ornament, in outward show / Elaborate, of inward less exact. / For well I understand in the prime end / Of nature her th’inferior, in the mind...” (*PL* 8.538-41).(^)

(29) Arguably, Shirley’s cryptic *devoir* is a mythic portrayal of the first marriage that is not only anti-misogamist, but also a parodic satire of misogynistic creation myths. Shirley designs a myth of origin for Eve as a female orphan named Eva who unites with Genius to become “*La Première Femme Savante*”: the first learned woman or “blue-stocking.” Although it appears that she is conventionally represented as “the heart” and “Humanity,” Eva’s intelligence is emphasized; her forehead “shines an expanse fair and ample” (a possible echo of Adam’s “fair large Front” [*PL* 4.300]) and her spirit is alive with “the flame of her intelligence” (*Shirley* 487). It is *she* who drinks from the cup offered by Genius (the Adam figure). Allegorically, the symbolic marriage of Genius and Eva undermines the traditional gendered binary of head/heart, to create the exemplary woman in whom intellect is merged with sympathetic sentiment. Similarly, Lucasta Miller asserts that Shirley’s allegory is a creation myth for female creative genius (175).(^)

(30) This is not the first example of Caroline’s feminist biblical hermeneutics; she rejects Lucretia and “Solomon’s virtuous women” as female role models, favouring Lydia—an agriculturalist and a manager. She recalls Proverbs 31:25: “[Lydia] opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness” (*Shirley* 392).(^)

(31) Barker declares that Brontë “lacked the courage of her convictions and ended her book in the conventional manner” (603). Yolanda Padilla, however, argues that Shirley “undermines her submission” to Louis simply through the rebellious act of marrying a social inferior (and also by controlling the terms of their engagement) (13).<sup>(^)</sup>

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