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Criticism of Anne Brontë's two novels

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CRITICISM OF ANNE BRONTË'S TWO NOVELS

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Well! Here's what I see when they speak the Brontë names:
Three upward-pointing tensely striving flames:
One towering, turbulent: leaping, searing white,
Over the Earnshaw's moor on a wild dark night;
One sternly shaping by duty its piercing scarlet pain,
Frail but indomitable, like her own Jane.
One still and clear and pale, accepting God's plan
Though God knew it was hard--that was Anne;
Held in captivity by a little grey stone town
Which, not understanding, tried its homely best to keep down
Souls which, striving to break through to a nobler air,
Created for others a beauty themselves could not share.

Yorkshire and literature, the moors, the winds, the nobly
free--
All that I hold most dear and high the Brontës are to me.

Phyllis Bentley

PREFACE

This study developed out of a desire to make available in one volume a representative selection of the reviews and criticisms of Anne Brontë's two novels, Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. It was an attempt to discover how the novels have been received from the time of publication down to the present.

Anne Brontë, whose novels have reflected a life of tragedy and frustration, has been of great interest to the scholar in Victorian literature. Although a study of Charlotte and Emily Brontë would not be complete without a study of Anne, until 1929 there was no single work devoted to Anne. At that time Dr. Will Hale of the Indiana University faculty published a study of her life and writings, and to this writer's knowledge it is still the only separate source of information about the youngest of the Brontë sisters.

Much of the search for criticism of Anne's novels has been fruitless; many writers and critics have either ignored her novels or dismissed them with a sentence or two. However, some of the Brontë biographies, histories of the novel, publications of the Brontë Society, and various periodicals have offered valuable and abundant material.

Chapter I will deal with critiques of Agnes Grey and Chapter II, with criticisms of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. These will be followed by conclusions drawn from the study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

AGNES GREY

Agnes Grey was written by Anne Brontë under the pseudonym, Acton Bell, and was published by Thomas Newby of London in 1847, a few weeks after the second edition of Jane Eyre appeared. The book was all but unnoticed and ignored by reviewers. The literary world, if it thought about Agnes Grey at all, believed it to be a youthful and inferior work of Currer Bell. It was completely eclipsed by Jane Eyre, and early critics in periodicals such as Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, The Edinburgh Review, The Literary World, and The Quarterly Review were engrossed with Jane Eyre and Shirley, not with Agnes Grey. It must be remembered, too, in regard to later volumes about the Brontës that many of them which have included Anne have confined themselves to a bare minimum of facts concerning her life and have been satisfied with the mere listing of her novels. Thus no reference has been made to these books in this study.

The story is that of an English governess, Agnes Grey, a sensitive and gentle girl who suffered greatly teaching the spoiled children of coarse parents but finally

found happiness by marrying Edward Weston, the curate whom she loved.

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM (1847-1857)

There were few early critics of Agnes Grey. Among them were Anne's sister Charlotte; Mrs. Gaskell, the English novelist who was Charlotte's friend and biographer; and Mrs. Margaret Jane Sweat, the American novelist who contributed frequently to The North American Review. Charlotte liked Agnes Grey, while Mrs. Sweat found more merit in Anne's second novel, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Both Charlotte and Mrs. Gaskell were interested in the autobiographical aspect of the novel.

On December 14, 1847, Charlotte[1] wrote to Mr. Williams, the Smith Elder reader, describing the novel as true and unexaggerated enough to please such critics as Mr. Lewes.

Another letter to Mr. Williams, dated December 21, 1847, revealed Agnes Grey as "the mirror of the mind of the writer."[2]

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[1]Charlotte Brontë, "Letter 254," cited by Clement Shorter, The Brontes: Life and Letters. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), I, 375.

[2]Ibid., "Letter 257," p. 377.

Charlotte preferred this first novel to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and on July 31, 1848, explained her preference to Mr. Williams: "The simple and natural--quiet description and simple pathos are, I think, Acton Bell's forte. I liked Agnes Grey better than the present work."[3]

Nine years later Mrs. Margaret Sweat in The North American Review revealed a different attitude. She considered The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as the novel upon which Anne's reputation rested and dismissed Agnes Grey as a novel which "made little impression."[4]

Mrs. Gaskell, whose biography of Charlotte first appeared in 1857, mentioned Agnes Grey as "the novel in which . . . Anne pretty literally describes her own experiences as a governess."[5]

Although Agnes Grey received less attention than The Tenant of Wildfell Hall from contemporary critics, it also received less hostile criticism. Agnes Grey was just the kind of story to be expected from the quiet Anne, and those who knew her recognized many of her own experiences as a

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[3]Ibid., "Letter 301," p. 442.

[4]Mrs. Margaret Jane Sweat, "Charlotte Brontë and the Brontë Novels," The North American Review, 85:328, October, 1857.

[5]Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1900), p. 176.

governess in the life of "Agnes." While one reader considered the story almost negligible, another found its simplicity and naturalness appealing.

LATTER NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM (1873-1899)

No criticism was discovered for the period between 1857 and 1873, and only three notices were found for the succeeding twenty-six years. These criticisms were unfavorable for the most part, although two of the critics tempered their adverse comments with faint praise.

George Barnett Smith, the head of Smith, Elder and Company and the founder of The Cornhill Magazine, wrote in July, 1873, that the novel was interesting but inferior to other Brontë works:

> . . . 'Agnes Grey,' . . . shows no notable powers of penetration and insight such as the world had been accustomed to look for in the authors bearing the cognomen of Bell. It is the most inferior of all the works written by the sisters, though interesting in many aspects.[6]

In 1897 Hugh Walker, author and professor of English literature at St. David's College, Lampeter, South Wales, described the novel as a "pleasing but commonplace tale."[7]

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[6]George Barnett Smith, "The Brontës," The Cornhill Magazine, 28:68, July, 1873.

[7]Hugh Walker, The Age of Tennyson. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897), p. 102.

Two years later novelist Mary Virginia Terhune, the mother of writer Albert Payson Terhune, called Agnes Grey "a third-rate, colourless story of governess life."[8]

In this period Anne's novel was compared with that of her sisters and was found lacking in the "powers of penetration and insight." The book was considered mediocre, albeit "pleasing" and "interesting in many aspects."

THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM

The twentieth century marked a rise in the number of critiques of Agnes Grey. Fifteen were discovered for the period from 1900 to 1925, and they were predominantly unfavorable.

The English novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, a niece of Matthew Arnold, wrote an introduction for the 1900 edition of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall in which she pictured Agnes Grey as a reflection of "the minor pains and discomforts of her (Anne's) teaching experience."[9]

From 1903 to 1910 Agnes Grey received more favorable criticism than in previous years. Walter Frewen Lord in

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[8]Mary Virginia Terhune, pseud. Marion Harland, Charlotte Brontë at Home. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), p. 224.

[9]Mrs. Humphry Ward, "Introduction," The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1900), p. xiii.

The Living Age, May 30, 1903, described it as a story of "dissolute squires and vulgar nouveaux riches . . . convincingly presented, in a style which Stevenson himself could not but have approved."[10]

The same writer discussed the incidents and characters:

> It is needless to say that the incidents in the story of Agnes Grey are in themselves tedious and dismal. The daily routine of a poor girl leading the arduous and depressing life of a governess in families where she was despised can hardly be anything else; but the story is so connectedly told, and the incidents are presented so soberly and touched so lightly, that the impression is great. Nothing is overdone: there is sufficient dialect to divert, not enough to weary. The children of both of the families Agnes Grey served stand out each from the other like living beings. The good men are not tiresome, the wicked men are not melodramatic.[11]

The critic believed that Wuthering Heights was Anne's first novel, and he declared that in Agnes Grey "one would see how much may be done towards improvement of style, and consequent success in art."[12]

He contrasted the two novels, clearly showing his preference for Agnes Grey:

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[10]Walter Frewen Lord, "The Brontë Novels," The Living Age, 237:525, May 30, 1903.

[11]Loc. cit.

[12]Loc. cit.

> In the one case the machinery is lavish, the scenery startling, and there is a wild abandon of language, which, if license could effect anything, ought to result in a horrifying impression, but the impression is nil: in the other case we have nothing but the bread and butter of life, but the impression is great.[13]

Clement King Shorter,[14] the English journalist and literary critic, spoke of Anne in his biography, Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters, which was published in 1906. He believed that although Anne had no genius and no passion, she possessed a valuable photographic quality:

> We go to Anne Brontë more readily than to Charlotte and Emily for a picture of what life was like for a nursery governess in the forties, and we find her pictures in Agnes Grey thoroughly interesting in consequence.[15]

According to Clara H. Whitmore, whose Woman's Work in English Fiction was first published in 1909, Agnes Grey is important as a portrayal of the life and manners of the nineteenth century:

> It is a photographic representation of the life of a governess in England during the forties. . . . a series of photographs, which only a sensitive, responsive nature could have produced. The contrast between the gentle, refined governess, and the coarse natures

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[13] Loc. cit.

[14] Clement King Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 141.

[15] Loc. cit.

upon whom she is dependent, is well shown, although there is no attempt on the part of the author to assert any superiority of one over the other.[16]

The same writer spoke of the point of view from which the story was told:

> We have many books in which the shrinking governess is described from the point of view of the family or one of their guests, but here the governess of an English fox-hunting squire has spoken for herself; she has described her trials and the constant self-sacrifice which is demanded of her without bitterness, and in a kindly spirit withal, and for that reason the book is a valuable addition to the history of the life and manners of the century.[17]

The French abbé Ernest Dimnet, a lecturer and writer who contributed to the leading French, English, and American periodicals, wrote Les Soeurs Brontë, which appeared in 1910 and was translated from the French in 1927. In it he mentioned Agnes Grey as "the peaceful story of a governess who marries the curate on the last page."[18] To him Agnes Grey did not count.[19]

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[16]Clara H. Whitmore, Woman's Work in English Fiction. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), pp. 258-59.

[17]Loc. cit.

[18]Ernest Dimnet, The Brontë Sisters. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, (1927), p. 152. (Translated from the French by Louise Morgan Sill. Original was Les Soeurs Brontë, 1910.)

[19]Ibid., p. 127.

In 1912 May Sinclair, the English novelist, described Anne's novel as a "humble tale"[20] and pictured the apathy with which it and Wuthering Heights, which were bound together, were received:

> Its (Wuthering Heights) lightning should have scorched and consumed Agnes Grey, but nothing happened. Ellis and Acton Bell remained equals in obscurity, recognised only by their association with the tremendous Currer.[21]

In discussing the long plaint of the novel the same author expressed a belief later supported by Dr. Will Hale:

> There is no piety in that plaint. It is purely pagan; the cry of youth cheated of its desire. Life brought her no good gifts beyond the slender ineffectual beauty that left her undesired. Her tremulous, expectant womanhood was cheated. She never saw so much as the flying veil of joy, or even of such pale, uninspired happiness as she dreamed in Agnes Grey. She was cheated of her innocent dream.[22]

Mrs. Ellis H. Chadwick in 1914 thought it a mystery that Agnes Grey had been accepted by the publishers and Charlotte's book, The Professor rejected:

> . . . for Agnes Grey is quite a colourless story, told in a very school-girl fashion, and Anne Brontë brings in her scripture references frequently, giving the novel a very didactic tone, and conveying the impression that it was written by a much older person. Anne meant to write a story with a purpose, and she was not afraid to point the moral.[23]

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[20]May Sinclair, The Three Brontës. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), p. 29.

[21]Loc. cit.

[22]Ibid., p. 42.

[23]Mrs. Ellis H. Chadwick, In the Footsteps of the Brontës. (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1914), pp. 176-77.

Adolphus Alfred Jack, author and Chalmers professor of English literature at the University of Aberdeen, spoke in 1916 of Anne's treatment of her governess experiences:

> Agnes Grey has interest, a record of her governess experiences, treated, so far as one can judge, not very freely, and, for this reason, affording, in its mild way, something of the pleasure of discovery. The eager interest in everything connected with the biography of the Brontes aroused by Mrs. Gaskell's Life has given to those faint pages an attraction beyond their own.[24]

During the same year The Advance of the English Novel made its first appearance. Its author, William Lyon Phelps, the American educator, literary critic, and Yale professor, wrote that "Anne now shines only by reflected light; few read Agnes Grey, and none would read it were she not the sister of Charlotte and Emily."[25]

That Anne had a mild humour, entirely denied to Charlotte and Emily, was the belief of Richard Brimley Johnson,[26] who in 1919 cited Anne's description of an "unchristian" rector:

> Mr. Hatfield would come sailing up the aisle, or rather sweeping along like a whirlwind, with his rich silk gown flying behind him and rustling against the

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[24]Adolphus Alfred Jack, "The Brontes," The Cambridge History of English Literature. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1916), XIII, 414.

[25]William Lyon Phelps, The Advance of the English Novel. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), p. 118.

[26]Richard Brimley Johnson, The Women Novelists. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 185.

> pew doors, mount the pulpit like a conqueror ascending his triumphal car; then, sinking on the velvet cushion in an attitude of studied grace, remain in silent prostration for a certain time; then mutter over a Collect, and gabble through the Lord's Prayer, rise, draw off one bright lavender glove, to give the congregation the benefit of his sparkling rings, lightly pass his fingers through his well-curled hair, flourish a cambric handkerchief, recite a very short passage, or, perhaps, a mere phrase of Scripture, as a headpiece to his discourse, and, finally, deliver a composition which, as a composition, might be considered good.[27]

The following year Oliver Elton, the English educator, literary historian and professor of English literature at the University in Liverpool, depicted the novel as drawing in faint but faithful lines the discomforts of a governess among callous people.[28]

In 1923 Marjory Bald[29] expressed a liking for the first chapter, in which Anne described the simple home-life and the simple farewell with plain quaintness. She felt that in it Agnes indicated clearly and lightly the general attitude of the bustling family toward herself. - - "It was time enough for me to sit bending over my work like a grave matron, when my favourite pussy was become a steady old cat."

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[27] Ibid., pp. 185-86.

[28] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature. (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), II, 296.

[29] Marjory Amelia Bald, Women-Writers of the Nineteenth Century. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923), p. 35.

The critic also enjoyed the little touch in the midst of the pathos of her farewell when Agnes "kissed the cat, to the great scandal of Sally, the maid."

> But Anne Brontë could not keep up to even this unpretentious level. After the first chapter of Agnes Grey it is hard to find anything with the slightest flavour of distinction.[30]

George Moore,[31] the Irish novelist who often liked to be paradoxical, discussed Agnes Grey in The Atlantic Monthly, April, 1923. He considered Agnes Grey the most perfect prose narrative in English literature and had nothing but praise for it:

> Agnes Grey is a prose narrative, simple and beautiful as a muslin dress. . . . the first sentences . . . convince us that we are with a quick, witty mind, capable of appreciating all she hears and sees; and when Agnes begins to tell us of her charges and their vulgar parents, we know that we are reading a masterpiece. Nothing short of genius could have set them before us so plainly and yet with restraint--even the incident of the little boy who tears a bird's nest out of some bushes, and fixes fish-hooks into the beaks of the young birds, so that he may drag them about the stable-yard. Agnes's reprimands, too, are low in tone, yet sufficient to bring her into conflict with the little boy's mother, who thinks that her son's amusement should not be interfered with.
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> . . . it is the one story in English literature in which style, characters, and subject are in perfect keeping. In writing it Anne's eyes were always upon

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[30] Loc. cit.

[31] George Moore, "Mr. Moore Talks to Mr. Gosse," The Atlantic Monthly, 131:455, April, 1923.

> the story itself, and not upon her readers; a thought does not seem to have come into her mind that a reader would like a little more drama, a little more comedy; that a picnic or a ball would provide entertainment. Whilst writing about Agnes Grey's first set of pupils, she had in mind Agnes's second set, and was careful that the first situation should lead up to the second.[32]

Moore especially liked the scene in which Agnes' pupil, Miss Murray, boasted of her success at her first ball: 'As for me, Miss Grey--I'm so sorry you didn't see me! I was charming--wasn't I, Matilda?' And the younger sister, who had not been to the ball, answered 'Middling.' "The word," wrote Moore, "lights up the narrative like a ray of light cast by Ruysdael into the middle of a landscape."[33]

The same critic also believed the language of the fields to be more beautiful than that of the town and the cottage to be better material for art than the drawing-room. "Anne," he wrote, "rises to greater heights in patter than Jane Austen; for Jane's patter is drawing-room patter, whilst Anne's patter is in Yorkshire jargon."[34]

He considered Charlotte Brontë in her novel Villette guilty of the most barefaced plagiarism. When Charlotte's novel began to droop and wither, he claimed that she borrowed

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[32] Loc. cit.

[33] Ibid., p. 456.

[34] Loc. cit.

from Anne's novel, a thing she could do without anybody protesting because none had read Agnes Grey.[35]

Two years later Lascelles Abercrombie,[36] the English poet, critic, and professor of English literature at the University of London, discerned in the novel not so much an inartistic as an anti-artistic spirit. This was not, he said, because Anne was a determined moralist, for so were Charlotte, Defoe, Dickens and Thackeray; but because an artist should enjoy being what he is. In his opinion the artist whose work is an obligation is inevitably a very bad artist, although no doubt a very good, even a very memorable person. In this category he placed Anne Brontë.

To J. C. Wright,[37] whose Brontë biography appeared in 1925, there seemed to be little originality about the portrayal of governess life which naturally inclined toward the seamy side.

Reviews of Agnes Grey from 1900 to 1925 were harsh for the most part. The story was found to be pallid, didactic, "anti-artistic", and possessed of little originality.

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[35]Ibid., p. 457.

[36]Lascelles Abercrombie, "The Brontës Today," Transactions and Other Publications of the Brontë Society. Shipley: Caxton Press, 1925), VI, Part 34, No. 4, 186.

[37]J. C. Wright, The Story of the Brontës. (London: Leonard Parsons, 1925), p. 118.

In some critiques more favorable comments were made. The story seemed well-told, interesting, and impressive. The simple home life and farewell were considered appealing; and the point of view from which the story was told, effective. In regard to style, characters, and subject, complete harmony was found. The characters appeared life-like; and the Yorkshire dialect, sufficient and beautiful. As a picture of the life of a governess in the forties, Anne's novel was thought to surpass the works of Charlotte and Emily; and in its humour, it exhibited a quality wholly lacking in their novels. The book was considered a faithful interpretation and valuable record not only of governess life, but also of nineteenth century life and manners in general.

Lastly, the novel was interpreted as the "pagan", not pious cry of Anne, whose "expectant womanhood was cheated."

THE SECOND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM

Twenty critiques were found for the period from 1926 to 1950, an increase of five over the preceding quarter of a century. The majority of them were favorable.

In 1926 Nora I. Sholto-Douglas[38] wrote that Anne's novel was a valuable piece of work, in which her own disposition was clearly portrayed in the character of Agnes, a sincere, serious Christian, who just avoided being a prig. The writer admired the character of Weston because he was manly and robust notwithstanding his piety.

The value of the novel according to this same critic was in the well-drawn characterization:

> There is no claim to originality of plot; the value of the work lies in the perfect delineation of character. Every one of the dramatis personae is a real, live human being, consistent, natural, and supremely well drawn. Each portrait stands out with vivid clearness, and perfect verisimilitude obtains throughout. The too frequent use of italics is a flaw characteristic of the period.[39]

Dr. Will Hale of Indiana University, like May Sinclair, saw Anne's desires reflected in "Agnes". He called Agnes Grey "the irrepressible cry of her woman's soul for love and home and children."[40]

He spoke of its realism and its didactic purpose:

> Agnes Grey is the barest sort of story, without color and without humor. Unlighted by the least play of fancy, it presents a bald, literal chronicle of

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[38]Nora I. Sholto-Douglas, Synopses of English Fiction. (London: George C. Harrap and Company Ltd., 1926), p. 340.

[39]Ibid., pp. 34-41.

[40]Will Taliaferro Hale, Anne Brontë: Her Life and Writings. (Indiana University Studies, Vol. 16, No. 83. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, March, 1929), p. 30.

> events as drab as life itself. It has no improbabilities, no flights of imagination, no romance. It is realism in the literal sense of the word, life as it actually is, without exaggeration and without adornment. It is just the sort of realism that William Dean Howells asserted that he wrote when he call Dickens' novels romances. . . . it seems to have been inspired by the same theory of the novel as Charlotte had in conceiving her first work, which was rejected by six publishers in succession because it lacked thrilling excitement and startling incident.
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> . . . it is a domestic novel of humanitarian purpose, and sets forth the ills and humiliations of a governess' life. . . . Agnes Grey almost literally describes Anne's own experiences at Mrs. Ingham's and the Robinsons', evidently with the purpose of informing the public as to the treatment accorded young women who had to make their living by going out to teach. Aside from this didactic purpose and the author's declared aim to instruct the reader, the book contains none of the usual paraphernalia of the novel of instruction: it never preaches, and proclaims no doctrines.[41]

Dr. Hale[42] declared that it is autobiographical in the main, that Agnes was Anne in every respect, and that through Agnes may be seen the seclusion in which Anne was reared, the way she was dominated by the older members of the family, her advent, young and inexperienced, into a harsh world, her grief at leaving home and her subsequent homesickness, the rudeness and vulgarity to which she was exposed, the hardness of her life as governess and her agony at being deprived of love. "No more pathetic document," he wrote, "can be found

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[41] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[42] Ibid., p. 31.

than this chronicle of the wild hunger of a blighted human heart robbed of its natural destiny."[43]

The same critic found no real plot in the novel and only slight characterization:

> Described in a sort of catalog method upon their introduction, the different characters make but a dim impression upon the mind and live only while one is reading the novel. It is impossible to visualize them. The dialog, also, adds nothing to the verisimilitude. Unnatural and stilted, it is as lifeless and colorless as the rest of the story. No children ever talked as the youngsters do in this book. The earmarks of the governess are over it all.[44]

Anne's mid-Victorian evangelical religious conceptions which permeated the narrative were mentioned by the writer. Throughout the story these Calvinistic conceptions dominated Agnes Grey's thinking and colored the whole attitude of her mind. For example, when she was enjoying the prospect of going to church to see her lover preach, her conscience reproached her for having a heart more bent upon the creature than the Creator. Later, when she thought of a future life without her lover and was naturally distressed at the idea, she reprimanded herself for being distressed. She felt that she should have made God's will the pleasure and business of her life. Then when she felt that she would rather die than live without her

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[43] Loc. cit.

[44] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

lover, she checked herself by devoting herself to her teaching, tasteless as it was, and by expecting her reward in the hereafter. "And when at last," wrote Dr. Hale, "she has got her lover, and certainly ought to be satisfied, she declares that her purpose is to 'keep in mind the glorious heaven beyond . . .'"[45]

Together with this mid-Victorian evangelicalism in Agnes Grey he spoke of the mid-century's fondness for tears. Tears flowing copiously from page to page upon the slightest provocation revealed the only luxury the poor governess had. Although abundant, they always seemed to be voluntary and strictly under her control. In one circumstance in which Anne thought she had heard her lover preach for the last time, she longed to return to her room to cry. But when he suddenly spoke to her, she said, "I was very much startled; and had I been hysterically inclined, I certainly should have committed myself in some way then. Thank God, I was not." Dr. Hale commented, "After all that he has been thru, the reader, too, says, 'Thank God,' from the bottom of his heart."[46]

After pointing out the above characteristics, the critic discussed the value of the book. He considered it

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[45]Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[46]Ibid., pp. 33-34.

of very little value except for the scholar studying the period or tracing the development of the mid-Victorian novel. However, for the scholar, he thought much was interesting and valuable:

> In the first place, as a type of the mid-Victorian novel written by a woman, it reveals certain distinctive qualities. It follows the trend of the age in its emphasis upon the emotions, its humanitarian purpose, and its interest in the lower classes. Based largely upon the quiet, prosaic experiences of a governess, it lacks excitement of any kind, and what interest it has lies in the revelations of the heroine's personality and her mild adventures of the heart. For herself she has revealed with a good deal of verisimilitude. Everywhere in the book her gentle, charming personality makes itself felt. Transcribing the minute details of a governess life, however, with literal exactitude and no imagination the narrative approximates reporting rather than an artistic presentation of life. And yet it does seem real. It has all the actuality of a transcript from Anne's own life. The most probable passages are those that the author drew from her own experience; the least probable are those she manufactured, such as the love scenes. But the whole story includes only the smallest segment of human affairs, shows no knowledge of the developments of the time in scientific achievement or appliances, gives no hint of the material progress of the outside world, and presents no philosophy of life.[47]

Dr. Hale named as the second value of the novel, the picture it has painted of the manners and morals in the mid-Victorian English village, the vivid insight it has furnished into the life of a governess at this time, and the true view it has given of a woman of the middle class living the inhibited life common to the female members of the mid-Victorian household.

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[47] Ibid., p. 34.

According to Dr. Hale, the light the novel has thrown upon Anne herself is its greatest value. Through the novel, he declared, much of Anne's inner self could be seen: her hatred of governess life, her love for children, her tender-heartedness, and her frustration:

> . . . so little had she seen of the actual world and so much had she lived her life within her own self, she seems like an unsophisticated child revealing things about herself she should not tell. What could be more charming and more childlike than Agnes' agreement with herself not to think so much about her lover?--"So said I in my heart; and from that hour I only permitted my thoughts to wander to Edward Weston--or at least to dwell upon him now and then--as a treat for rare occasions." What could be more touching than her confessions to the reader of her love for him?--"He had not breathed a word of love, or dropped one hint of tenderness or affection, and yet I had been supremely happy. To be near him, to hear him talk as he did talk; and to feel that he thought me worthy to be so spoken to--capable of understanding and duly appreciating such discourse--was enough." What could be more womanly and more mid-Victorian?[48]

The Irish writer, Rosamond Langbridge,[49] like Clement Shorter, believed that from Anne, one might gather better than from Charlotte, the routine of the Victorian governess' day. In 1929 she compared the results of Anne and Charlotte in their treatment of the governess theme:

> Charlotte dwells almost wholly on how the ogress looked to the country mouse which had crept into their cave; but Anne has sufficient self-possession to pause and realise how the mouse may have looked to the ogress.

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[48] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[49] Rosamond Langbridge, Charlotte Brontë: a psychological study. (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929), p. 46.

> Upon arrival at the mansion "I was somewhat dismayed at my appearance," she writes in Agnes Grey, "on looking in the glass; the cold wind had swelled and reddened my hands, uncurled and entangled my hair, and dyed my face of a pale purple; add to this my collar was horribly crumpled, my frock splashed with mud, my feet clad in stout new boots," in which she adds, "I proceeded to clomp downstairs."
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> One feels that is "echt" Brontë, for the poor Miss Brontës suffered terribly from cold hands and chilblains; and there follows a further autobiographical touch in the passage where Miss Grey describes her sufferings in the carriage, where in spite of the fact that this position made her "invariably sick," she was always thoughtfully placed with her back to the horses! Following on this martyrdom of "sickliness" came the "tormenting fear of its becoming worse," and "the headache and depression" which pursued them travelling either in carriages or trains.[50]

Contrary to the usual opinion, this critic expressed the idea that the governess must have been as great an ordeal to her employers as they were to her:

> In fairness one is obliged to admit that, if the Bloomfields were sad trials to the Brontës, the Miss Brontës, always "dyed of a pale purple" from the cold or suffering from exposure to the evening dew; or tortured with chilblains; or turning the other cheek to childish insult instead of slapping Master Tom's; trembling at the sight of visitors, or threatening to be sick; or shedding floods of tears from loneliness or scoldings, must have been, upon occasion, dreadful ordeals to the Bloomfields.[51]

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[50] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[51] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

This reviewer also suggested that "the sweet Mr. Weston of Agnes Grey is Anne's conception of her revered papa . . . ."[52]

In the same year, Kaye Aspinall Ramsden Sugden, barrister-at-law and former master at Rugby, found the novel to be "a gentle, even conventional story."[53]

Edward Frederic Benson[54] in 1932 affirmed that Agnes Grey abundantly testified to the colourlessness in Anne's character; while in 1937 Ernest Baker, English librarian and man of letters, declared it "a Jane Eyre in embryo, without the strange love-affair."[55]

The latter critic also mentioned the didactic tone of the book. Anne had been wounded by the parents, who treated the conscientious, hard-working teacher as a menial. Unlike Charlotte, who was fiercely resentful at such treatment, Anne bore it with resignation. Ingenuously Anne hoped that a plain story of what she had gone through would be a lesson

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[52]Ibid., p. 83.

[53]Kaye Aspinall Ramsden Sugden, A Short History of the Brontës. (London: Humphrey Milford, 1929), p. 55.

[54]Edward Frederic Benson, Charlotte Brontë. (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1932), p. 153.

[55]Ernest Alfred Baker, The History of the English Novel. (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, Ltd., 1937), VIII, p. 78.

to such parents; the story is practically Anne's own case.[56]

> Anne was as clear-sighted as her sister. All three saw through the placid, smug, prudish mentality of most middle-class people then, whose daughters they had to teach the elements of useful knowledge and deportment, and they did their duty by telling the candid truth, instead of subscribing to the amiable fiction current at the circulating libraries. . . . Anne abstained from satire, which may indeed be one of the useful arts when it helps to kill or cure a social nuisance, but is usually read by the wrong people, those who do not need it.[57]

The critic concluded that Anne's realism was as good as that of her sisters: "She wrote more in sorrow than in anger; but Agnes Grey, benevolently didactic in intention, is an honest bit of realism, and as good a document as the relevant portions of her sisters' books."[58]

The following year Edith Batho, principal of Royal Holloway College at the University of London, and Bonamy Dobrée, English literary scholar and editor, discovered in "the bitter record of a governess's life, . . . a certain strength and dignity."[59]

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[56]Loc. cit.

[57]Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[58]Loc. cit.

[59]Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée, The Victorians and After, 1830-1914. (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1938), p. 89.

The value of the story as a record of the early Victorian governess was asserted by The Honorable Lady Wilson in 1939:

> Anne's novel . . . is in great part a chronicle of these six years of teaching, and if we wish to arrive at the status occupied by the early Victorian governess it is a human document written for our learning.[60]

George Sampson,[61] the English educationist and man of letters, whose The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature appeared in 1941, judged the novel as a moving personal record and found Anne's qualities underrated because she was less vehement than her sisters.

The following year the inclusion of a selection from Agnes Grey in Strong's[62] English Domestic Life During the Last 200 Years: An Anthology Selected From the Novelists, showed the compiler's estimate of the book as a document of governess life.

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[60]The Honorable Lady Wilson, "'The Brontës' as Governesses," Brontë Society Publications: Transactions. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1939), IX, Part 49, No. 4, 228.

[61]George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941),

[62]Leonard Alfred Strong, English Domestic Life During the Last 200 Years: An Anthology Selected from the Novelists. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1942), pp. 150-54.

Edward Wagenknecht, American author and professor of English at Boston University, found in the story "a Jane Eyre with all the fire left out."[63] Other Brontë characteristics were mentioned:

> It has the familiar Brontë scorn of insincerity, the Brontë excoriation of selfish, vain, self-centered women, the Brontë preoccupation with love. But this time the lover is no Rochester. He is a good, faithful clergyman, just the kind of man who might have appealed to the youngest and gentlest and prettiest of the Brontës.[64]

To Laura Hinkley[65] in 1945 Agnes Grey was a little gray novel. She considered the novel solidly written and believed that Anne's version of the tender-hearted governess crushing a nest of young birds with a stone to prevent a boy from torturing them to death was told more poignantly than Charlotte's version in Shirley.[66]

The same writer found the book deservedly immortal:

> This innocent tale still has readers. In every public library which contains . . . a set of the Bronte novels, Agnes Grey will be found in as worn a binding as any of them except Jane Eyre. It deserves its modest

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[63]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel: From Elizabeth to George VI. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p. 315.

[64]Loc. cit.

[65]Laura L. Hinkley, Charlotte and Emily. (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1945), p. 50.

[66]Ibid., pp. 118-20.

> immortality. Anne had a decided gift for quiet, "domestic" narrative. Had she lived and continued to write, her novels, though never of first or second rank, might well have attained a wider contemporary popularity than those of either sister, always excepting Jane Eyre.[67]

The reviewer also mentioned that Agnes Grey has been called a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which Anne was Agnes and Mr. Weightman, the curate Agnes married. The critic thought it unlikely that Weightman was the model for the hero, Edward Weston, since Weightman's flirtations had been a family joke for two years. Instead it seemed to her that Weston distinctly resembled Arthur Bell Nichols, Charlotte's husband, and that Anne was not in love with him.[68]

"Agnes Grey," wrote Naomi Lewis in The New Statesman and Nation on August 17, 1946, "is the perfect record of the daily life of a governess, and of the curious position that she held in the Victorian economy." The critic commented upon Anne's reaction to the life of a governess, who had no share in the social world of her employers nor in the rough camaraderie of the servants, and whose position resembled that of the chaplain in the eighteenth century country house:

> Undemonstrative as she was Anne Brontë shows that she was not unaffected by the sordid and humiliating details of her work, and she more than once reveals moments of

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[67] Ibid., pp. 120-21.

[68] Ibid., pp. 108-09.

> Brontë violence, brought out in her by such things as cruelty.[69]

The following year Yorkshire authoress Phyllis Bentley[70] wrote that Anne had depicted Agnes' sufferings with such appalling vividness that her picture of the unhappy girl was unforgettable.

According to Miss Bentley, Mr. Weston was a serious version of Mr. Weightman, and the Murrays of Horton Lodge were drawn largely from the Robinsons who had employed both Anne and her brother, Branwell. Miss Bentley noted also an unintentional pathos in the fine description of Scarborough sands in the early morning light because no lover came to Anne herself there, only death.[71]

The same critic discussed the structure and the theme of the story:

> The structure of Agnes Grey is very simple; it is a mere relation of a series of small domestic incidents . . . . Its theme is the struggle of spiritual integrity to hold its own in a difficult world. There are many pages when, with its curate hero and its patient persecuted heroine, its district visiting and shocked comments on flirtation, its pretty pictures of cat and dog and pigeon, the novel seems naive and weak, fit only for a Sunday School prize for a decidedly junior class.[72]

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[69]Naomi Lewis, "Books in General," The New Statesman and Nation, 32:119, August 17, 1946.

[70]Phyllis Bentley, The Brontës. (London: Home & Van Thal Ltd., 1947), p. 104.

[71]Ibid., p. 105.

[72]Loc. cit.

But the authoress found more in Anne's novel than that:

> The keen observation, the frank language, the unsparing honesty of the account of the governess's struggles with her pupils, struggles so unflattering to herself, make the book far too strong meat for such missish palates. Anne's firm avoidance of the sentimental appears with admirably vivifying effect in her descriptions of her characters. Says Agnes of her own appearance: "I could discover no beauty in those marked features, that pale hollow cheek, and ordinary brown hair; there might be intellect in the forehead, there might be expression in the dark grey eyes, but what of that?" Few are the heroines of fiction equipped with "ordinary" hair and an intellectual forehead; Agnes becomes a real human being for us at once. Mr. Weston's appearance has a similar reality because it is described in terms of the same lifelike moderation, and Sir Thomas Ashby is a real villain, not the handsome sinister type dear to the immature mind, for his face is pale and blotchy, with a disagreeable redness about the eyelids. The crowning example of this convinced and deliberate realism occurs in the replies given by Agnes to Rosalie's questions about her sister's fiance.
>
> "'Is he rich?'
>
> 'No; only comfortable.'
>
> 'Is he handsome?'
>
> 'No; only decent.'
>
> 'Young?'
>
> 'No; only middling.'"
>
> The quiet little governess will never allow herself to romanticise the facts, even in the excitement of a beloved sister's betrothal.[73]

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[73] Ibid., p. 106.

In "A Novelist Looks at the Bronte Novels" written in 1948 Miss Bentley re-emphasized the realism in Agnes Grey:

> . . . what she has seen she portrays with an altogether admirable realism. The behavior of animals and children (good or bad) is drawn in delicately observed detail. Her night journeys, her moorland landscapes, her governess's struggles with tough meat and even tougher children . . . are done to the life, from a most modern, de-bunking attitude. . . .
>
> The small incident, quietly observed from the governess's corner and presented with a relentless, almost sardonic, realism, is Anne's particular strength.[74]

A broadcast by Dr. Phyllis Bentley was included on the program in honor of Anne on May 28, 1949, the centenary of her death. On this occasion Dr. Bentley commented upon George Moore's statement that Agnes Grey was as simple and beautiful as a muslin dress:

> Certainly it has the fine, delicate, even texture, the simple clarity, the completeness, and also the lack of bold colour which such a description implies. But it has something more; shall we say an ironic scent, one of those subtle, pungent, modern perfumes? Or is it just the tang of the heather?[75]

In the same year Ernest Raymond,[76] the prolific English novelist who won the 1936 gold medal of the Book Guild

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[74]Phyllis Bentley, "A Novelist Looks at the Bronte Novels," Transactions: Bronte Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1948), XI, Part 58, No. 3, 150.

[75]"The Youngest Bronte: A Third Programme Appreciation," Transactions: Bronte Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, pp. 240-41.

[76]Ernest Raymond, "Exiled and Harassed Anne," Transactions, Bronte Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, 228.

for his novel, We, the Accused, declared that Anne's novel would have been much greater if her puritan conscience had not reined, whipped, and disciplined her:

> What might she not have written, with her really remarkable powers if she had lived longer and learned in the end to take its nagging and pulling bit between her teeth? As it was, it drove her, in her first novel, into painting her good characters too white and her bad characters too black, and thus drained the natural life-blood from "Agnes Grey" leaving it, not dead, but anaemic and pale.[77]

> Any my submission is that, but for her harassing conscience, she would have been an immeasurably greater novelist than she was. She wrote a beautiful prose, purer than Charlotte's because never empurpled or rhetorical; she had a narrative gift equal to Charlotte's; she had a fine dry humour when her conscience was looking away and let her use it; she could have created many rich, fruity characters if she'd had more of such break-away moments--consider Miss Matilda in "Agnes Grey" who would use the word damn and even refer to her horse as a mare; like Charlotte and Emily, she is capable, when unconscious of the Vicarage pew around her, of scenes with a fine harsh tang--. . . .[78]

The most recent Brontë biography, The Four Brontës by Lawrence and E. M. Hanson, was first published in 1949 and revised in 1950. In the 1950 edition they discuss the virtues and defects of Agnes Grey:

> . . . Anne set out simply and with some charm the life of a governess. Much of the story was autobiographical. There was no trace in Anne's governess of the fiery Jane Eyre. She loved, indeed; but her mild and steadfast regard for the local curate certainly would never have exceeded the bounds of propriety. The book

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[77]Loc. cit.

[78]Ibid., pp. 227-28.

> and its heroine display a mild but unmistakable sense of humour, which is sought in vain in Jane Eyre, except in some passages . . . . Anne's descriptive powers were excellent, and her subsidiary characters have life if they usually lack interest. Her failing was that she had not the necessary imagination to translate life into art. Like Charlotte in The Professor, Anne made a literal transcription of emotional and factual experience.[79]

From 1926 to 1950 Agnes Grey received preponderantly favorable reviews. It was considered vivid, moving, strong, dignified, unforgettable, and deserving of its immortality. It was found to be solidly written and unsparingly honest in its account of the governess' struggles with her pupils. Anne's narrative talent appeared equal to Charlotte's; and her prose, purer than Charlotte's. Her sense of humor, a trait lacking for the most part in Charlotte's works, was appreciated. The realism of the novel was judged admirable. Anne, unlike Charlotte, was able to imagine how the governess looked to her employers. Her characters became real human beings. The greatest value of the book to the scholar was thought to be its picture of Anne herself. It was also considered valuable as a type of mid-Victorian novel written by a woman, as a picture of the manners and morals of the age, and as a record of the life of a governess at that time.

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[79]Lawrence and E. M. Hanson, The Four Brontës. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 231.

Adverse critics found the story colourless with no real plot and only little characterization. The dialogue was considered stiff and unnatural; and the tears flowing at will, somewhat irritating. The repeated use of italics was, like the fondness for tears, a flaw characteristic of the age. Agnes Grey seemed more like a report than fiction. Anne's strict conscience seemed to hold her back and cause her to make her good characters too good and her bad ones too bad.

In this period Mr. Brontë, Anne's father, was proposed as the original of Mr. Weston. Another critic suggested Arthur Bell Nichols, Charlotte's husband, as the prototype of Mr. Weston; while still another thought Mr. Weston to be a serious Mr. Weightman. The Murrays were thought to have their source in the Robinsons, by whom Anne and Branwell had been employed.

Unlike The Tenant of Wildfell Hall which aroused comment because of the author's evident lack of religious orthodoxy, Agnes Grey was found to be dominated by orthodox Calvinistic beliefs.

Some critics were convinced that Agnes Grey originated as a wish-fulfillment fantasy. They believed that Anne's longing for a husband and children found expression

in this novel. Some of Anne's poetry seems to support this theory:

> While on my lonely couch I lie,
> I seldom feel myself alone,
> For fancy fills my dreaming eye
> With scenes and pleasures of its own.
>
> That I may cherish at my breast
> An infant's form beloved and fair;
> May smile and soothe it into rest,
> With all a mother's fondest care.
>
> How sweet to feel its helpless form
> Depending thus on me alone;
> And while I hold it safe and warm,
> What bliss to think it is my own!
>
> And glances then may meet my eyes
> That daylight never showed to me;
> What raptures in my bosom rise
> Those earnest looks of love to see!
>
> To feel my hand so kindly prest,
> To know myself beloved at last;
> To think my heart has found a rest,
> My life of solitude is past![80]

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[80] Cited by Hanson, op. cit., p. 173.

CHAPTER II

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL

In the spring of 1848, Anne finished The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and sent it to Newby, by whom it was published in three volumes in June, 1848. Newby offered it to an American publisher with the statement that it was the work of the author of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights and was superior to each. Since Smith and Elder had promised the American publisher Currer Bell's second work, they asked an explanation from Currer Bell. Thus The Tenant of Wildfell Hall caused Charlotte and Anne's famous trip to London to explain that they were two authors instead of one. For the first time their publishers, under the pledge of secrecy, learned the identity of Currer and Acton Bell.

Although misconstrued and abused, the book seems to have had more success than anything else written by the sisters before 1848 with the exception of Jane Eyre; it went into a second edition in the same year that it was published.

The story of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is that of the unhappy married life of Mrs. Helen Huntingdon, her escape from the drunken and profligate husband to Wildfell Hall, her acquaintance with Gilbert Markham, their love

for each other, her return to her husband when he was ill, her husband's death, and finally her marriage to Gilbert Markham.

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM (1848-1857)

Among the early critics of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall were Anne's sister Charlotte; Edwin Percy Whipple, the American critic and essayist; and Mrs. Margaret Jane Sweat. Charlotte did not like The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, nor did Mr. Whipple; but Mrs. Sweat thought it a more important novel than Agnes Grey.

On July 31, 1848, Charlotte[1] wrote to W. S. Williams expressing her conviction that although the book had faults of execution and art, it had none in intention or feeling. In her opinion the subject was unfortunately chosen and one that Anne was not qualified to handle vigorously and truthfully. She liked Agnes Grey better than The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and thought "the simple and natural," the "quiet description and simple pathos" were Anne's metier.

In another letter written to Mr. Williams on August 14, 1848, Charlotte could not agree that there was a resemblance

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[1]Charlotte Brontë, "Letter 301," cited by Clement Shorter, The Brontës: Life and Letters. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), I, p. 442.

between Anne's dissolute Huntingdon and her own Rochester of Jane Eyre:

> You say Mr. Huntingdon reminds you of Mr. Rochester. Does he? Yet there is no likeness between the two; the foundation of each character is entirely different. Huntingdon is a specimen of the naturally selfish, sensual, superficial man, whose one merit of a joyous temperament only avails him while he is young and healthy, whose best days are his earliest, who never profits by experience, who is sure to grow worse the older he grows. Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, misguided; errs, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live, but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it. He is taught the severe lessons of experience and has sense to learn wisdom from them.[2]

Charlotte's dislike of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was also revealed in a letter written to Mary Taylor on September 4, 1848. "Acton Bell," wrote Charlotte, "has published another book . . . but I do not like it quite so well as Agnes Grey--the subject not being such as the author had pleasure in handling . . . ."[3]

Edwin Percy Whipple in The North American Review of October, 1848, showed a very hostile attitude toward the Bells, especially Acton. He did not know that the Bells were women.

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[2]Ibid., "Letter 302," p. 446.

[3]Ibid., "Letter 297," p. 434.

> The truth is, that the whole firm of Bell & Co. seem to have a sense of the depravity of human nature peculiarly their own. It is the yahoo, not the demon, that they select for representation; their Pandemonium is of mud rather than fire.
>
> This is especially the case with Acton Bell, the author of Wuthering Heights, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, and, if we mistake not, of certain offensive but powerful portions of Jane Eyre. Acton, when left altogether to his own imagination, seems to take a morose satisfaction in developing a full and complete science of human brutality. . . .[4]

The same critic compared The Tenant of Wildfell Hall with Wuthering Heights and discussed the characters in the former novel:

> The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is altogether a less unpleasing story than its immediate predecessor, though it resembles it in the excessive clumsiness with which the plot is arranged, and the prominence given to the brutal element of human nature. The work seems a convincing proof, that there is nothing kindly or genial in the author's powerful mind, and that, if he continues to write novels, he will introduce into the land of romance a larger number of hateful men and women than any other writer of the day. Gilbert, the hero, seems to be a favorite with the author, and to be intended as a specimen of manly character; but he would serve as the ruffian of any other novelist. His nature is fierce, proud, moody, jealous, revengeful, and sometimes brutal. We can see nothing good in him except a certain rude honesty; and that quality is seen chiefly in his bursts of hatred and his insults to women. Helen, the heroine, is doubtless a strong-minded woman, and passes bravely through a great deal of suffering; but if there be any lovable or feminine virtues in her composition, the author has managed to conceal them. . . . All the characters are drawn with great power and precision of outline, and the scenes are as vivid as life itself.5

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[4]Edwin Percy Whipple, "Novels of the Season," The North American Review, 67:357-58, October, 1848.

[5]Ibid., pp. 359-60.

The critic concluded with a scathing attack upon the author and subject matter of the novel:

> Everywhere is seen the tendency of the author to degrade passion into appetite, and to give prominence to the selfish and malignant elements of human nature; but while he succeeds in making profligacy disgusting, he fails in making virtue pleasing. His depravity is total depravity, and his hard and impudent debauchees seem to belong to that class of reprobates whom Dr. South considers "as not so much born as damned into the world." The reader of Acton Bell gains no enlarged view of mankind, giving a healthy action to his sympathies, but is confined to a narrow space of life, and held down, as it were, by main force, to witness the wolfish side of his nature literally and logically set forth. But the criminal courts are not the places in which to take a comprehensive view of humanity, and the novelist who confines his observation to them is not likely to produce any lasting impression, except of horror and disgust.[6]

Charlotte's letter written to Mr. Williams on November 22, 1848, describes Anne and Emily's reaction to the above criticism. Emily, who was ill, had appeared easier on that day, and Charlotte, thinking the review would amuse her, read it aloud to her and Anne. As she sat between them, she studied the two "ferocious" authors:

> Ellis, the "man of uncommon talents, but dogged, brutal and morose", sat leaning back in his easy chair, drawing his impeded breath as best he could, and looking, alas! piteously pale and wasted; it is not his wont to laugh, but he smiled half-amused and half in scorn as he listened. Acton was sewing, no emotion ever stirs him to loquacity, so he only smiled too, dropping at the same time a single word of calm amazement to hear his character so darkly portrayed.[7]

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[6] Ibid., p. 360.

[7] Charlotte Brontë, "Letter of November 22, 1848 to Mr. Williams," cited by K. A. R. Sugden, A Short History of the Brontës. (London: Hymphrey Milford, 1929), p. 67.

Charlotte did not change her opinion of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, and in her letter of September 5, 1850, to Mr. Williams she remarked, "Wildfell Hall it hardly appears to me desirable to preserve. The choice of subject in that work is a mistake: it was too little consonant with the character, tastes, and ideas of the gentle, retiring, inexperienced writer."[8]

On September 19, 1850, Charlotte wrote a biographical notice for Wuthering Heights in which she criticized and explained Anne's subject matter in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. This passage has often been quoted as evidence that Branwell Bronte, Anne's brother, was the original of Arthur Huntingdon:

> . . . The choice of subject was an entire mistake. Nothing less congruous with the writer's nature could be conceived. The motives which dictated this choice were pure, but, I think, slightly morbid. She had, in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate, near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations), as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest: she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. . . .[9]

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[8]Charlotte Bronte, "Letter 467," Shorter, op. cit., p. 169.

[9]Currer Bell, "Biographical Notice," Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte. (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, n.d.), p. ix.

Mrs. Margaret Jane Sweat in The North American Review of October, 1857, considered Anne, the younger and more gentle sister, of a different mold; yet in some passages of her second novel she sensed that she was gentle chiefly in contrast with her Spartan sister, and that the savage elements about her found an occasional echo from within. She felt that Anne's reputation rested upon this last novel, which was almost as inexplicable at a first glance as Wuthering Heights.[10]

The didactic tone of the novel was also mentioned in the article:

> It must be owned that she did not "varnish" the horrors which she painted, and which her first readers did not suspect of causing the artist so much suffering. We can now trace the quiverings of a sister's heart through the hateful details of a vicious manhood; and if the book fails somewhat in its attempt to become a warning, it may at least claim the merit of a well-meant effort.[11]

More contemporary criticism was found for The Tenant of Wildfell Hall than for Agnes Grey. This greater interest in Anne's last novel was due probably to its subject matter, which exposed both the novel and its author to abuse. Critics of this period found the plot clumsy and too much

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[10]Mrs. Margaret Jane Sweat, "Charlotte Bronte and the Bronte Novels," The North American Review, 85:328, October, 1857.

[11]Ibid., pp. 328-29.

attention given to the bad side of human nature. Gilbert was considered too rough to be a hero; while Helen, the heroine, seemed to have no lovable or feminine traits. The effect of the novel was said to be that of disgust and horror, and yet Anne was accused of failing to make virtue pleasing.

Buried in this hostile criticism were a few favorable comments. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was called more pleasing than Wuthering Heights. All of the characters were found to be precisely and powerfully drawn; and the scenes, vivid and life-like.

LATTER NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM (1873-1897)

For the years between 1857 and 1873 no criticisms were found, and only four were found for the succeeding twenty-six years. Two mixed praise and censure, while the other two were wholly unfavorable.

George Barnett Smith[12] wrote in The Cornhill Magazine of July, 1873, that it was curious how gentle Anne happened to write such a story, which in some parts was "more offensive and repulsive than the great piece de resistance" of Emily. Although he thought the drunken revels of Mr.

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[12]George Barnett Smith, "The Brontes," The Cornhill Magazine, 28:68, July, 1873.

Huntingdon and his friends were related vividly, he believed that they must be disgusting to the reader. He believed that part of the story was suggested by Branwell's wrongdoing and drunkenness and that Anne wrote it to get relief for herself and perhaps to do good.

In conclusion Mr. Smith described the effect of the novel:

> . . . certainly all who read the story cannot but be affected by that wretched portion of it devoted to the delineation of a drunkard. It is the strongest, the most striking part of the volume . . . . The love of Gilbert Markham for the attractive and clever widow is a delightful episode, and excellently told, and the closing chapters go very far to redeem the unpleasantness we were compelled to encounter in the body of the work. As with Emily, Anne Bronte's strong point as a novelist was in the delineation of one grand master passion from the moment when it entered into the soul to the time when it assumed complete and undisputed possession of it. We see this tyranny of passion in Heathcliff; we behold the tyranny again in another direction in Mr. Huntingdon. In both cases, however, it is finally left with as repulsive an appearance as the graphic pencils of the artists were able to command. No one can affirm that vice is ever winked at: it is, on the contrary, drawn without cloak or veil, in order that its devotees may be ashamed, or that those who are in danger of becoming its victims may be arrested and appalled. Such, we take it, is the great lesson of "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," and readers, even without sympathy for the author, would be unjust to affirm that the lesson is not taught with sufficient distinctiveness and force. . . .[13]

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[13]Ibid., pp. 68-69.

Thirteen years later Algernon Charles Swinburne,[14] the English poet and essayist, declared that The Tenant of Wildfell Hall deserved a little more notice and recognition than it had ever received and described it thus:

> It is ludicrously weak, palpably unreal, and apparently imitative, whenever it reminds the reader that it was written by a sister of Charlotte and Emily Bronte; but as a study of utterly flaccid and invertebrate immorality it bears signs of a more faithful transcription from life than anything in Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights.[15]

In 1896 Clement King Shorter[16] said that he would have pronounced it incredible that The Tenant of Wildfell Hall had gone into a second edition in 1848 if he had not possessed a copy of the later issue.

The following year Hugh Walker[17] called the novel an unsuccessful attempt to depict a profligate.

In this period Anne's second novel was considered more real as a study of immorality than anything in Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights. The story of the drunkard was thought to be the most powerful part of the novel and vividly related.

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[14]Algernon Charles Swinburne, Miscellanies. (London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1886), p. 264.

[15]Loc. cit.

[16]Clement King Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), p. 184.

[17]Hugh Walker, The Age of Tennyson. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897), p. 102.

The love story of Helen and Gilbert seemed pleasant and excellently told. Anne, it was said, had taught her lesson forcefully in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.

As in the preceding period this novel was compared with Wuthering Heights and found to be more repulsive in parts. The scenes of drunkenness were offensive. The story seemed unreal, and the attempt to portray a rake was considered unsuccessful.

THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM

During the twentieth century reviews of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall like those of Agnes Grey increased in number. Eleven were discovered for the period from 1900 to 1925, and most were a combination of favorable and unfavorable comments. Fifteen notices were found for Agnes Grey in the same period.

In 1900 Mrs. Humphry Ward[18] noticed the "determined didactic tone, narrowness of view, and inflation of expression" in the book. Yet she found in it "a considerable narrative ability" and "a sheer moral energy."

Mrs. Ward evaluated some of the scenes in the novel and discussed the source of much of Anne's material:

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[18]Mrs. Humphry Ward, "Introduction," The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1900), p. xiv-xv.

> The scenes of Huntingdon's wickedness are less interesting but less improbable than the country-house scenes of 'Jane Eyre'; the story of his death has many true and touching passages; the last love-scene is well, even in parts admirably written, But the book's truth, so far as it is true, is scarcely the truth of imagination; it is rather the truth of a tract or a report. There can be little doubt that many of the pages are close transcripts from Branwell's conduct and language,--so far as Anne's slighter personality enabled her to render her brother's temperament, which was more akin to Emily's than to her own.[19]

On May 30, 1903, Walter Frewen Lord, in The Living Age, spoke of the confusion of ideas in the novel:

> The Tenant of Wildfell Hall . . . is a much neglected book. It suffers from the slight drawback of being a story within a story, which always fatigues the attention; otherwise the construction is good. The famous incident of the brother who is mistaken for the lover was probably more or less novel sixty years ago; but the consequences of the mistake lead up to scenes which disclose a very curious confusion of ideas. The hero of the book is supposed to show no more than manly displeasure when he strikes the brother with a loaded crop and nearly murders him. The unhappy victim is, of course, extremely ill. The murderer "left him to live or die as he could," overwhelming him with foul abuse. But all this does not appear to have been a bar to quite a cheery friendship when the little mistake was cleared up. This is perhaps creditable to the temper of both parties, who conduct themselves with manly and criminal violence as gentlemen ought to do.[20]

Mr. Lord found much in the book that was absorbing in its interest, although he noticed here and there the first

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[19]Ibid., p. 15.

[20]Walter Frewen Lord, "The Bronte Novels," The Living Age, 237:525, May 30, 1903.

appearance of catchwords that may have been seriously meant at the time, but that had not always been useful.[21]

His interpretation of Anne's heroine is unique:

> The heroine is one of those blameless people who have served as a model for so many imitators. Blameless herself, she is in a perpetual attitude of reminding all around her of their duty, while weeping hot tears over her curly-headed little boy. Of course she despises clothes, and of course her husband is everything that he ought not to be; although if one comes to think of it, it could not have been very agreeable to the best of husbands to find the young lady keeping a diary of his married life in which all his peccadilloes were set forth in excellent style and with much verve. Of course she runs away, and the husband dies repentant but despairing, while she comforts his last moments.[22]

Mr. Lord quoted and commented upon the scene in which Mrs. Huntingdon complained of being displayed to her husband's acquaintances in London and regretted his desire that she wear jewels and beautiful dresses when she preferred a plain, dark, and sober style of dress:

> The obvious comment that occurs to one is this--that perhaps if the young lady had not been so exacting about trifles, and so unreasonably reluctant to accept the small things of life as they came, and so determined to see nothing in life except sitting about in the country doing nothing and keeping a diary of her husband's shortcomings, perhaps her husband would not have taken to drink. We are to remember that the young lady came of considerable family, was an heiress herself, and now married to a young man with a large establishment and the usual prosperous and dignified surroundings of a

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[21] Ibid., p. 526.

[22] Loc. cit.

> country gentleman in the great days of English agriculture. It is therefore only reasonable that her husband should have liked her to wear the family jewels; and a "plain, dark, and sober style of dress," which would be the very thing for housekeeping in the morning in the country, is not the right thing for the opera. In short, the young lady did not know how to dress and would not be taught.[23]

Concerning the scene in which Mr. Huntingdon began to read from his wife's diary while she attempted to recover it, Mr. Lord wrote: "This is meant to be tragedy, but there has been no more screaming farce in real life since the matrimonial difficulties of Count and Countess Rumford." In conclusion the critic stated: "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is undoubtedly a very interesting story, but the idealization of these unrestrained and dubious manners is unfortunate in itself, and has had an unfortunate effect upon the English mind."[24]

Clara Whitmore,[25] whose Woman's Work in English Fiction was first published in 1909, cited Anne's experience at Thorp Green as her incentive for writing this novel. Anne had been governess there, where Branwell was tutor, and where he formed an attachment for the wife of his employer, an attachment which with opium and liquor deranged his mind.

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[23] Ibid., p. 527.

[24] Loc. cit.

[25] Clara H. Whitmore, Woman's Work in English Fiction. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), pp. 259-60.

At that time Anne had written in her diary that she had had some very unpleasant and undreamt of experience of human nature.

The critic found the story realistic and quite different from the novel of a century before:

> The gradual change in Mr. Huntingdon from the happy confident lover to the ruined debauchee is well traced; the story of his infatuation for the wife of his friend, so reckless that he attempted no concealment, is realistic in the extreme. But what a change in the novel! A hundred years before, Huntingdon would have made a fine hero of romance, but here he is disgraced to the position of chief villain, and the reader feels for him only pity and loathing. Probably a man's pen would have touched his errors more lightly, but Anne Brontë painted him as he appeared to her. . . .[26]

The book was considered promising by the critic who explained her conviction thus:

> Notwithstanding its defects--and it is full of them judged from the stand-point of art--Wildfell Hall is a book of promise. In the descriptions of the Hall, the mystery that surrounds its mistress, the rumours of her unknown lover, the heathclad hills and the desolate fields, there are romantic elements that remind one of Wuthering Heights. The book is more faulty than Agnes Grey, but the writer had a deeper vision of life with its weaknesses and its depths of human passion. If years had mellowed that "undreamt-of experience" of Thorp Green, Anne Bronte with her truthful observation and sympathetic insight into character might have written a classic. The material out of which Wildfell Hall was wrought, under a more mature mind, with a better grasp of the whole and a better regard for proportion, would have made a novel worthy of a place beside Jane Eyre.[27]

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[26] Loc. cit.

[27] Ibid., p. 261.

Three years later May Sinclair in The Three Brontës stressed Anne's audacity in handling moral situations:

> There was, in this smallest and least considerable of the Brontës, an immense, a terrifying audacity. Charlotte was bold, and Emily was bolder; but this audacity of Anne's was greater than Charlotte's boldness or than Emily's, because it was willed, it was deliberate, open-eyed; it had none of the superb unconsciousness of genius. Anne took her courage in both hands when she sat down to write The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. There are scenes, there are situations, in Anne's amazing novel, which for sheer audacity stand alone in mid-Victorian literature, and which would hold their own in the literature of revolt that followed. It cannot be said that these scenes and situations are tackled with a masterhand. But there is a certain grasp in Anne's treatment, and an astonishing lucidity. Her knowledge of the seamy side of life was not exhaustive. But her diagnosis of certain states, her realisation of certain motives, suggests Balzac rather than any of the Brontës. Thackeray, with the fear of Mrs. Grundy before his eyes, would have shrunk from recording Mrs. Huntingdon's ultimatum to her husband. The slamming of that bedroom door fairly resounds through the long emptiness of Anne's novel. But that door is the crux of the situation, and if Anne was not a genius she was too much of an artist to sacrifice her crux.[28]

May Sinclair also mentioned that Anne was not only revolutionary in her treatment of moral situations but was also an insurgent in religious thought. In mid-Victorian times and evangelical circles, not to believe in eternal punishment was to be almost an atheist. In the late seventies when Dean Farrar published his Eternal Hope, it

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[28]May Sinclair, The Three Brontës. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), p. 48.

fell like a bomb. But long before his book Anne had thrown her bomb. "There are two pages in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," wrote the biographer, "that anticipate and sum up his now innocent arguments. Anne fairly let herself go here."[29]

"The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," wrote Mrs. Ellis Chadwick in 1914, "was probably the first temperance novel, and it was written with a purpose."[30] Mrs. Chadwick believed that it would not have been accepted so readily by the publisher if Jane Eyre had not made the name of Bronte famous.[31] It was a pity, she thought, that whenever a bad character appeared in a Bronte novel, poor Branwell should get the credit of being the original. She was certain that Charlotte's allusion to the characters in the novel had been misunderstood, that Anne would never have betrayed her only brother by portraying him as a drunken profligate.[32]

Adolphus Alfred Jack in 1916 spoke of the appeal of the novel and its one drawback:

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[29]Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[30]Mrs. Ellis H. Chadwick, In the Footsteps of the Brontës. (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1914), p. 355.

[31]Ibid., p. 177.

[32]Ibid., p. 356.

> The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is as interesting a novel as was ever written without any element of greatness. It is pleasant to read of all sorts of intrigue and bad doings just as if they were a fairy tale and altogether outside the atmosphere of badness. There is one drawback--the tale is told by a man meant by the authoress to be quite 'nice,' but, in fact, less likeable than Crimsworth in The Professor. The Brontes had observed men not unclosely; but they were not able to see things through the eyes of men.[33]

In 1919 Richard Brimley Johnson in The Women Novelists found the novel "a morbid picture of 'talent misused and faculties abused'."[34]

The gleams of quiet humor in the first chapter of the novel appealed to Marjory Bald, who in 1923 cited the picture of Gilbert Markham watching Mrs. Graham at church. Ashamed of his own conspicuous curiosity Gilbert had said, "I glanced round the church to see if anyone had been observing me; but no--all, who were not attending to their prayerbooks, were attending to the strange lady." Miss Bald considered the mere story worthless, but found a freshness of spirit which revived the scenes set in the open air:

> In reading of the solitary hall, we always seem to feel the companionship of brown hills sloping up before us; sometimes we feel the wind in our faces. We feel it when we stand in the dishevelled garden, with the

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[33]Adolphus Alfred Jack, "The Brontës," The Cambridge History of English Literature. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1916), XIII, 414.

[34]Richard Brimley Johnson, The Women Novelists. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 184.

"goblinish appearance" of its clipped trees grown out of shape; we feel it even more keenly on the evening when Gilbert comes up the hill, and sees the sun crimsoning the windows, while his own heart is shadowed by disillusion.[35]

To the critic the Huntingdon episodes were futile because they were not described with the sharpness which alone might have made such squalor tolerable. Only on the bleak lonely hillside, away from Huntingdon and his sordid story, did she feel any artistic exhilaration. It was in the atmosphere of that wild pure country that Anne, according to Marjory Bald, wrote her finest passage--a paragraph beautiful in imagery, music and poetry of conception.[36]

"I have a confused remembrance (says Gilbert) of . . . long hours spent in bitter tears and lamentations and melancholy musing in the long valley, with the west wind rushing through the over-shadowing trees, and the brook babbling and gurgling along its stony bed--my eyes for the most part, vacantly fixed on the deep, checkered shades restlessly playing over the bright sunny grass at my feet, where now and then a withered leaf or two would come dancing to share the revelry, but my heart was away up the hill in that dark room where she was weeping desolate and alone--she whom I was not to comfort, not to see again, till years of suffering had overcome us both, and torn our spirits from their perishing abodes of clay."

The freshness of Nature adds poignancy and edge to the intensity of human sorrow. As a rule Charlotte and Emily found in Nature not this contrast of mood, but an affinity and sympathy with their own emotions. Nevertheless in this passage Anne shows the family resemblance

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[35]Marjory Amelia Bald, Women-Writers of the Nineteenth Century. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923), pp. 35-36.

[36]Ibid., p. 36.

> more strongly than in any other place. Particularly in the last phrases we catch echoes of the music which flows through Wuthering Heights.[37]

The reviewer also mentioned that Anne's representation of life was more average and normal than anything in the work of her sisters, and that Huntingdon was admittedly nearer to the actual Branwell than Emily's Heathcliff or Charlotte's Rochester.[38]

The same year in A History of English Literature edited by John Buchan[39] The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was called an attempt at fiction not to be compared with the novels of her sisters.

George Moore in The Atlantic Monthly of April, 1923, expressed his conviction that if Anne Bronte had lived ten years longer, she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen --perhaps even a higher place because she had all the qualities of Jane Austen and other qualities too. According to him Anne could write with heat, one of the rarest qualities. He considered the diary a mistake and thought the heroine should have told the story:

> Anne broke down in the middle of her story, but her breakdown was not for lack of genius but of experience. An accident would have saved her; almost any man of

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[37]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[38]Ibid., p. 33.

[39]John Buchan, editor, A History of English Literature. (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1923), p. 503.

> letters would have laid his hand upon her arm and said: 'You must not let your heroine give her diary to the young farmer, saying: "Here is my story; go home and read it."' Your heroine must tell the young farmer her story, and an entrancing scene you will make of the telling. Moreover, the presence of your heroine, her voice, her gestures, the questions that would arise and the answers that would be given to them, would preserve the atmosphere of a passionate and original love-story. The diary broke the story in halves.--

Mr. Moore also declared that the weaving of the narrative in the first hundred and fifty pages of the novel revealed a born tale-teller.[40]

Cornelius Weygandt,[41] Professor of English literature at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1925 uttered his belief that some devotee of Anne, more sociological than Moore, would find deep social significance in Mrs. Huntingdon's defiance of her husband in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:

> Such a one will say this is an anticipation of what the future was to bring about in the marital relationship, that it makes her a prophet and therefore the most important of the Brontes. Was it not "advanced" for a wife to say in 1848: "I must contrive to bear with you . . . for as long as I discharge my functions of steward and housekeeper so conscientiously and well, without pay, and without thanks, you cannot afford to part with me. I shall therefore remit these duties when my bondage becomes intolerable"? Her "brutal insensibility," as Mr. Huntingdon calls it, had already led her to deny he had any rights as her husband. "I was infatuated once, with a foolish, besotted affection, that clung to him in spite

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[40]George Moore, "Mr. Moore Talks to Mr. Gosse," The Atlantic Monthly, 131:452-54, April, 1923.

[41]Cornelius Weygandt, A Century of the English Novel. (New York: The Century Co., 1925), p. 109.

of his unworthiness, but it is fairly gone now--wholly crushed and withered away; and he has none but himself and his vices to thank for it."[42]

The critics of this period found The Tenant of Wildfell Hall possessed of a deeper view of life than Agnes Grey and a more normal view of life than any of the works of Anne's sisters. Huntingdon seemed more like Branwell than did Heathcliff and Rochester. For its audacity the novel appeared to stand alone among other mid-Victorian novels. The profound social significance of the novel with Anne as a prophet of what was to come in the marital relationship was mentioned. Unlike Agnes Grey which was influenced by Anne's orthodox religious beliefs, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was found to contain an unorthodox disbelief in eternal punishment. Scenes meriting approval were the open-air scenes, the death of Huntingdon, and the last love scene. The quiet humor of the book was commended. There were romantic elements in the novel, such as the description of the Hall and the mystery surrounding Helen, that were reminiscent of Wuthering Heights; while other parts, like Huntingdon's infatuation for the wife of his friend, were extremely realistic. The metamorphosis in the character of Huntingdon was considered very well done.

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[42] Loc. cit.

There were several flaws in the novel according to the reviewers of the period. The heroine seemed almost too blameless, while the hero was not even likeable. The story within a story, the diary, the Huntingdon episodes, the narrow point of view, the didacticism, and the inflated expressions were decried. The story was called worthless and too much like a report. It was said that Anne's attempt at tragedy became a farce in the scene in which Huntingdon began to read from his wife's diary. The novel was considered more faulty than Agnes Grey. The idealization of the manners in the book was thought to have had a bad effect upon the English mind.

Anne's experience at Thorp Green, where she and Branwell taught, was considered by one critic as the incentive for The Tenant of Wildfell Hall; while another said that Anne would never have betrayed her brother. Probably both critics were right. Anne could have pictured her brother in Huntingdon without betraying him. When she wrote The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, she wrote under a pseudonym and had no reason to think that Huntingdon and Branwell would ever be linked together.

THE SECOND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM

No criticisms were found for the period from 1926 to 1929, but eighteen were discovered for the following twenty-one year period. This was an increase of seven over the preceding quarter of a century. Agnes Grey during this length of time received twenty notices. Much attention was given at this time to the origin of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. The favorable and unfavorable reviews were about equally divided.

As to the ideas set forth in the novel Dr. Hale wrote in 1929:

> The views there set forth in the mid-Victorian period by a woman show that the youngest of the Brontës was one of the bravest and boldest. It took no little strength of character to defy the conventional Victorian ideas as to the doctrine of eternal punishment or what was fit and proper to be touched on in a novel. In her ideas and situations, she was away ahead of her times. She rushed in where even Thackeray dared not tread.[43]

Her declared that the book had an "interesting, probable plot, several characters of considerable distinctness, and a spirit as audacious as that of either of the other Brontës." The construction seemed artifical to him; the letters and diary, unreal. However, the plot kept him in suspense until the very end, which, he said, turned out as it

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[43]Will Taliaferro Hale, Anne Brontë: Her Life and Writings. (Indiana University Studies, Vol. 16, No. 83. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, March, 1929), p. 30.

should "in the most natural way and without any improbabilities." Mrs. Huntingdon, her husband, and Gilbert Markham were, he thought, vivid and real; while the minor characters, especially Lord and Lady Lowborough and Frederick Lawrence, were drawn well. He found the dialogue as stilted as that of Agnes Grey:

> . . . Every one uses big words and sentences that are too stiffly articulated. No child ever talked like little Arthur.
>
> And Anne herself, whether writing as Markham in the letters or as Mrs. Huntingdon in the diary, uses a language that is far from simple and natural. This is the way that she has Gilbert describe the lighting of a fire in the grate: "Meanwhile Rachel came in to kindle the fire, which was soon effected by thrusting a red-hot poker between the bars of the grate, where the fuel was already disposed for ignition." He thus analyzes the feelings he had just before he attacked Lawrence: "I grasped my whip with more determined energy than before, but forbore to raise it, and rode on in silence, waiting for some more tangible cause of offense before I opened the floodgates of my soul, and poured out the dammed up fury that was foaming and swelling within." Mrs. Huntingdon uses an equally inflated diction: Hattersley came into her presence one day "redolent of the stables"; on another occasion, while outdoors, she paused a moment to "rectify" her hair; and Hargrave on a certain occasion surpassed her "in his discursive versatility and eloquence."[44]

Dr. Hale assigned the cause of such diction:

> Let it not be thought, however, that such diction was due to Victorian prudery; for Anne does not hesitate to use expressions that must have startled her readers: Mrs. Huntingdon thought that she heard her husband refer to her under his breath as a "confounded slut"; Hargrave called this husband "as great a reprobate as ever was

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[44]Ibid., pp. 35-37.

d___d," and the latter reciprocated by telling his wife, "Do so, and be damned" (spelled out); and Hattersley clinched his promise to reform with "G_d d__n me if I don't." Evidently it was not squeamishness that caused Anne's artifical, flamboyant style, but the prevalent tendency of the age toward "fine writing."[45]

Anne's audacity was spoken of:

> Gentle and timid as she was, squeamishness was not one of her faults. No novel, indeed, of this period in England shows fewer qualms in facing certain of the facts of life. Any one who will read Chapter XLIII, in which Huntingdon introduces a mistress into his home right under the eyes of his wife, pretending that she is a pious young person recommended to him by a respectable old dowager as a governess for his little son, will realize something of Anne's courage as a Victorian writer. It took a writer equally bold to pen Chapter XXI, designated ironically "Social Virtues," which depicts that wild orgy at Grassdale Manor in which the drunken Hattersley, in the presence of the ladies, committed one outrage after another while the beastly Huntingdon sat by laughing at him. The various scenes in which Hargrave attempted to seduce Mrs. Huntingdon must have shocked many of the mid-Victorians. What, really, could be more audacious than that game of chess, with its implications, or the scene where she defended herself against Hargrave with her pallet-knife? To what extreme limits Anne could go is shown in that brutal episode where Huntingdon told the men right before his wife that any one might have her that would take her: "My wife! what wife? I have no wife . . . or if I have, look you, gentlemen, I value her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome--you may, by Jove, and my blessing into the bargain!" But the greatest defiance of the Victorian proprieties is displayed in that interview Mrs. Huntingdon had with her husband just after she caught him in the shrubbery with Lady Lowborough in his arms, "with the moon shining full upon them." When he refused to let her take her child and leave him, she delivered her ultimatum to him:

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[45]Ibid., p. 37.

"Then I must stay here, to be hated and despised. But henceforth we are husband and wife only in the name."

"Very good."

"I am your child's mother, and <u>your</u> housekeeper--nothing more."[46]

The source of Anne's knowledge for such scenes of debauchery was discussed:

> In the first place, the influence of the French realists is obvious. The Brontës, from their childhood, were all great readers, and Anne, no doubt, while at home in 1840 had access to the "bale of French books from Gomersal," which, Charlotte declares, were "clever, sophistical, and immoral." But the immediate inspiration of these scenes was her brother, Branwell.
>
> After witnessing his moral deterioration at the Robinsons' and his wild, mad decline and death three years later at home, Anne had such a first-hand knowledge of the destructive power of drink and felt so deeply the tragedy of it all, she could find no relief except thru this expression of her outraged, agonized feelings. At least, this is Charlotte's explanation of the origin of the book . . .
>
> Aside from his drunkenness, Branwell's relations with Mrs. Robinson suggested a number of details for Anne's book. The chief situation, that of the two lovers, Gilbert and Mrs. Huntingdon, being prevented from a happy union by a living husband standing in the way, was the very condition of affairs between Branwell and Mrs. Robinson, as his sister saw it. And just as Gilbert Markham was anxious for Huntingdon to die, so that he might marry his wife, so Branwell had felt about Mr. Robinson. And just as Gilbert feared that Huntingdon's will would prevent her marrying again, so Branwell asserted that Mr. Robinson had placed restrictions upon his wife's marrying again. And, no doubt, Mrs. Huntingdon's loyal attitude to the husband she no longer loved was inspired by what Anne believed to be Mrs. Robinson's disloyal betrayal of hers.[47]

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[46]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 37-38.

[47]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 38-40.

Dr. Hale spoke of the ideas which must have been offensive to Anne's readers:

> The treatment of the whole affair shows a great deal of boldness for a Victorian author. Tho married, Mrs. Huntingdon never denies her love for Gilbert; and Gilbert never disguises the fact that he would welcome her husband's death. And, in the end, when the husband finally dies, and Gilbert holds back on account of her wealth, it is Mrs. Huntingdon who does the actual proposing. How indelicate this must have seemed to Anne's Victorian readers, it is not difficult to imagine. No wonder is it that Charlotte felt called upon to defend her sister's memory upon the first opportunity that occurred.[48]

According to Dr. Hale,[49] nothing could have seemed more audacious to Victorian readers than Anne's repudiation of the doctrine of eternal punishment. Even as late as 1853, Frederick Maurice, professor of theology, was dismissed from King's College, London, because of his lack of orthodoxy on this particular belief. Eleven years later, eleven thousand ministers signed a declaration committing themselves to the dogma.

Rosamond Langbridge, who wrote her study of Charlotte in 1929, believed that all of the young Brontës had inherited a curious taint of wildness and a strain of savagery from their father and that in the case of Anne they produced such

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[48] Ibid., p. 40.

[49] Loc. cit.

a brutal character as Huntingdon.[50] She called the monstrous Huntingdon the ever-useful Branwell.[51]

In the same year Kaye Sugden[52] found The Tenant of Wildfell Hall underrated. "A much abler and more interesting work than Agnes Grey," wrote the critic, "it is in the real sense a 'novel with a purpose'; and its object is to show how body and soul can be sapped by excessive indulgence in alcoholic liquors."[53]

The source of inspiration for the novel was mentioned:

> It is quite clear that the book, which is full of several distressing scenes showing the influence of excessive drinking on language and character and the degradation which it causes, was written from a living model, the unhappy brother who had been with Anne at Thorp Green and was now drinking himself to death at Haworth Vicarage.[54]

Grant Cochran Knight, Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, in 1931 described The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as the novel in which Anne "advocated the right of a wife to leave an intolerable husband and live apart from him without suspicion or stigma."[55]

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[50]Rosamond Langbridge, Charlotte Brontë: a psychological study. (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929), pp. 190-91.

[51]Ibid., p. 83.

[52]Kaye Aspinall Ramsden Sugden, A Short History of the Brontes. (London: Humphrey Milford, 1929), p. 109.

[53]Ibid., p. 59.

[54]Ibid., p. 61.

[55]Grant Cochran Knight, The Novel in English. (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), p. 211.

Mr. Knight disagreed in part with May Sinclair's statements in her introduction to the Everyman's Library edition of the book:

> . . . Miss May Sinclair suggests rather ungraciously that Anne forced herself into writing as a matter of keeping up with her sisters, and that the composition of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall bored her as much as it bores later readers. It is likely true that Anne Bronte threw herself into authorship as a matter of emulation; it is possibly true that writing The Tenant of Wildfell Hall wearied her; but it is not true that the reader must find the novel dull. On the contrary, he is likely to find Helen Huntingdon's spirited search for independent happiness and her eventual reward at least as engrossing as Charlotte's Villette. And when he remembers that The Tenant is the first strong protest in English fiction against the dominance of the male, he will find it possessing a strong social as well as a decided narrative interest.[56]

In 1932 Edward Frederic Benson[57] said that there could be no question as to who misconstrued Anne's motives and abused her; it was Emily. The critic pictured the scene in the dining room:

> The three sisters were together to-night in the dining-room, and Anne had just told Emily who was the model for the drunken wastrel in her new book. She sat silent, conscious of the rectitude and high moral aim of her intentions, while Emily stormed at her for the brutality of it. Charlotte, too, was dissuasive; she thought she was morbid to dwell on such a theme. When they had finished, Anne merely said she knew she was doing right --they must not tempt her--and patiently resumed her

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[56]Ibid., pp. 211-12.

[57]Edward Frederic Benson, Charlotte Bronte. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1932), p. 184.

> work. The words came easily to-night, for there had been a horrid scene with Branwell, who came back reeling and hiccoughing from the 'Black Bull.'[58]

In 1937 Ernest Baker[59] discussed the origin of the story. Like Mrs. Chadwick, he did not believe that Branwell was the original of Huntingdon. Branwell was weak and yielded to temptation while struggling against it, he said, but Huntingdon was "the full-blown reprobate of fiction, a resolute libertine and drunkard, cynically glorying in profligacy, and taunting his wife with her jealousy of his boasted amours." Mr. Baker believed it more likely that Anne's knowledge of "fast society" came from the French novels which she had read. He considered the novel "edifying."

To Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée in 1938 the book was "easy reading, if not at all convincing."[60] In 1941 to Fannie Ratchford, disagreeing with Mrs. Chadwick and Mr. Baker, it was "picturing under fictitious guise, Branwell's ruin with its consequent misery to himself and those who loved him."[61]

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[58] Ibid., p. 184.

[59] Ernest Alfred Baker, The History of the English Novel. (London: H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 1937), VIII, 79-80.

[60] Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée, The Victorians and After, 1830-1914. (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1938), p. 89.

[61] Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 172.

In the same year George Sampson discovered in the book "clear signs of undeveloped strength and fine observation."[62]

As to Anne's heroine, Edward Wagenknecht in 1943 saw her as the forerunner of Ibsen's Nora:

> Didacticism carries over into The Tenant of Wildfell Hall . . ., in which a woman walks out and slams the door long before Ibsen's Nora was ever dreamed of, but this time it is didacticism with a difference. Wildfell Hall is not a very good novel, but it is an amazing book for a girl like Anne Brontë to have written; there was no weakness in that gentle heart. . . . here we get the story of a man who drives on steadily to the devil, as Branwell did. But he is not Branwell temperamentally; Charlotte's note is misleading on that point. It took courage, too, in those days, to disbelieve in eternal damnation, and say so frankly.[63]

Two years later Laura L. Hinkley, too, thought of Ibsen and called the heroine "Braver than Mrs. Alving and forty years ahead of the Norwegian lady."

As to Helen's letters, she considered them realistic in their account of the most insufferable invalid on the borders of literature.

Concerning the structure of the novel, she observed that it was influenced unfavorably by her sisters' examples. "Like The Professor, she wrote, "it begins with a letter

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[62]George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), pp. 788-89.

[63]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel: From Elizabeth to George VI. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p. 315.

from one man to another, but where Charlotte promptly abandoned this device, Anne clumsily carries it through."[64]

Branwell's part in the story was discussed:

> Undoubtedly Arthur Huntingdon is the only character not herself whom Anne ever succeeded in galvanizing into a sort of life, and undoubtedly he owes this dubious animation to Anne's experience with Branwell. But in what sense did she make copy of him? Obviously not in outward circumstance except in beginning as a spoiled child and overindulged youth--a theme the Bronte girls recurred to again and again--in alcoholic excess--which also they used expertly at need--and in ending as an unbearable invalid.[65]

The critic believed it highly improbable that the critics or the public would ever have noticed any resemblance between Huntingdon and Branwell if Anne, and especially Charlotte, had not felt it necessary to defend Anne's motive and character. She found Anne's literal transcription less revealing than the more imaginative and subtler forms in which their experience with Branwell pervaded the works of Charlotte and Emily.[66]

She spoke of the fact that Charlotte wrote her defense with no conception of the fierce, but not very

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[64]Laura L. Hinkley, Charlotte and Emily. (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1945), pp. 122-23.

[65]Ibid., p. 125.

[66]Ibid., pp. 125-26.

white, light which was to beat upon her family and upon every word she ever wrote.[67]

Anne's anonymity was discussed:

> We should remember, too, that Anne published her book under what she thought an inviolable incognito, but it was a strong one, and accounts for much of the girls' anxiety to remain unknown. Impersonal writers might deal as they could and must with drunkards and wastrels, but if the parsonage daughters were known to do so, their neighbors, impelled by neighborly curiosity to read the work, would inevitably refer it to the parsonage drunkard and wastrel. Oddly, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall occasioned the first carefully guarded breach in their incognito.[68]

In 1945 Homer and William Watt described the novel as a "morbid, moralizing tale."[69]

Naomi Lewis[70] in The New Statesman and Nation of August 17, 1946, found the real extent of Anne's abilities and limitations as a writer in this book. She wrote:

> Though the "noxious slime" is not kept below the surface, The Tenant is a much better book than one would expect. It is written with an impetus that does not suggest at all that it was a painful labour and duty.[71]

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[67] Ibid., p. 126.

[68] Loc. cit.

[69] Homer Andrew Watt and William Whyte Watt, A Dictionary of English Literature. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1945), p. 32.

[70] Naomi Lewis, "Books in General," The New Statesman and Nation, 32:119, August 17, 1946.

[71] Loc. cit.

She found the construction of the novel involved like that of Wuthering Heights. Markham's letters seemed improbable to her, while Helen's diary seemed the most forceful and well-written part of the book.[72]

The critic found all the section dealing with the disastrous marriage intensely observed:[73]

> Anne Brontë, like Charlotte, conveys peculiarly well the atmosphere of a house: its emptiness on a rainy day when there are no visitors; its warmth and excitement when full of people on a summer evening. And though the impact of the book as a whole is not powerful, it is full of vivid scenes. The symbolic game of chess played in the sultry atmosphere of suspicion and guilty love is a dramatic tableau that has in its way the same quality as Shirley's description . . . of the mad dog's bite, the cauterising of the wound with a hot iron, and her instructions in case the horror of madness should come upon her. In another effective episode Markham, Helen Graham's priggish admirer in the "outer" plot, meets on the road his fancied rival Frederick Lawrence, and inflamed by jealousy, brings down upon his head the handle of his whip (a typically Brontesque detail). That spontaneous moment of rage is the only thing that makes this dull character at all likeable. But how well the whole scene is sustained. Markham makes a sullen return to see how badly his victim is hurt; Lawrence, with more than a touch of Mr. Rochester, rejects the grudging aid, yet is too weak to mount his horse. And Markham rides off, throwing him a handkerchief to replace the one that is already soaked with blood. Churlishness was a quality that the Brontës must have known well.[74]

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[72] Loc. cit.

[73] Loc. cit.

[74] Loc. cit.

The disturbing realism of the diary was spoken of:

> There are, for instance, drunken orgies: during one of these Helen, the young wife, helps to free a man by giving him a candle to hold against the hands of the drunken assailant who is pinning him down. How did such an idea enter that quiet imagination? Huntingdon deliberately sets out to ruin the lives of his weaker friends by encouraging them to reckless drinking. He brings his mistresses openly into the house and makes no pretence of concealing his feeling for them in front of his wife. One comes, indeed, in the guise of a governess--a touch of irony that must surely have been accidental.[75]

Although the critic found the book to be forceful in its details, she declared that it was not a great book. The characters seemed to have a kind of reality, but they were seen, not felt:[76]

> They are lacking in some quality that might give greatness even to a badly constructed book. Consider the hero. As a lively young rake in love, he is a likeable figure; we can understand his attraction. As a bored and dissolute husband, kept by the weather indoors in his country house, without resources, and suffering from a vicious ennui, he is still real (here, at least, there is a suggestion of Branwell): and his wife, for all her disapproval, cannot help feeling sorry for him. But there is no strength in him; no real passion, even as his character deteriorates he ceases to hold our interest at all. And the ending, when the evangelistic fire is no longer needed, is tame; it peters out in a lingering deathbed scene and a number of suitable marriages. We remember the power and atmosphere of Wuthering Heights long after we have forgotten the intricacies of the plot; of this book we recall only the odd detail. This is not due to the awkward construction nor to any falsity in the characterisation.

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[75] Loc. cit.

[76] Loc. cit.

> Truth the characters have, in their behavior, but they are over simplified. They do not stir the imagination. Anne Bronte's mind was intensely receptive but it worked only on what she had seen and felt, and some things never came within its scope at all. Virtue, not passion, is the powerful motive of the book; it has its own strength, but it does not make the characters moving or sympathetic. There is not enough of nature mixed in them to give us any doubts about what they will do or what will become of them. Her "good" men are tedious prigs; Gilbert Markham, who is spiteful, petty, jealous, vain and hypocritical, is one of the most unpleasant heroes I can recall outside a Shakespeare play.
>
> But we cannot feel that Anne cared much for Gilbert Markham, and she cared still less for Huntingdon. She had not the passionate temperament that could make her conceive a Heathcliff or a Rochester.[77]

The critic mentioned that Charlotte was the first to point out the resemblance between her sister and Cowper:[78]

> . . . here were two gentle natures, in which even a consciousness of evil seemed incongruous, yet both weighed down by an unwarranted burden of sin. I feel, indeed, that The Task and Wildfell Hall had a similar function in their authors' lives. The didactic intention of Anne's book is clear, though I am not convinced for a moment that it was her reason for writing it. The rural and domestic calm of Cowper's poem is broken constantly by moralising reflections. Yet both works are written with a fluency that suggests that the act of producing them was a pleasure.[79]

Phyllis Bentley[80] in 1947 described the structure of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as an interesting one. She

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[77]Loc. cit.

[78]Loc. cit.

[79]Loc. cit.

[80]Phyllis Bentley, The Brontës. (London: Home & Van Thal Ltd., 1947), p. 107.

noted that the book fell into three parts, each part a first-person story, and commented upon the necessity of using this method:

> The change of narrator from Gilbert to Helen and back to Gilbert, which at first sight seems clumsy, is in truth necessary to give this particular story its full effect. If we are to feel Helen's attraction and the mystery of her situation at Wildfell Hall we must see that situation through Gilbert's eyes; if we are to appreciate the anguish of Helen's sufferings with her husband, we must see those sufferings through Helen's eyes; but we must see from Gilbert's point of view Helen's access of fortune or we cannot get the full flavour of his scruples. It is not without significance that in each case it is the sufferer who is chosen to tell the tale; Anne understands only too well the feelings of the suffering and oppressed.[81]

Miss Bentley found the great merit of the book in its terrible picture of the gradual deterioration of a drunkard:[82]

> . . . the portrait of Arthur Huntingdon convinces in every detail. The very shape of the drunkard's head, with its depressed crown masked by rich curls, his florid complexion and full lips, his "long low chuckling laugh" when Helen justly accuses him, his sick peevishness after a drinking bout, his essential lightness of head and heart, his soda-water breakfasts and brady luncheons, his alternate insolence and yearning towards his wife, his boasted infidelities--no other handling of this subject in fiction has exceeded these keenly observed and strongly portrayed details in truth and impressiveness.[83]

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[81] Ibid., pp. 107-08.

[82] Ibid., p. 108.

[83] Loc. cit.

Anne's heroine was found to differ from the heroines of Charlotte and Emily:

> The character of Helen while she is Huntingdon's wife is indeed unique in the Brontë repertoire. With intelligence and pride Helen combines beauty and charm; her power of exciting men's love, her resentment as a scorned wife, her indignant repulse of the dishonourable proposal made her by one of Huntingdon's worthless friends and her passionate love for her little boy belong to a view of life more normal than either Emily's or Charlotte's.[84]

In 1948 Miss Bentley[85] observed that Anne's attempts to give the novel more plot simply resulted in a schoolgirlish artificiality. She thought the moorland farm setting was well done, but that the fashionable "fast" high society setting was unconvincing because Anne was unfamiliar with that milieu. The portrait of Arthur Huntingdon, she believed, was done to the life, from a most modern, debunking attitude.

In a broadcast by Phyllis Bentley on May 28, 1949, Miss Bentley, after quoting George Moore's description of Agnes Grey, said:

> 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' is by no means a muslin dress; it is woven of stronger and less even stuff, and tinctured by bolder dyes. 'Agnes Grey' is

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[84] Ibid., p. 109.

[85] Phyllis Bentley, "A Novelist Looks at the Brontë Novels," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1948), XI, Part 58, No. 3, 150.

> complete in itself, but 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' far less of an artistic whole, shows more promise.[86]

In the same year Ernest Raymond called the book "in many ways a grand sombre novel, . . . twisted to its loss in the direction of a temperance tract."[87]

> This pity for all, together with her strong sense of duty, conspired to make her devote her very great talent to a novel that should exhibit before the world the evil of drunkenness. A noble aim, but the means were sadly mistaken.[88]

The Hansons evaluated the novel in the 1950 revised edition of The Four Brontës:

> . . . the youngest Brontë wrote in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall a novel that can by no means be dismissed as a failure. It told a good story--more colourful, though less convincing, than the realistic Agnes Grey--and it contains, for its time, some remarkable plain speaking on the relations between men and women.[89]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . it is a triumph for Anne that the book is so interesting to read. It is an ably written and in parts absorbing story, and contains some sound analysis of character. If Huntingdon is less villainous and a great deal more attractive than Anne would have had him appear, the fact is that she was simply not capable

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[86]"The Youngest Brontë: A Third Programme Appreciation," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, p. 241.

[87]Ernest Raymond, "Exiled and Harassed Anne," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, 228.

[88]Ibid., p. 230.

[89]Lawrence and E. M. Hanson, The Four Brontës. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 222.

> of portraying real heartlessness and abandon. Nevertheless The Tenant of Wildfell Hall does no discredit to the company in which it found itself. By virtue of it, and not solely as a sister of Emily and Charlotte, Anne deserves remembrance.[90]

Some critics of this period found The Tenant of Wildfell Hall more promising, colorful, and interesting than Agnes Grey and more engrossing than Charlotte's Villette. The plot seemed interesting, probable and full of suspense. The diary was deemed the best part of the book. The scenes were considered vivid, and the farm setting was thought to be well done. Both major and minor characters appeared vivid and real, and the character of Helen was thought to be more normal than any character in the novels of Emily and Charlotte. Attention was called to the social value of this novel, which was the first forceful protest against the dominance of the male. Another value that was mentioned was its picture of the slow disintegration of a drunkard. As late as 1947 it was called the most truthful and impressive handling of the subject in fiction.

Other reviewers found the book unconvincing, morbid, and harmed by its tendency to preach temperance. The diary and letters seemed unreal; the dialogue, stilted; and the

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[90]Ibid., p. 256.

society setting, unconvincing. The characters were said to be over-simplified with the result that one always knew what each character would do in a given circumstance. Gilbert was considered a very unpleasant hero.

At this time much attention was given to Anne's temerity not only in her choice of subject, but also in her repudiation of the doctrine of eternal punishment. In both she was far ahead of her time.

It was suggested by some that Branwell and his relations with Mrs. Robinson were the inspiration of the novel, while others insisted that Branwell and Huntingdon did not have the same temperament. The latter critics believed that Anne drew her inspiration from the French novels which she had read. Whatever the source of her material, at least Anne thought that she was writing under an inviolable pseudonym.

RETROSPECT

Although Agnes Grey was practically ignored by contemporary critics, interest in it has steadily increased with the passing years. Its chief value lies in its realistic portrayal of life and manners in the mid-Victorian period and in the light it has thrown upon Anne herself.

The autobiographical aspect of the novel has been generally acknowledged with critics agreeing that Agnes was Anne. However, there has been some disagreement over the identification of Mr. Weston. Mr. Brontë was suggested as the original of Mr. Weston by one critic; Arthur Bell Nichols, Charlotte's husband, by another; and Mr. Weightman, by still another. The Robinsons by whom Anne and Branwell were employed were considered the prototypes of the Murrays. By some the novel was considered a wish-fulfillment fantasy, an expression of Anne's longing for a home, husband, and children. Others noticed especially its didacticism. Anne seemed to feel it an obligation to warn future governesses of what lay before them and to chastise parents and children for making the life of a governess miserable. This book unlike her second novel, seemed to be dominated by orthodox Calvinistic beliefs.

A review of the last one hundred and three years of criticism shows that:

1. The plot of the novel is simple and appealing.

2. The characters are life-like although there is a tendency for the bad characters to be too bad and the good characters, too good.

3. It is so realistic that it often suggests a report rather than fiction.

4. It has a pleasing element of humor which is lacking in the works of Charlotte and Emily.

5. The dialogue is somewhat stiff and unnatural.

6. In the repeated use of italics it has a flaw characteristic of the period.

7. Its tendency toward didacticism is not always pleasing.

8. The point of view from which the story is told is effective.

Like Agnes Grey, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall has received more attention in recent years. Its realistic picture of the gradual deterioration of a drunkard, its realistic treatment of the relationship between a man and a woman, its protest (the first strong one in English fiction) against the dominance of the male, and its repudiation of the doctrine of eternal punishment, were considered its most important qualities.

The authorities have disagreed upon the source of inspiration for the novel. The most popular and logical theory offered was that Anne's experience as governess at Thorp Green, where Branwell was tutor, gave her the idea for The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. The relationship between Gilbert and Mrs. Huntingdon was much like that of Branwell and Mrs. Robinson. Huntingdon and Branwell were both

drunkards, but, as it has been pointed out, they were temperamentally unlike. Branwell tried to resist temptation, while Huntingdon made no effort to change. Yet this does not refute, as it was intended, the belief that Branwell was the model for Huntingdon. Other critics have argued that Anne would never have betrayed her brother by exposing him to the public in the novel. This is probably true, but it must be remembered that Anne was writing under what she thought was an inviolable pseudonym. Still other critics believed that Anne's inspiration came from the French novels which she had read. The most logical conclusion seems to be that Branwell was the pattern for Huntingdon and that the French novels were a secondary influence.

Results of the study show that:

1. The plot of the novel is involved like that of Wuthering Heights. It is more interesting than that of Agnes Grey. It is probable and full of suspense.

2. All of the characters are vivid, and Helen is a more normal character than any in the novels of Charlotte and Emily.

3. It gives a deeper view of life than Agnes Grey and a more normal view of life than any of the works of Anne's sisters. It is extremely realistic, especially in

the story of the drunkard. As a study of immorality, it is more real than anything in Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights.

4. It has a welcome touch of quiet humor.

5. The dialogue is stilted.

6. Its tendency to preach temperance is too evident.

"To everyone familiar with the Brontë story," wrote Helen Arnold in 1940, "any words of praise for gentle but brave Anne . . . are especially welcome."[1] This year of 1950 has welcomed such words; the critics have lauded the Hansons for their treatment of Anne and her novels. The remarks of Edward Wagenknecht and Harry Ransom may indicate a new trend in Anne Brontë criticism. ". . . it is good, too," wrote Wagenknecht about the Hanson biography, "to find Anne's novels appreciated as they deserve."[2] Ransom, who is now at work on a study of the first century of Brontë criticism, also was pleased to find Anne given her proper place among the four Brontës: "So, too," he declared,

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[1]Helen H. Arnold, "Americans and The Brontës," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1940), X, Part 50, No. 1, p. 13.

[2]Edward Wagenknecht, "Those Brilliant Gifted Brontës," Chicago Sunday Tribune, March 12, 1950.

"Anne becomes more significant not in spite of her humility and modest attainments but because of them."[3]

Ernest Raymond's appreciation of Anne has seemed the most fitting tribute with which to close this study.

> . . . I am fond of saying that you cannot have a family of less than three, father, mother, and child, because two straight lines will not enclose a space: similarly Charlotte and Emily would not have been what they were, nor the Brontë legend what it is, without the third and completely individual Anne. She closes the figure with beauty. She was not the equal of either of her sisters as a novelist, nor of Emily as a poet, because, more than either of them she allowed moralism rather than art to bank up and channel her native force; but she did write some things that endure in their own right, and shine of their own power and not because they catch the great light of her sisters' fame; however she compares with those sisters as a writer she is their equal and their partner in courage and character; and because of this--because of what she did and what she was--we do nothing amiss to-day . . . in considering her achievement anew and then saluting her memory and thanking God for that brief but brave and profitable life.[4]

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[3]Harry Ransom, "Charlotte, Branwell, Emily & Anne," The Saturday Review of Literature, 33:48, April 15, 1950.

[4]Ernest Raymond, "Exiled and Harassed Anne," Transactions of the Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, p. 236.

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Cross, Wilbur L., "Brontë, Charlotte, Emily and Anne," The Encyclopedia Americana, IV, 579-81. Chicago: Americana Corporation, 1950 (c.1918).

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E. NEWSPAPERS

Wagenknecht, Edward, "Those Brilliant Gifted Brontës," Chicago Sunday Tribune, March 12, 1950.

APPENDIX

SOME CRITICISM NOT CONSIDERED IN THE TEXT

Some authorities consulted for this study discussed the novels in general and so were not mentioned in the first two chapters. All except one wrote to the effect that the novels had little merit and that Anne had little genius in comparison with her sisters. These were: Augustine Birrell,[1] English political leader and man of letters; Mrs. Oliphant,[2] Scottish novelist and historical writer; George Saintsbury,[3] English critic, journalist, and educator; Angus MacKay;[4] Chambers's Cyclopedia of English Literature;[5] William

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[1]Augustine Birrell, Life of Charlotte Brontë. (London: Walter Scott, 1887), p. 92.

[2]Mrs. Oliphant, The Victorian Age of Literature. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1892), p. 304.

_____, et al., Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign: A Book of Appreciations. (London: Hurst & Blackett, Limited, 1897), p. 28.

[3]George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895). (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1896), p. 319.

_____, The English Novel. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1913), p. 243.

_____, A Short History of English Literature. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919 (c.1898), p. 748.

[4]Angus M. MacKay, The Brontës: Fact and Fiction. (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1897), p. 20.

[5]Chambers's Cyclopedia of English Literature. (London: W. & R. Chambers, Limited, 1903), III, p. 526.

Henry Hudson,[6] English author, librarian, and professor of English; Archibald T. Strong,[7] professor of English at the University of Adelaide; Norman Collins,[8] English fiction writer and deputy chairman of Victor Gollancz, Limited, publishers; John William Cunliffe,[9] English educator and author; C. Mabel Edgerley,[10] licentiate of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, secretary of the Bronte Society, and author of "Eyesight of the Brontes," "Causes of Death of the Brontes" (British Medical Journal), and "A Portrait of Emily Bronte" (Yorkshire Post); Elizabeth Bowen,[11] Irish novelist and short-story writer;

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[6]William Henry Hudson, An Outline History of English Literature. (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915), p. 307.

_____, A Short History of English Literature in the Nineteenth Century. (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1918), p. 239.

[7]Archibald T. Strong, A Short History of English Literature. (New York: Humphrey Milford, 1921), p. 361.

[8]Norman Collins, The Facts of Fiction. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1933), p. 176.

[9]John William Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution. (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 112.

[10]C. Mabel Edgerley, "Anne Bronte," Transactions, Bronte Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1938), IX, Part 48, No. 3, p. 179.

[11]Elizabeth Bowen, English Novelists. (London: W. Collins, 1942), p. 33.

Transactions of the Brontë Society,[12] X, Part 53, No. 4; Walter James Turner,[13] The Encyclopedia Britannica;[14] Transactions of the Brontë Society,[15] XL, Part 59, No. 4. The exception was Wilbur L. Cross,[16] Professor Emeritus of English at Yale University, who wrote about Anne for The Encyclopedia Americana. He found Anne's novels interesting as transcripts of Yorkshire ways and manners.

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[12]"What the Brontës Mean Today," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1943) IX, Part 53, No. 4, p. 164.

[13]Walter James Turner, Romance of English Literature. (New York: Hastings House, 1944), p. 256.

[14]The Encyclopedia Britannica. (Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1948 (c.1929), IV, 239.

[15]"Centenary of Anne Brontë's Death: A Scarborough Commemoration," Transactions, Brontë Society Publications. (Shipley: Caxton Press, 1949), XI, Part 59, No. 4, p. 237.

[16]Wilbur L. Cross, "Brontë, Charlotte, Emily and Anne," The Encyclopedia Americana. (Chicago, Americana Corporation, 1950 (c.1918), IV, 580.

INDEX