UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

"I HAD RATHER BE A *THING* THAN AN ANGEL."

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN'S AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S VIEWS ON WOMEN'S STATUS IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää Jane Austenin ja Charlotte Brontën näkemyksiä naisten asemasta 1800-luvun Englannissa heidän elämäntilanteittensa ja viktoriaanisen aikakauden valossa. Materiaali koostuu Austenin teoksesta *Persuasion* ja teoksesta *Jane Eyre*. Tutkielmassa vastataan kysymyksiin: 1) Miten Austenin ja Brontën elämäntilanteet sekä viktoriaaninen aikakausi vaikuttavat heidän töihinsä? 2) Miten elämäntilanteiden ja aikakauden vaikutus ilmenevät Austenin ja Brontën näkemyksissä naisten asemasta viktoriaanisessa yhteiskunnassa teoksissa *Persuasion* ja *Jane Eyre*? Lähtökohtana tutkimukselle on aikakauden historia, Austenin ja Brontën elämänkerrat sekä romantiikan aikakausi taiteessa. Koska tutkielmassa käsitellään Austenin ja Brontën näkemysten samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavuuksia, tutkielma on vertaileva.

Austenin ja Brontën näkemyksiä naisten asemasta yhteiskunnassa vertaillaan avioliiton ja rakkauden, rahan ja sosiaalisen aseman sekä työn ja koulutuksen osa-alueilla, koska nämä edustavat naisille keskeisiä elämänalueita viktoriaanisella aikakaudella. Austenin ja Brontën elämäntilanteet viktoriaanisen aikakauden kontekstissa vaikuttavat heidän asennoitumiseensa naisten asemaa koskeviin ongelmiin ja he reagoivat työssään yhteiskunnan naisille asettamiin rajoituksiin. Omien elämäntilanteidensa ja aikakauden lisäksi Austenin ja Brontën mielipiteiden ilmaisuun vaikuttavat aikakauden kirjallisuuden konventiot, jotka määrittävät kirjailijoiden vapautta käsitellä aiheitaan.

Yhteiskunta ja kulttuuri ovat jatkuvassa interaktiossa ja taiteilijat reagoivat oman aikakautensa tapahtumiin. Taiteilijan työn lähtökohta on hänen omat kokemuksensa ajasta jossa hän elää, mutta myös hänen oman aikakautensa kulttuurinen ilmapiiri, joka määrittelee tavan jolla taiteilija voi käsitellä työtään. Austenin ja Brontën näkemyksiin ja tapaan käsitellä naisten asemaa vaikuttavat heidän omat kokemuksensa naisina viktoriaanisessa yhteiskunnassa, mutta kirjailijoina he muotoilevat omat kokemuksensa taiteellisiin tarkoituksiinsa sopiviksi, huomioiden samalla aikakautensa kirjallisuuden konventiot.

Austenin näkemystä naisten asemasta muokkaa 1800-luvun alkupuolella vaikuttanut regency-aika, joka painotti ihmisten yhteisöllisyyttä ja heidän sosiaalisen roolinsa vastuuta. Brontën naiskuvaan taas vaikuttaa viktoriaaninen aikakausi, joka keskittyy individualismiin ja tarkastelee yksilöä yhteiskunnan ulkopuolella. Omasta lähtökohdastaan Austen näkee naisten aseman yhteiskunnassa olevan sen ylläpitäjiä, kun taas Brontë pohtii naisten problemaattista suhdetta yksilöllisyyteen ja itsenäisyyteen viktoriaanisessa yhteiskunnassa.

Asiasanat: Victorian society, literature, Austen and Brontë, women's position

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1.INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë are perhaps the two most prominent female novelists of the nineteenth century English literature. They have stood the test of time and their works are still fascinating enough to attract readers and scholars of our time despite the gap of two hundred years. What is it then that interests us in Austen and Brontë? On the surface it seems that the things they wrote about two centuries ago should bear no relevance to us. In addition, the time that they lived in and wrote about had quite a different set of values and ideas than we do, thus making it even more difficult for us to understand the characters and their behaviour in Austen's and Brontë's novels.

However, the very things that make Austen and Brontë relevant to us even today are not tied to time, but are universal by nature. The themes that they dealt with included love, morality and social justice, which explains why Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë still speak to us today. These universal themes are also the reason for the continuing interest in studying their work.

Austen and Brontë wrote romances which included a moral statement on the condition of society. The fact that they did not write merely romantic stories of finding lasting happiness and love is explained by their own marginal position in society. Austen and Brontë were, what the Victorians called, surplus women, in other words they were poor and unlikely to marry. In the Victorian society the only way for a woman to achieve social security and a position within society, was to get married. Thus, Austen and Brontë, who were placed in the outskirts of society were probably more acutely aware of the questions of morality and social justice concerning the lives of women. Austen and Brontë were not, however, complete outcasts, which is also shown in their work: in the end their heroines become full members of society through marriage, which confirms to what Hunt (1988) calls Victorian feminine ideal. The novelists do not, however, adapt entirely to this ideal, for they portray their heroines as equal to their husbands, not as weak and submissive as women were supposed to be.

In this thesis my aim is not only to study the works of these women, but to look at them in a broader context. The context is provided firstly, by their lives and secondly, by the period in time when they lived and worked, namely the late eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century. My goal then, is to look at how the context of their lives and the time they lived in influenced their work. In particular, I will concentrate on the views Austen and Brontë had on the question of women's status in society in the framework of the above mentioned circumstances in life and the time in question.

What makes studying Austen and Brontë interesting within the framework proposed above is the fact that there are only a few comparative studies done on Austen and Brontë. Furthermore, the few fleeting parallels that have been drawn between them have not dealt with the similarities or differences between their lives or compared how the circumstances of their lives affected their work and their views on the position of women. In addition to this, there is the context of time to consider and the change which took place in English society and in its social and cultural atmosphere when the liberal eighteenth century turned into the prudish nineteenth century. It is interesting to see how this change affected, on one hand, Austen, who lived at the turning point of ideas, values and attitudes and on the other hand, Brontë, who lived a rather secluded life and seems to have been to some extent out of reach of the Victorian ideas and ideals, at least where her literary influences were concerned.

The primary sources of my study are *Persuasion* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. I have chosen them as my data because they are roughly from the same period, the first half of the nineteenth century and they resemble each other in the sense that they are both stories of development and growth of young women who are transformed in the course of the book from passive creatures into masters of their own fate, a state which the authors strived for in their own lives. My aim, then, is to study *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* in the framework of the novelists' lives, as well as in the context of the time that they lived in and try to pinpoint and compare the views and attitudes they had on the question of women's status in society. In addition, I have consulted some critical reviews written on Austen's and Brontë's work.

For the biographical data on Austen I have used Claire Tomalin's highly acclaimed autobiography (1997), as well as that by John Halperin (1984). On

Brontë's biographical data I have relied on the Brontë biography by Elizabeth Gaskell (1875) and a more recent work by Lyndall Gordon (1994) The survey of the historical and cultural background consists of works on the Regency era as well as on the Victorian and the Romantic period by such writers as R. J. White (1963), W. A Craik (1969), James Walvin (1987), Gary Kelly (1989) and David Punter (1989)

The structure of this study consists of seven sections. After the general introduction I will move on to the historical and cultural background in which I will consider the context of time, provided by the Regency and the Victorian periods, as well as the Romantic age. The background section is divided in to two parts: one deals with the above mentioned historical context and the other with the biographies of Austen and Brontë and will also include a short comparison of their lives. Chapter four consists of the description of the present study, my hypothesis and the storylines of the novels. In addition, the fourth chapter also includes the analysis, in which I will study extracts from *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* in the light of my hypothesis. The last two chapters include discussion of the data and conclusion as well as suggestions for further study.

2. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Before beginning to discuss Austen and Brontë and their background I will briefly consider the historical and social setting in which they lived. There are two distinct periods of time to consider when talking about Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë: the time of Regency and the Victorian era. Although these two periods were somewhat different in manners and morals, the change between them was not abrupt but was more on the lines of a gradual shift into different values and attitudes. Furthermore, the changed values and attitudes were had their basis in the previous era. In addition, the Romantic period functions as a cultural framework for both of these eras, extending from the beginning of The Regency to the early part of the Victorian period. I will consider the historical background first, in chronological order, and finish the discussion with the Romantic period, which provides the cultural setting for my own study.

2.1 THE REGENCY PERIOD

The actual Regent government began in 1811, when King George the Third lapsed into madness, and ended in 1820 when the old king died and Prince Regent became King George the fourth. The period considered as Regency, however, extends beyond the Regent's government both before and after. In fact, the fine arts and building style recognised as Regency actually rose from the Romantic movement from the 1790s.

White (1963:1-10) notes that the Regency was a time of innovations and developments and prosperity. There were new innovations in agriculture and landscape gardening for example. Roads and communications improved vastly, the effects of which can be seen in the increased number of letters sent and received due to the better roads and faster mail-coaches. This particular time was yet innocent of the ramifications of industrialisation. Actually, the term 'Regency' meant picturesque countrysides, styles of building and dress. The Regency people were filled with robust energy for the new and improved. They were practical people who took life as it came, and with the ideas of the enlightenment in their past, they emphasised also rationality.

On the other side of the wealth and advancements was the less picturesque side of Regency life. White (1963: 8-18) points out that death was a common visitor, because of diseases and the mortality rate of children, which was considerably high. As death and cruelty were part of human life, the Regency people thought nothing of public executions, which even children were taken to see. In fact, this was a feature of English life which continued to the Victorian era and was only ended in the 1860s. White continues to say that because of this quality, in combination with their acquired wealth, the Regency people were described as coarse by the later generations. Furthermore they were accused of being immoral and irreligious, which is largely based on the reputation of Prince Regent's court rather than the actual conduct of the rest of the population. White (1963:103-105) mentions that Prince Regent's seemingly liberal attitudes were in fact a reaction against the strict religiousness and propriety of the court of the old King. However, as the Regency people had as a model a prince who kept a mistress quite openly, it may have had an effect on

the way people judged such morally dubious conduct in the whole society less strictly than their later Victorian counterparts. Naturally the condoning of such behaviour had to do with the social position of the person in question and that determined the social consequences for the actions.

White (1963:14-18) points out that the Regency period saw the progress of England from a rural country to an industrial force and the world power it was at the end of that period. It also saw the darker side of progress, the misery and poverty of the overcrowded industrialised towns, the ambivalent attitudes the upper classes had about helping them, the country exhausted by wars, the fear of revolution in a changing society with new emerging classes without position in society. It seems that this time of transition between the Regency and the Victorian era is filled with the contradiction between the shameless enjoyment of the new prosperity brought about by industrialisation and the Dickensian workhouses for the poor. As Craik (1969:11) notes, the change that took place resulted in a mixture of old and new. That is why in spite the differences between Regency and Victorian periods there are ideas and beliefs that have stayed unchanged.

White (1963: 46-49) mentions that the old rural world broke down with industry which changed the whole pattern of work from being tied to the seasons to being regulated by the factory bell. One of the side effects of industrialisation was also the urbanisation of England in addition to the growth in population. The urbanisation, in turn, resulted in social mobility and the forming of new classes in society. In Regency England people's social positions were distinct and the relations between members of different classes were defined by the their social standings. There were certain general rules governing the conduct between the classes, which can be seen in the ease Jane Austen deals with confrontation of different classes in her novels. However, as White (1963:54-55) adds, when industrialisation brought wealth to new people in society, they were able to rise with it on the social scale. Naturally there was the difference between the more prestigious inherited wealth and the self made one but nevertheless social mobility became possible. As evidence of this, there emerged a new middle class of factory owners and tradesmen, which the old middle class had trouble accepting. *The noveau rich* were looked down on and thought to be vulgar by the upper middle class with connections to the

aristocracy. White (1963:49) continues to say that another class that emerged was the working class of the industrial towns, who were thought to be dangerous because they had no loyalties to anyone or anywhere. They were just a crowd of people thrown together into horrid conditions with no ties to the community. Both of these groups tried to achieve their rightful position in society and sometimes even violence erupted, as it did with the working class in Peterloo in 1819 but mostly both parties concentrated on peaceful petitioning for parliamentary reform which to some extent the middle class and the working class got in 1832 by working together. By no means was their relationship uncomplicated and the middle class tended to see the working class as something to be patronised and they considered themselves as the proper models for the working class people.

The question of the poor was beginning to worry the middle class gradually. One reason was the French revolution in the late 1780s. Industrialisation was beginning to show its side effects in the wretched conditions of the poor in the urban environment. When the old network of family neighbours and parish had been taken away, there was no one to take care of the poor, old and sick. As mentioned above, the middle class was beginning to worry about the poor and at the same time about the whole excessive life style of the Regency in the upper ranks of society. In order to avoid the same state of corruption which had led to the French revolution, the middle class started a moral reform with the help of puritan revival to restore society. The evangelical movement was strong among the middle class. It was divided into different creeds, the most radical group being the Clapham sect. In addition there was also Utilitarianism with its cult of rationality and practicality. By Victoria's reign Methodism had become the most respectable and main stream form of nonconformity. These creeds were all humanitarian and philanthropic by nature and promoted right conduct, personal and social responsibility, duty and frugality in living. As White (1963:148) points out, Evangelism had a powerful impact in the nineteenth century and its morality changed the immoral and coarse Regency into the serious, respectable and responsible Victorian society. What the Regency also gave to the Victorian era was the concept of charity through the idea of philanthropy. In addition, the seeds of the Victorian concept of self-help were sown. People were taught to help themselves by teaching them, for example to

live within their means. Victorians were keen on self-improvement and the self- help concept went along with that. It could be said that the general air of progress had influenced people, who also had to progress in order to keep up with the changes in their society.

2.2 THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

The official Victorian period begins when Victoria came to the throne in1837. The grey area between the end of the actual Regency in 1820 and the beginning of the actual Victorian Period is where the gradual shift from the liberal and practical Regency into the serious and sensitive Victorian era begins. During the reign of Queen Victoria, Britain rose to the height of its economic and imperial achievement, the foundations of which had been laid during Regency. However, along with the growing empire and the rising comfort of the middle class, grew the measureless poverty and suffering of the lower classes.

As White (1963:145,149) notes, the poor relief, which had begun during the latter part of the Regency period with the help of the Evangelical movement, was mainly charity work done on voluntary basis. However, the middle class succeeded in some of their efforts to help the poor. They managed to bring about the poor law act in 1834, which guided the poor to workhouses. It has been debatable whether the law did much good to the poor or whether it made their existence even more wretched. Walvin (1987:85-87) mentions that another thing the Evangelicals had promoted was schooling for the working class, starting with Sunday schools for children to increasing literacy by providing reading material for the adult population. Walvin notes that providing education on a wider scale was begun when the church of England, worried of losing its hold on society, also took part in education. The factory act in 1833 slightly increased children's time for learning and finally, after long resistance, the state had to intervene in education, first with the Education Act in 1870, which made education the right of every child though not compulsory, and then compulsory with the Education Act of 1880.

Literacy was surprisingly common even among working class people and with the help of the Evangelical movement it even increased. As Walvin

(1987:82) says, this was partly made possible by the technological advancements in printing, papers, ink, transportations and news gathering. In fact, publishing became a prosperous business and books, magazines and newspapers were sold by the millions. Typically, the attitudes towards educating the working class, or helping the poor for that matter, were controversial. Some people believed that it was better to stay in one's own place and the knowledge of something better and out of reach would only make one bitter. Government even reintroduced the Stamp Act in 1855, a sort of tax for newspapers, in order to prevent working class people from reading them. This, however, did not stop people either from publishing or reading. Others believed that educating people would ensure peace in the country and that the advancing industry needed educated people. The working class people themselves wanted education because it offered the only possibility to get ahead and have an influence over matters concerning one's life.

Education was forming into a weapon in the war between the classes. Walvin (1987: 86-87) observes that education was used from the point of view of the upper classes to keep people within their social rank, while the lower ranks would argue that they used education as a means of social advancement. However, when the new middle class and the working class were beginning to be established in society, social mobility came to a halt. The ranks were once again closing in society and the possibility of social climbing became more difficult, if not completely impossible, at least to the working class people. The rigid class divisions were explained by the fact that previously people had known their neighbours and their social ranks but in towns it was more difficult to determine the social position of your neighbours and it became important to hold on to and mark outwardly your own social standing.

Another issue besides education of the masses was prominently placed in the Victorian social discussion and that was the question of women's status in society. This issue also had its roots in Regency, with Mary Wollenstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). She insisted on basic rights for women, who at that point did not have either political, social, economic or legal rights. They did not have the right to property when married or if they divorced, which was highly unlikely, they could not get the custody of the children. Billington (1988:120) mentions that there was also the question of the

growing number of poor, unmarried "surplus" women, who had limited means of supporting themselves and who were beginning to pose a real problem to society. In addition there were outcries to improve women's education. In the Victorian era, in contradiction with the demands for women's rights, women's roles were even more reduced to the confounds of the home in the middle and upper classes when industrialisation removed the necessity of running and supervising large rural households. The working class women on the other hand had their work cut out for them in the factories.

One of the few options for the unmarried surplus women, who needed to support themselves, was to become a governess. A governess was one of those people without position in society because she did not belong either to the household or the servants. It was a bitter experience shared by many women, including Charlotte Brontë.

Women who had money to establish their own schools were considerably more well off than the governesses, since they had the freedom to run things in their own way. These boarding schools were places were many middle class girls got their education. There was a difference between the education given to girls and the education given to boys. Boys were taught Latin and Greek by a private tutor, either in their own homes or in boarding schools such as the one Jane Austen's parents kept. The training the boys got, had its eye on their future education in university and it provided a base for studies in divinity and for a profession among the clergymen.

If, during Regency, the education of boys aimed at turning them into men of profession, the education for girls, as Craik (1969: 48) mentions, prepared them to be mistresses of the homes. As literacy became more general, some sort of education was considered more important for girls too. They had to run their households, which demanded also writing and reading skills in the form of keeping accounts, for example. Billington (1988: 118-119) notes out that in the Victorian period, as life became more prosperous and easier, the middle class girls received education which responded to the demands of their middle class lives. They were taught needlework, painting, music and it was also important for them to be fluent in conversing in Italian or French, skills which were considered as social accomplishments. Billington continues to point out that to this seeming superficiality those who were concerned with women's

education reacted. They demanded more useful education for women, the same kind men were receiving. However, even the most eager reformists of women's education did not intend women to use their knowledge outside home but to become better wives and mothers through their education and to teach their families. A woman's portion was, it seems, to sacrifice herself for others. Hunt (1988:1-2) observes that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, along with the debate on women's position in society, there co-existed a unanimity on what is natural to the female character. According to the Victorian ideal, woman was the "angel in the house" and she was expected to be submissive, chaste, and physically frail, in addition to being religious, self-denying and capable of tremendous feats of self-discipline. Armed with these contradicting characteristics, the Victorian women were seen to represent morality and strength against, harsh and competitive world of business, in which men could not afford to possess moral virtues.

2.3 THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Romanticism or the Romantic movement swept through the arts in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, overlapping the Regency and Victorian periods. There seems to be some disagreement among scholars what constitutes the actual Romantic period. According to Kelly (1989), the period lasted from 1789 to 1830, while Prickett (1981) defines the time from 1770 to 1830. Punter (1989), however, goes the furthest and extends the period from 1785 to 1851. These differences in the time span may shed some light on the far reaching influence that the Romantic movement had, not only on arts, but on the whole society as well.

The Romantic period was an age of progress, the period saw the advent of many scientific and technological developments like steam power, electricity, gas street light, telegraphy and astronomical findings. One of the most profound changes, which the Romantic period also witnessed was the coming of the railways in 1825. White (1963:1) calls Regency "the last truly historical age, in the sense that it is divided from us by a real chasm in time," the chasm" in this case being the railways. Punter (1989:3) points out that the reason for

this intense activity was the great change that the industrial revolution had on peoples' lives.

During the Romantic period, besides scientists, the poets, novelists, painters and musicians were extremely prolific in England. Names like Wordwsworth, Byron, Dickens, Thackerey, Turner, Constable and naturally Austen and Brontë come to mind. As Kelly (1989:24) puts it, the Romantic movement in the arts was the response of the artists to the age of progress and change. The professional middle classes that were at the helm of the whole process of change in society were also responsible for the Romantic movement. Kelly continues to point out that the purpose of the Romantic movement was to "redefine secular culture in the image of the progressive middle classes, by redefining the idea of the self 'the domestic affectations, the experience of community the nation and nature...". In other words the Romantic movement dealt with all the aspects of human life that progress had had an effect on. Moreover, Prickett (1981:5) notes that Romanticism was not only confined to the arts but had an effect on the whole society through politics, religion and philosophy, which were all responding to the industrial growth and its consequences to society. This side of the Romantic movement influenced the way the British saw their own position and its centrality in relation to the other countries in the world

Although there were problems, Britain was undoubtedly an industrial power. Despite the growing competition from other European countries like Germany and later from America, Britain was also an international power with its growing Empire. After losing the American colonies in 1783 Britain expanded to Australia, New Zealand, Africa and Canada. India's role became even more important when the East India company charter turned the trading station into a governed state. The Eastern colonies influenced also the Romantic movement with the interest in the exotic. This was realised in the Brighton Pavilion built by Prince Regent in 1815. The interesting paradox here is that the aristocracy indulged in wasting time and money in upholding the Regency style while the suffering and the poverty were already eminent in towns. Another thing to bolster the ego of the British was the command of the seas and the victory in the Napoleonic wars. All of the above mentioned factors contributed to the rise of patriotism and nationalism in England, although they

did influence other parts of Europe as well, as a part of the Romantic movement. In addition to patriotism and Romanticism there was the rise of heroism due to the celebrated victories of Nelson and Wellington. In the later Victorian period social Darwinism was also used to justify colonialism and the idea of the supremacy of the British race. Punter (1989:11) notes that the self-contentment of the British was however, being eaten away by the problems at home, the ethical questions concerning, for example, slave trade and also the problems posed to the individual by the rapidly changing society.

One of the ideas of the Romantic age which shows the change of emphasis from the times of Regency to the Victorian era is the attitude, particularly visible in arts, towards the countryside and nature in general. Punter (1989: 25-26) points out that as urbanisation began and towns were gradually crowded by people and by the problems related to it, the countryside became a refuge from the town life. This can be seen, for example, in the paintings by Turner and Constable with their depictions of the countryside. Through art was also born the myth that despite the changes in society, the countryside could stay unchanged. The countryside was a remedy for the effects of city life. However, as Punter suggests, The Romantics did not see the countryside as being escapist but as a source of moral and educational superiority to the distractions of life in towns. The countryside emphasised the importance of social and communal bonding within the community, which was missing from the towns comprised of strangers. This theme of social and communal bonding recurs in all Jane Austen's novels.

However, as times changed, the myth of the countryside and the firm belief that it represented the world as it should be, fought against the obvious need for reformations in society. In addition, the cruel laws of nature were recognised to represent similar ones in competitive society. According to Bellamy (1989:135), Brontë's Jane Eyre represents the changed view point of the nineteenth- century Romantic movement in that it deals with the themes of alienation, freedom and self-realisation in the grip of the contradiction between the individual personality and the pressures of the world of work and social conventions. The peaceful haven that nature was once considered to be had turned into a field where passions, both human and inhuman could reign, since they had no place to be realised in the new structures of society. As David

Punter (1989:27) puts it "... as the perceptions of social life changed, so the images of the countryside changed, and Romantic viewpoints swung from the world of innocence to that of passion, from lost childhood to lost emotional freedom."

2.4 AUSTEN'S AND BRONTË'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

For the purpose of this study the Romantic movement provides a suitable background as it includes both Austen and Brontë and links the social and historical changes with the cultural ones. As mentioned above, the Romantic era was a time of intense activity in arts and ~~in~~ particularly in literature. According to Kelly (1989:x), the novel and other kinds of prose fiction were used as means of setting forth and discussing issues centred around the transformations that society was undergoing. Kelly (1989:xi)calls Romantic fiction "a product, or rather articulation, of major social and cultural issues and changes of the Romantic period.". Therefore, as the middle classes were affected by the social upheaval the most, the novel too, was largely a middle class phenomenon and was used in achieving middle class objectives. What was also remarkable was the fact that women were beginning to become prominent in literature, both as readers and writers, as Cunningham(1994:32) notes. He also continues to point out that the novels dealt with issues that were largely from the woman's sphere, namely courtship and marriage, which provided the framework for the story.

According to Kelly (1989:111), many critics think of Jane Austen as the greatest Romantic novelist despite the fact that she wrote tightly controlled realism during the height of the Romantic movement. Kelly continues to point out that Austen's paradoxical status is heightened by the fact that the view of her as a Romantic writer began to develop only at the end of the period, when her novels were republished in early 1830s and for instance, it is a well known fact that Charlotte Brontë, a romantic novelist of the Victorian period, did not like her work. Cunningham (1994:39) explains Austen's realism with the fact that she is more eighteenth century than Victorian and suggests that she is more Classical than Romantic and therefore chooses rationality over unbridled

emotionalism. Kelly (1989:19), however, insists that Austen does belong to the Romantic period because she deals with the central issues of the period, the gentrification of the professional classes, the professionalized gentry and women's position in the professionalized culture. Cunningham(1994:39), who calls Austen pre Victorian, points out one crucial thing which separates her from the Victorian novelists like Brontë, which is the treatment of children. With Austen, children are always in the background while Brontë, in *Jane Eyre* for instance, follows the Victorian model of placing a child and the process of growth as the central thematic focus. Brontë, then, is decidedly a Victorian novelist but also a Romantic, although according to Kelly (1989) and Pricket (1981), she does not belong to the actual time span of the Romantic period. Winnifrith (1973:83) points out that because of poverty and isolation prevented Brontë from reading contemporary novels, her literary influences were derived form the Romantic period. This contact with the Romantic writers can be seen in the subject matter of her novels, which mark her off distinctly as a Romantic in the Victorian period. As Cunningham (1994:41-42) points out, Brontë as well as her sister Emily "take part in the Romantics' championing of the unique individual" and the Gothic and Byronic influences "make their works most striking inheritors of Romanticism in the fiction of the period"

3. THE BIORAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF AUSTEN AND BRONTË

In the following section I will briefly recap the life stories of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë against the historical background presented above. This is done in order to further illuminate the context of historical settings and the writers' circumstances in life.

At first glance the lives of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë seem rather similar in their course. Both were middle class clergymen's daughters. Both of them were imaginative children interested in reading, which is an important factor when considering their writing careers later on. They both seemed to live rather uneventful, quiet lives as spinsters, although Brontë did eventually marry. To the outsider the greatest difference between the two women seems to be the more tragic nature Brontë's life, due to the deaths of her sisters and brother. After closer inspection, however, other differences do emerge in their

lives, some of which can be explained by the historical and cultural settings of their lives and others which are due to their different personalities and personal experiences. I will begin the discussion of the authors' lives with Jane Austen and then move on to Charlotte Brontë while keeping in mind the historical background discussed earlier.

3.1 JANE AUSTEN

Family history and close family connections were important to Jane Austen's parents and they did their best to pass along these values to their children. The tight web of aunts, uncles and cousins, and the immediate family form the background of Jane Austen's life. In addition, her literary origins lie partly in that background. Therefore I will start the description of Austen's life with a summary of her parents background and then move on to her brothers and sister before concentrating on the writer herself.

Jane Austen's family from her father's side had been clothiers in Kent from the Middle Ages. They were also part of the middle class landowning gentry in the area of Sevenoaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a sign of prosperity the Austens acquired two manor houses in Kent. However, combined with the gentry's need to educate their offspring for careers in the church, military or law, the maintenance of their life style faced some financial ups and downs and most of the Austens ended up only moderately wealthy. Some branches of the Austen family were decidedly rich but George Austen, Jane's father, came from a poorer branch of the family. His father was a surgeon, which placed the family near the bottom of the middle class scale.(Halperin 1984: 16-17.)

George Austen was born in 1731 and he had two sisters, Philadelphia and Leonora, who died young. When their mother died, their father remarried, only to die soon after. Tomalin (1997:14) mentions that George and his sisters were left with their stepmother, who felt no obligation to look after the orphaned children and they were sent to live with their relatives. George was sent to his aunt Hooper in Tonbridge and there he went to school for six years studying the classical subjects, after which he received a scholarship to St

John's College, Oxford. He was successful in his studies and the studies in divinity led him to be ordained at twenty-four.

Although George was at an age to be married, he did not have realistic possibilities for it because he had no home of his own and little fortune. When he was offered the position of second Master in his old school in Tonbridge, he accepted it. Although it provided him with a home and some additional income by logding pupils, it was not enough for an independent life. He had wisely kept up his contacts in Oxford and was finally asked to take care of the duties of assistant chaplain. In addition, he became a proctor and was known as the "handsome proctor" for his good looks. He was also considered good natured and cordial, both were things he emphasised later on to his children in their conduct. (Halperin 1984: 17-18.)

If George Austen's family came from the lower middle class and did not have links with the aristocracy, according to Tomalin (1997:11, 18),his wife Cassandra Leigh's did and although she was a practical and unpretentious woman, she was proud of her family tree. The Leighs were descended from Sir Thomas Leigh, who was the Lord Mayor of London in the accession Elizabeth the first and had proclaimed her Queen. Another ancestor was Sir Thomas White, the founder of St John's college, Oxford. One branch of the family had been ennobled and they owned Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire, others married aristocrats. In fact the name Cassandra, passed along in the family, came from Cassandra Willoughby, the wife of a great uncle who became the first Duke of Chandos. Education was important in the Leigh family too. Cassandra's father was appointed early in his life a Fellow of All Saints College, Oxford and his brother Theophilus was the Master of Balliol for fifty years. It is assumed that through this Oxford connection George Austen and Cassandra Leigh first met.

Cassandra Leigh's father was a Rector of Harpsden, near Henley-on – Thames. There Cassandra grew up with her sister Jane and brother James. She had another brother, Thomas, but because he was handicapped, he did not live at home. (Halperin 1984: 18-19) Halperin (1984:17) notes that Cassandra was said to be sensible, practical, hard working and pious. She was also described as beautiful but to have a sharp turn of speech. Tomalin (1997: 11, 23) mentions that as a child she began writing, which continued in her adult life

also. It is easy to see that some of these qualities were transferred to her daughter Jane.

Tomalin (1997:12-19) notes that the marriage of George and Cassandra did not take place immediately because Cassandra's father was not all that happy about the prospects of his daughter's marriage and therefore did not condone it. He, however, died and with the help of the small inheritance Cassandra got, together with that of George's, the young couple was able to get married and start a life together. In addition, George was offered a living at Steventon and they were married on 26 April in 1764.

After they had settled in, Cassandra assumed the duties of country parson's wife. She took care of the household, the poultry yard and the dairy with her excellent skills of organization. Three years before Jane was born the Austens started to take in pupils to increase their income to support the growing number of their children. This naturally added to the work of Mrs Austen who had to oversee the preparation of meals for the students as well as the washing of their laundry (Tomalin 1997: 3-23.) Mr Austen was responsible for the education of the students. At the same time he also taught his own boys. Halperin (1984: 17-18) mentions that in addition to teaching and his clerical duties he also had the duties of a country gentleman in supervising the farm attached to the Rectory, as well as acting as a sort of a squire, on behalf of Mr Knight, to the manor house at Steventon and the land around it. George Austen was also a scholar and spent time in his library among books, which were later fully available to young Jane.

The Austen family began to expand rapidly with the birth of the first three sons in three consecutive years. When they moved to Steventon the number of children was increased by four in four years. To support such a large family was of course costly and Mr Austen ended up owing money to both sides of the family. Tomalin (1997: 5-6) points out that Mr and Mrs Austen cared deeply about their children, although to the modern parent their child rearing method may seem rather strange. When the child was a few months old it was placed in a surrogate family in the village for a year or so and then taken back when it became more manageable. This method was widely used and accepted in those days and it was not considered to be in any way harmful for the child. The reason why the Austens used it may lie in the pragmatic nature of Mrs Austen,

who probably ran the large household more easily without the demands posed by a baby dependent on its mother.

From the physical side of things their arrangement seemed to have worked well, since in the age of high mortality rate in children all theirs survived. The emotional side, however, is a different matter. This switching back and forth of babies must have been a painful experience for the children. It is very likely that, at least, to some extent the experience did have an effect on the individual which later on might have shown as sings of insecurity and fear of rejection. Jane Austen is a case in point. Her relationship with her mother was strained with emotional distance and the overall defensive tone found in her letters could be understood as reaction against rejection (Tomalin 1997: 6-7.)

Despite their singular method for rearing babies the Austens managed to raise a tightly knit family of clever children. Altogether there were eight children in the Austen family, six boys and two girls. Jane was the seventh of the eight. She was born on 16 December in 1775 at the Steventon rectory which was to be her home for the next twenty-five years. The Austen family was full of intelligent, active and enterprising individuals, with the exception of George, who was handicapped and did not live home. James and Henry turned out to be clergymen like their father. Henry, who was Jane's favourite brother, was also her adviser in practical and literary matters. Edward came into money when he inherited his fathers connections, the Knights, and became the owner of Godmersham Park. The two younger brothers Francis and Charles launched themselves into successful careers in the navy. The brothers all had large families, and Jane and Cassandra often visited them to help nurse the children while their sisters-in-law were confined to the bed, yet with another baby. If Henry was Jane's favourite, the most important of her siblings to her was Cassandra. The two sisters shared their deepest thoughts and feelings and with each other they could let their guards down and Jane's relationship was closer to her sister than to her mother. Cassandra in turn described Jane as "the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow." (Halperin 1984: 21-24)

Jane, or Jenny as she was called, grew up among the energetic and diverse Austens. She became the family's pet with her clever mind and her amusing stories. As a child she was surrounded by boys. There were, of course, her own

brothers but also her father's students occupying the house. According to Tomalin (1997: 26-30), she was always at ease with boys for having participated in their games from her early childhood. The boys' influence in her life can be seen, first of all in her early writings, which were full of black humour and rude jokes typical of adolescent boys and secondly in *Northanger Abbey,* in which the heroine is depicted as a tomboy in her childhood, thus offering indirect evidence of Jane's own childhood. Through her association with boys Jane was tough and unsentimental but she was also shy as a child, which may have caused her cousin Phila Walter to describe her as "whimsical and affected" and " not at all pretty or feminine". (Tomalin 1997: 26-59.)

The Austen boys were educated at home by their father with the other students and James and Henry continued to study even further in Oxford with the help of the Founders Kin Scholarship that they got through their mother's relations. The two girls, Jane and Cassandra, were, however, sent to a boarding school at an early age. (Halperin 1984:21-22.) Tomalin (1997: 32) suggests as a reason for this the Austens' financial difficulties, with the girls gone there would have been more room to lodge more pupils. Halperin (1984: 25) adds to this the busy life of Mrs Austin with her household duties and lack of time for instructing the girls. In 1784 the girls were sent to Mrs Crawley's school in Oxford with their cousin Jane Cooper. Jane was rather young to go to a boarding school but she may have wanted to follow her sister, to whom she was more closely attached than to her mother. Most boarding schools at the time seemed to have been wretched places offering inadequate nutrition, living space and education. There is no knowledge what the conditions were at Mrs Crawley's school but as Tomalin (1997: 33-34) points out, merely the change form the countryside Rectory to living in a town house in Oxford must have been difficult for a seven-year-old used to running around freely, not to mention being cut off from the family. Mrs Crawley moved her school to Southampton and there an infectious fever spread among the pupils. The Austen girls and their cousin caught the disease also and were taken home, just in time, to be nursed back to health. Tomalin (1997:36-37)suggests that while Jane was at Mrs Crawley's she may have taken refuge as a shy and lonely child in books, which began developing the imagination of that little girl.

The girls stayed at home for a year before they were sent away to another school in Reading. The headmistress of the Abbey school was Madame La Tournelle, who in spite of her name turned out to be an Englishwoman called Sarah Hicks. According to Tomalin (1997:41-42), although the place was better than the previous one, it at least had a beautiful garden for the girls to walk in, much cannot be said about the educational side of the establishment. The mistress, herself, mainly told stories of the theatrical world and evidently the girls performed plays at school. Otherwise the pupils were taught French, spelling and needlework in addition to having piano and dancing lessons. According to Halperin (1984: 25-26), Jane and Cassandra spent there nearly two years not learning much since there were only a few lessons a day. This probably caused Mr Austen to remove the girls from the Abbey school thus ending their formal education in1786.

As an adult Jane criticised the type of formal education she herself had gotten. Halperin (1984: 46) points out that in her novels Austen often scorned what she called the acquiring of "accomplishments" because they substitute real learning for methods used in landing a husband. In general she had a rather bleak picture of women's education. Her own experiences at boarding schools left her with the idea of the teacher's position as pitiable and the schools themselves being "places of torment for pupils and teachers alike" as Tomalin (1997: 36-37) puts it.

Jane's education was completed at home, after she left school at the age of eleven with the help of her father and his library. She managed to read extensively at an early age. Halperin (1984: 27) suggests that this was due to he frank atmosphere of the Georgian age which did not limit the subject matter for reading or conversation, and although Jane's education may have been haphazard, it was a liberal one. For instance, she read classics such as Shakespeare and Milton. Her open minded father even allowed her to read Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* with its detailed descriptions of drunkenness and adultery. Her brother Henry trying to preserve her respectability toned down her literary taste in his biographical note in 1817 by saying that "she recoiled from everything gross". Tomalin (1997: 47), however, points out that although she may have recoiled, she read and took pleasure first. Her favourite contemporary writers were Cowper and Johnson,

who, according to Tomalin (1997: 67-68), directly influenced Austen's style which has a similar graveness and wittiness as Johnson's.

Besides the above mentioned Richardson, Jane Austen read the fiction of other eighteenth century novelists such as Fielding and Scott and their female counterparts Charlotte Smith, Maria Edgeworth and Fanny Burney to mention just a few. Austen did not, however, let her reading affect the formation of what Tomalin (1997: 68-73) calls her "own voice". Instead she took what was of use to her from what she read and modified it for her own purposes. Tomalin continues that Austen also took notice of what was negative and learnt from it. This was the case with Fanny Burns, who taught Austen to be short and to exclude and to prefer the imperfect heroine to the nearly perfect one, common in the fiction of that time.

With her extensive reading she also acquired the "critical eye of the satirist", as Halperin (1984: 35) puts it. In her early works she ridicules the overtly sentimental and sensational popular fiction, particularly the Gothic novel, which she parodies in *Northanger Abbey.* Her unsentimental nature seems to have aided the development of her ironic and satirical vein which she so skilfully used in her later works as Halperin notes.

The Austens were also eager to read and perform plays. Tomalin (1997: 54-58) notes that their cousin Eliza, who had married a French aristocrat and mixed with the best societies in France and in London, was a great influence on them with her knowledge of the newest plays. She stayed with the Austens during the French revolution and passed on her passion for the theatre to them. According to Halperin (1984: 29-30) the plays performed at the Rectory included Thomas Francklin's *Matilda,* Garrick's *Bon Ton* and Mrs Centlivre's *A wonder: A Woman Keeps A secret.* It is fairly obvious that young Jane would have been fascinated by these theatricals and to some extent taken part in them. It is interesting to see that Henry in his biographical note left out the plays read and performed in the family, as Tomalin (1997:67) points out. She suggests that Henry might have considered it in appropriate at the time in 1817. It seems that by then the times had changed from the liberal Regency to the more serious and prude pre -Victorian period.

Halperin (1984:20- 30) points out that most of the Austen family had literary leanings and while Henry and James were at college, they had helped

establish a periodical, *The Loiterer*, which Jane read and also later contributed to. Halperin continues to say that the Austens were also articulate people and in addition to plays they liked all sorts of charades, riddles and games. It is no wonder that this inspiring environment fostered Jane's ability to write. According to Halperin (1984: 36) most of her juvenilia was written between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. She began writing for the family's amusement and although, as Tomalin (1997: 65-66) says, her stories were rather bold for a girl her age she was encouraged by her family to continue with her interest. Her father, who admired her daughter, even provided her with the paper which at the time was an expensive commodity.

With the exception of her budding career as a novelist Jane Austen was a typical young woman of her time with similar hopes and dreams for the future as all the other girls her age had. As Tomalin (1997:74-75) points out, the transition from a girl to a woman must have been somewhat awkward in a house full of boys.

Jane's world gradually began widening beyond the Rectory with new friendships among the new families in the neighbourhood. There were the Lloyd sisters, Mary and Martha, who later became Jane's in-laws when her brothers James and Francis married them, and the Bigg-Wither girls, with whom Jane could share the experiences involved in becoming a woman, as Tomalin (1997: 75) notes.

By the time Jane was sixteen two of her brothers were already married and Cassandra was about to be engaged with Tom Fowle, one of her fathers former students. In addition there was the romantic wedding of her cousin Jane Cooper and a young naval officer, who got married regardless of their parents' warnings. Tomalin (1997: 79) suggests that these events made Jane ponder the question of a woman's control over her own destiny. The answer she seemed to have reached was money, the subject later to appear in her novels. Her aunt Philadelphia's experiences as a young girl, sent to India in search of a husband, had a great effect on Jane, who even wrote a story about it. She obviously began to wonder the lengths women should go in order to secure their future happiness and prosperity and whether these two were even possible to achieve together.

The Austens' neighbourhood, which consisted of clergymen, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and aristocrats, offered the young women the chance to "come out" into the society by taking part in balls. This "coming out" was not as formal in the country as it was in towns, the girls had, after all, been joining these dances since they were children. Naturally, Jane too took part in these dances and after Cassadra's engagement it was her official turn to come out. Tomalin (1997: 102) quotes Henry Austen's words on his sister: "Jane was fond of dancing and excelled in it". No doubt she enjoyed dancing and the attention of young men and evidently she also loved flirting with them.

During her sister's engagement Jane, too, had her first attempt in romance. In December 1795 she met a handsome Irishman, Tom Lefroy at a ball. He was the same age as Jane and studying to be a lawyer. Jane Austen has been said to have enjoyed flirting as much as she loved dancing and in a letter to Cassandra she informed her of practising both of them with her "Irish friend". She certainly was not a wall flower and as Tomalin (1997: 114) notes, she must have been fully aware that her behaviour had been noticed by the neighbours. However much in love the young couple might have been, there were no realistic prospects for their marriage. According to Tomalin (1997: 119-120) Tom, who had to fulfil the expectations of his family could not afford to risk his future for a penniless girl. Therefore his aunt sent him away before any further damage would be done and Jane never saw him again. Jane did not forget her first love so easily, instead she channelled her emotions into writing, as Tomalin points out. Later Mrs Lefroy introduced Jane to Mr Blackall, a clergyman, as if to make up for sending Tom away. Mr Blackall seemed to be interested in Jane but the feeling was not mutual, which ended the whole awkward episode. Tomalin (1997: 130) observes that Jane seemed to share the problem of most intelligent women with a sharp tongue, which is that she was too intimidating for insecure young men to be approached.

In Jane Austen's supposedly uneventful life, there were also other, more or less, romantic encounters. One of the more romantic and mysterious ones took place, according to Tomalin (1997:179), in a Devon resort on a family holiday. There she apparently met a young man who showed interest in her, which Jane returned. Plans were made to meet the next summer but before this could take place the mysterious man was dead. She also rejected at least two suitors,

herself. The first one of these proposals she, in fact, accepted at first but later changed her mind. The proposal was made by Harris Bigg-Wither, the brother of her good friends, in 1802. He was the heir to his father's estates and would have guaranteed Jane a secure future and a family. The marriage would have also enabled Jane to help her sister and brothers in their lives. After considering the offer she decided to reject it, apparently coming to the conclusion that the financial point of view and respect were not enough to make a good marriage, although she must have made the painful realization that this had probably been her last chance of marriage and family of her own, as Tomalin (1997: 182) points out.

Later in her life Austen had an ambivalent attitude towards marriage, to say the least, most likely based on her own experiences. On one hand she realized that the position of an unmarried woman of small fortune, like herself was difficult in society and that marriage would at least bring financial security. On the other hand marrying merely for money was not the solution either, since it did not guarantee happiness. She herself had come to that conclusion. She also instructed her nieces not to marry without affection but to marry wisely (Halperin 1984: 262-263). In her novels she seems to exhort the power and control she did not have over her own life by placing her heroines in marriages which include both love and money. In her later works, such as *Emma* she does have her heroine weigh the possibility of remaining unmarried but as Halperin (1984: 271-273) points out, Emma is not dependent on anyone. She is wealthy and does not need a spouse to support her, in her case being alone does not take away her respectability. The opposite example in the novel is Jane Fairfax, who does not have the security brought about by wealth and her destiny seems to be that of the governess. Another thing that Jane Austen resented as a single woman was being at the mercy of others. Tomalin (1997:135) says that Jane felt she was treated condescendingly as the poor relative by her brother Edward and his wife.

Jane Austen was also rather ambivalent in attitude towards children. She loved her nieces James' Anna, and Edward's Fanny but as the number of her nieces and nephews grew she became less happy to spend time with them. This was probably because the increased number of children meant less time for writing. She also witnessed many of her sisters-in-law dying in childbirth,

which may have influenced her to resign from the idea of having children of her own.

Austen was well aware of women's problems with her first hand knowledge, but still she seems to be quiet about their rights even though hers was the age of Mary Wollenstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of women.* At least she must have shared Wollenstonecraft's arguments for better education and status of women to some extent. Austen may not have been so outspoken in her views as Wollenstonecraft but, as Tomalin (1997:139-140) points out, her books insisted on the moral and intellectual parity of the sexes. Religion is another matter where Austen has little to say. This may be due to the fact that religion was a natural part of her life. Tomalin notes that she does mock snobbish and self-serving clergymen, like Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* but mostly she is interested in how religion is used for different reasons and practised in different ways.

Jane Austen began writing, as mentioned before, for the amusement of her family. This juvenilia was written between 1787 and 1793 and it mainly consisted of short tales, epistolary novels and bits of plays, according to Halperin (1984:35-36). He continues to state that Austen's juvenilia is defined by ridicule and mockery and that despite her young age she had already acquired a certain detachment and moral distance which enabled her write in that satirical vein.

From the year 1796 to 1799 Jane Austen was prolific, producing three major novels which were later to be known as *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey.* Tomalin (1997:120) suggests two reasons for this increased output. First of all, there was the departure of Tom Lefroy, which may have prompted Jane to turn to writing in order to forget her heartache, Secondly, the Austens decided to give up taking pupils, which meant more freetime and privacy for Jane to write.

According to Tomalin (1997:154-166) in October 1796 she began writing *First Impressions* which was to become *Pride and Prejudice.* She finished it in nine months after which she took out *Elinor and Marianne* and began revising it. *Elinor and Marianne* was a novel in letters begun in 1795 but Austen was not happy with the form of the novel and changed it into direct narrative. The revision was ready in 1798 and she renamed the novel *Sense and Sensibility.*

The same year she began working on yet another novel called *Susan*, later changed to *Catharine*. The final title of the book was *Northanger Abbey*, which was given to it when it was finally published in 1817 posthumously. The other two of her books took also nearly twenty years before they were published.

During the long period between the first drafts and the final publication Jane Austen revised her work, in addition to changing their names. According to Tomalin (1997:154), although there are no existing manuscripts of drafts as evidence of her revisions, there are some clues of it in the novels themselves, such as the insertions of names of novels and poems which could not have been in the earlier versions.

According to Tomalin (1997: 155), *Sense and Sensibility* is a debate, based on the discussion in society in 1790s on the extent of society's toleration of openness. *Pride and Prejudice* is a full blooded comedy and romance, which is remarkable since, as Tomalin (1997:159-165) points out the time when it was written was a difficult one for the Austen sisters with the death of Cassandra's fiancé and Tom Lefroy's departure. Tomalin suggests that Austen used the novel as a means of detaching herself from her bleak personal circumstances. Tomalin mentions that the last novel from that period *Northanger Abbey* is a light hearted satire, which was started in the wake of yet another family tragedy, the death of Jane's cousin Jane Williams.

When Jane Austen turned twenty-five something happened that put an end to her creative activity for ten years. This was her parents decision to move to Bath. Tomalin (1997:173) notes that the move came as a shock to Jane and plunged her into depression by bringing back the earlier, bad childhood experiences of being sent away from home. Once again she was sent away from everything familiar and made to feel she had no control over her own life. In addition the move posed practical difficulties for her work destroying the pattern of working she had created for herself.

Although her creative side suffered from the removal to Bath, as well as from the almost continual travelling that took place during that time, there were attempts to get her work published. Years earlier, her father had contacted a publisher called Caddel on *First Impressions* but it had been promptly refused. Now Henry took over and in 1803 contacted publisher Richard Crosby, offering him the manuscript of *Northanger Abbey*, called *Susan* at that point. It

was bought for ten pounds, but to Jane's disappointment, it was not published. Jane also started on a novel called *the Watsons* but the tone of the book is cheerless and pessimistic, unlike the earlier novels, as Tomalin (1997:184-186) points out. In addition, when Jane's father died in 1805 she decided to give up the book. The Austen women were left to be supported by the brothers and finally Edward had to offer a cottage in the village of Chawton in Hampshire as a permanent home for them. According to Tomalin (1997:209) the moving into a permanent residence restored Jane's creative powers.

Tomalin(1997:218) notes that Henry continued in his attempts to find a publisher for Jane and in 1810 he got Thomas Egerton of Military library to agree to publish Sense and Sensibility on commission. The advertisement on the book appeared in a newspaper in October 1811 and by the summer of 1816 it was sold out, making Jane a profit of 140 pounds. Since Sense and Sensibility was a success, the publisher wanted to buy her next work and Pride and Prejudice was bought in 1812. When it was published it got the most favourable reviews and Austen was also being read by the most influential people in the Kingdom, namely those belonging to the court of Prince Regent. The same court caused offence with its outrageous behaviour in most ordinary people and, as Tomalin (1997:226) points out, Austen's *Mansfield Par*k is a novel about the condition of England, examining the model of behaviour the court presented for society. *Mansfield Park*, began in1811, is perhaps the most controversial of Austen's novels. Others defend it for its high morality, while others abhor the priggish heroine Fanny. The next novel Austen started working on in 1814 was *Emma*. It was completely different from its predecessor and, according to Tomalin (1997:250), it is generally considered Austen's most perfect book. *Emma* is also dedicated to Prince Regent, although Jane was not very enthusiastic about it. The book was published by a new publisher, John Murray, since the association between Austen and Eagerton ended after the publication of *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's last completed book was *Persuasion*, or *the Elliots*, which was Jane Austen's working title for the book. At that time Jane also bought back the manuscript of *Northanger Abbey*, still called *Susan* from Crosby, which she began revising and changed the name into *Catharine*. *Persuasion* was finished in 1816 and it is the only one of her novels to offer any evidence on her

revisions with its two discarded chapters. Tomalin (1997:257) notes that they show us how tightly and economically Jane Austen wrote. According to Tomalin (1997:258-259) *Persuasion* is a book on a new England where social mobility is both possible and acceptable through hard work. It is easy to see that the character of Captain Wentworth is partly based on Jane's brothers Francis and Charles, who were naval officers like Wenworth and rose on the social scale through their own merit. It also shows that the old fashioned values of prudence, rank and family can sometimes be wrong. *Persuasion* also has a more romantic vein then her other books.

After *Persuasion* Austen began writing a novel called *Sanditon* which was never finished. According to Tomalin (1997:256-273), she had begun feeling ill while she was working on *Persuasion,* but had refused to acknowledge her symptoms, which she thought resembled rheumatism, and at the end of January 1817 she was sure of her improved health. Between March and April her condition got worse with fever and bilious attack and she agreed to be taken to Winchester to be under the supervision of the surgeons there. Cassandra, naturally, went with her and they settled in a house on College street. Two days before her death, Jane dictated a comic verse to Cassandra as if to spite her impending faith. On 18 July she died after having a seizure of some kind. She was buried in the Winchester Cathedral. *The Elliots* and *Catharine*, renamed by Henry and Cassandra as *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published five months after her death.

Jane Austen's feelings towards being known as an author had been divided. On one hand she had been frustrated with not being able to discuss her work, or her darling children as she called them, openly. On the other hand she had wanted to keep her privacy and had refused to take part in any literary gatherings to which Henry had offered to take her in London.

Such was the life of the woman and the novelist, the life, which was in fact quite the opposite of the one described later by her nephew : "Of events her life was singularly barren: few changes and no crisis ever broke the smooth current of its course..." (Halperin 1984:4).

3.2 CHARLOTTE BRONTË

As was mentioned above, Jane Austen's life was marked by the closeness of family connections and family history. Charlotte Brontë's life also revolved around her family but its characteristics were very different from Jane Austen's. The Brontës led a secluded life, in the secluded moors of Yorkshire, far away from the scarce number of existing relatives. Patrick Brontë had left Ireland for a better life in England but the rest of his family still remained there. His wife, Maria, was from Cornwall and by the time she married Patrick Brontë, she had lost both of her parents. The family circle narrowed even further when Maria Brontë died, leaving the children with their father, who was a rather distant, yet dominating figure in their lives.

Patrick Brontë was the eldest son of an illiterate Irish farm labourer Hugh Brunty. He was born on St Patrick's Day in 1777. The family lived in the north of Ireland in County Down. The Bruntys were poor but Patrick turned out to be an ambitious and intelligent young man who was also an avid reader of the Greek and Latin classics. At the age of twelve he apprenticed to a blacksmith and at sixteen to a village schoolmaster. While he was teaching at the school he was discovered by Reverend Tighe, a Methodist and friend of Wesley. Mr Tighe was also a fellow of St John's College, Cambridge and in 1802 Patrick was sent there to study theology and classics. There he was elevated from a peasant's position to the company of the young lord Palmerston, who later became Prime Minister.

It was during his time in Cambridge that he changed his name to Brontë, which is a Greek word meaning the sound of thunder. According to Gordon (1994:61), in addition to changing his name, he saw his family only once after his ordination in 1806. Gordon further mentions that in Cambridge he also managed to move into the inner circle of the Evangelicals with the backing of the reformer William Wilberforce and the celebrated preacher, Henry Martin. As a result of this, he finally acquired a gentleman's position in the church of England. This was no meagre achievement for the son of an Irish peasant but his swift change of class also made him conscious of his low origins and he did his best to hide them by emphasising the importance of his position for the rest

of his life and also, as Mrs Gaskell (1875:177) notes, by telling fabricated stories to his children of his family being the descendants of an ancient family.

Patrick Brontë was a man who stood firmly by his own opinions and prejudices. He was by no means an easy person to get along with. Gordon (1994:10) mentions that he kept his distance, not only from his family in Ireland, but also from his own children. According to Mrs Gaskell (1875:87-89), he had very particular ideas about nutrition, which he also applied to his children, who were not allowed to eat meat , for example. Also in other areas of life he practised rather stoic principles, which naturally affected his children, He believed in life of simplicity without the pleasures of food and dress. According to a story told by a servant to Mrs Gaskell , he had burnt pairs of coloured boots that were given to his children because he thought them too fancy and luxurious for them. Similarly, he had torn his wife's silk gown because it went against his notions of propriety. Behind the resolute stoicism lurked his strong, volcanic temper which he worked off, according to Mrs Gaskell, by firing pistols in the back yard, or as he once did, by sawing off the backs of chairs.

If Mr Brontë was somewhat eccentric, his wife, Maria, was a gentle and pious daughter of a merchant from Penzance, Cornwall. Mr and Mrs Thomas Branwell had four daughters and one son. Maria was the youngest of the daughters, and born in 1782.The Branwells were Methodists and well enough descended on both sides so that they were able to mix in the best society of Penzance. There is not much evidence left of Maria Branwell's life but evidently she too was quite well read, as Mrs Gaskell (1875: 83) points out, based on Maria's letters. Maria met the handsome read headed Irishman while they both were at Hartshead. When the couple met in the summer of 1812, Mr Brontë was thirty-five and the recently orphaned Maria was twenty-nine. Since they were both over the first bloom of youth and their financial situation was adequate with Mr Brontë's living at Hartshead and Maria's annuity of £50, there were no objection for their marriage. The marriage took place in December 1812 after a warm and playful correspondence on Maria's part, as Gordon (1994: 7) puts it.

First the family lived in Hightown where the two eldest daughters were born. From there they moved to Thornton where Charlotte Brontë was born in

1816. She was the third child of Patrick and Maria Brontë. Altogether there were six children in the family. The first two daughters, Maria and Elizabeth were born within a year of each other, in 1814 and 1815. The only boy, Branwell was born a year after Charlotte in 1817 and the youngest of the children, Emily and Anne were also born in consecutive years, 1818 and 1819. Naturally the yearly childbirths took their toll on the mother, who died in 1821 at the age of thirty-nine, when the eldest daughter was only seven. A year earlier the family had moved to Haworth, a small, bleak town on the Yorkshire moors, when Patrick Brontë had been appointed its curate. There Charlotte and her sisters were to spend most of their lives among the rough, wilful and independent people and nature of Yorkshire. It is only natural that these surroundings and events affected and moulded the Brontë children to a great extent.

According to Gordon (1994: 10-27), after their mother's death the children were left for the most part on their own, for their father was occupied with his work in the parish and generally showed little interest in them, with the exception of the education of his only son. In fact, Maria, as the eldest, had been in charge of the younger ones ever since the family moved to Haworth because their mother had been ill and confined to her bed. When Maria Brontë was dying her sister Elizabeth Branwell came to look after her and the children and after Maria's death she stayed on. Gordon notes that although the children respected her and she did take care of their physical needs, they remained emotionally distant from their aunt. This was probably caused by the fact that, while their mother was ill, the children had developed a tightly-knit community of their own to satisfy their emotional security, with Maria as a surrogate mother to the others. The only older woman in the family that the children truly loved was their servant, Tabby, a Yorkshire native, who probably provided the future authors in the family with much of their materials with her stories of the sometimes gruesome local past.

As to their education at home, the children were also left to their own devices with the exception of Branwell who was the only one to receive a classical education from his father. The girls were left with reading their father's books, which they managed to do quite extensively, from geography books to *Pilgrim's Progress.* They also read the classics of Shakespeare, Scott,

Byron and Wordsworth, as Mrs Gaskell (1875: 87) points out. They were also very aware of what was going on in the world from an early age, since they were in the habit of reading newspapers. The practise was that Maria, as the eldest, reported the news to the others. In addition to facts, the Brontë children were also involved in a rich fantasy world, created mainly by Charlotte and Branwell between the years 1825-1830. The fantasy kingdom of Angria, as well as its inhabitants, were the combined product of the books and news the children read and the wild Yorkshire moors where they roamed letting their imagination fly.

The children lived a secluded life from the rest of the village, which naturally emphasised their closeness. Their seclusion was to a great extent due to Mr Brontë, who was in fact rather snobbish, and thought that the villagers were not suitable company for his family. The Brontës were not, however, high enough on the social scale either, to mingle with landowning gentry of the area. Mr Brontë's snobbishness was connected with his attempt to hide the traces of his own humble origins. He managed to install in his children a sense of strangeness from others, which they carried with them for the rest of their lives, so that eventually they felt that the only place in the whole world where they could be themselves and be understood by others was their home in the moors.

When Maria Brontë died, Mr Brontë's income was reduced to under £200. The Branwell's offered no help with the children, except the aid of Elizabeth Branwell. Mr Brontë understood what the consequences of the poor financial situation meant for his daughters. He realised the necessity of preparing them to earn their own livings since they were unlikely to marry. As the common profession for women in his daughters position was that of governess, Patrick Brontë decided to find a school that would provide the suitable education, as Gordon (1994: 14) mentions.

Maria and Elizabeth, aged 10 and 9, were sent to a charity school for daughters of poor clergymen at Cowan Bridge in July 1824. Charlotte joined her sisters in August and was followed by Emily in November. At the time Charlotte was 8 and Emily was 6 years old. The school at Cowan Bridge fitted the descriptions of the horrid early Victorian boarding schools for girls. It was situated in a damp place with poor sanitation. In addition to these factors, the diet offered there was virtually inedible and the Brontë girls, were soon semi-

starved. The school's founder William Carus Willson emphasised Christian resignation in the girls, believing that cutting off their hair and keeping their diet to minimum would help them to accept their humble position. He also constantly reminded the girls that they were objects of charity, which must have been difficult for Charlotte to accept since she had been taught at home to be proud of her family and its alleged ancestors. The bad conditions at the school predisposed the pupils to a typhus epidemic in the spring of 1825 and Maria and Elizabeth contracted tuberculosis, of which they later that year died. At that point Mr Brontë decided to bring Charlotte and Emily home from the school. The family had gone through three losses in a short period of time, which made the remaining children even more close and dependent on each other. During the time the children spent at home from 1825 to 1830 the Brontë Juvenilia was born. As mentioned above, the children were engaged in a rich fantasy world of their own, which they had based on the books and news they had read and the tales Tabby told them. According to Mrs Gaskell (1875: 110-112), there were tales, dramas, poems and romances written in abundance between the years 1825-1830. The master minds behind the manuscripts like Young Men's Magazine and the story world that became Angria were principally Charlotte and Branwell and for instance, in the plays that the children made up, Anne and Emily were put in minor roles. In their writing the brother and sister balanced each other, Charlotte adding romance to Branwell's wars, as Gordon (1994:26-29) points out. Gordon continues to say, however, that they were also opposed to each other from the start with Charlotte rebelling against Branwell's Byronic pretensions, while Charlotte, before finding her adult voice based on experiences, relied on imitating feelings which resulted in banal, overtly romantic longing. Despite the close connection with her brother, Charlotte did make up a story with Emily, that excluded Branwell. This "bed play" as Charlotte called it, was too secret to be written down, but as Gordon notes, it was the beginning of the inventive bond between the sisters that was to continue throughout their lives. In addition, the dream world the children developed influenced their writing later on and for Charlotte, it proved to be quite difficult to tear herself away from it.

In January 1831 the dream partners were separated when Charlotte went to school again. This time the experience was to be more tolerable. The place was

Roe Head school at Mirfield and the headmistress was a Miss Wooler. Her educational emphasis was on health, conduct and the elevated tone of *belles letters*. In practise the girls were taught grammar, French, geography and politeness of conduct. When Charlotte arrived at the school she was well read but behind in the formal subjects such as grammar and geography. She was, however, an eager leaner and by the time she left the school a year and a half later she was Miss Wooler's top pupil. While she was at school she made friends with Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey, who were to become her life long friends.

At Roe Head Charlotte was homesick and felt misplaced, as a charity case, among the wealthy factory owners' daughters. However, her loneliness ended when Ellen Nussey arrived at the school. She was from a respected family of the area, the family, however, was not rich and Ellen was in the same situation as Charlotte with little or no prospects of marriage. Charlotte referred to Ellen as a conventional, calm and steady girl and therefore suited for her more intense personality. Gordon (1994: 42), however, mentions that Charlotte's statement undermines Ellen's capacity to understand and empathise with her friend's inner life. Within the boundaries of their friendship she offered Charlotte the freedom to express her true feelings and thoughts. In addition, Ellen had the capacity to look past the superficial eccentricities of Anne and Emily and she was accepted as their friend as well.

If Ellen was the warm empathiser, Charlotte's other friend Mary Taylor was forthright and tactless. On her arrival at Roe Head she told poor, plain Charlotte how ugly she was. When she later apologised, Charlotte told her that her words did her only good. Mary's bluntness had woken her to reality from the dream world of her childhood, which still had a hold on her. Mary's no-nonsense attitude was inherited from her radical family, which fascinated Charlotte to the extent that Mr Taylor, who was a mixture of Yorkshire bluntness and continental cultivation ended up as the figure of Mr Hunsden in *The Professor*. Mary, like her father, was alert to social injustice and in particularly she was concerned about the constrictions society forced upon women. Mrs Gaskell (1875: 170-171) quotes Mary Taylor, who said that she used to tease Charlotte, who was too feeble to put up a resistance, with her radical opinions. They were complementary in the sense that Mary liked to

inform and Charlotte to analyse and question. The difference between the two women was that Mary acted on her beliefs by moving to New Zealand after better opportunities for women to support themselves while Charlotte concentrated on the images of womanhood, which she thought more enslaving than the absent rights, as Gordon (1994: 46-48) notes. Between her two friends Charlotte had a chance to develop herself over the boundaries of her sisters and the Parsonage and to acquire knowledge which extended the small, familiar circle of her own life.

When Charlotte came home from Roe Head in the summer of 1832, she occupied herself with the teaching of her sisters and household work under the strict supervision of her aunt. For three happy years she stayed at home with her sisters and they continued to live in their dream world, walking arm in arm around the kitchen at nights, when their work was done and their aunt gone to bed, "making out" as they called it.

At the age of eighteen Branwell had taken up painting and drawing and was now aspiring to become an artist. The girls also tried their skills at it but Branwell had the expectation of the family weighing on his shoulders to be the one to succeed and it was agreed that he should be sent to the Royal Academy to study. Because Branwell's future training would increase the family's expenses, Charlotte decided to accept Miss Woolers proposition to return to Roe Head as a teacher in 1835. She also took Emily with her and it was agreed that her teaching would cover the expenses of Emily's education. By that time Charlotte was nineteen and Emily seventeen. Emily's experience at the school was not a happy one, she became literally ill with home-sickness and had to be sent back home. She could not live away from her moors and as Charlotte said "Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished" (Gaskell, 1875: 158). Anne was sent to replace Emily and she was able to hold on for two years, from 1835 to 1837, before her health collapsed. Charlotte herself endured her time at Roe Head with the help of Miss Wooler's affection and her friend's concern but her days were monotonous and tedious. She did not derive the same pleasure from teaching than she did from learning. Neither did she have any vocational calling for teaching and the mediocrity of her pupils frustrated her. What also made her dispirited was the lack of mental space which the mundane tasks of daily life brought on. She simply did not have time

to exercise her imagination, which was essential to her. As Gordon (1994:53) points out, Charlotte's negative attitudes toward her work and pupils derived from not being able to do what she wanted, which was to write. Finally her mood deepened into depression, which took a form of a religious crisis during the year 1836. This becomes evident in her letter to Ellen Nussey:

> If you knew my thoughts, the dreams that absorb me, and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up, and makes me feel, society, as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity, and I dare say despise me. ... I can see the Well of Life... but when I stoop to drink of the pure waters they fly away from my lips. (Gaskell 1975: 161)

The result of this tug between duty and dreaming was the emergence of a new kind of heroine, as ordinary as she herself, in her stories and she began to drift away from the fairytale world which had occupied her thoughts since childhood.

During Christmas holiday in 1836 when she was reunited with Emily and Branwell she summoned enough courage to write to the poet laureate Robert Southey for his opinion on her writings. Branwell also sent his work to Wordsworth but got no answer. Southey did eventually reply to Charlotte but the answer was not what she had hoped for. It was a condescending letter warning Charlotte that writing was not a suitable business for women and that she should be engaged in her proper duties. Charlotte wrote a reply, in which she reassured Souhey that she would bury her ambitions as a writer. Charlotte was not, however, crushed, as Gordon (1994:66) points out. She responded to Southey's letter with humour and control and managed to deceive the poet with her mock obedience.

After Charlotte's health failed in spring 1838, she finally decided to give up teaching at Miss Wooler's school. Once at home she restored her piece of mind and found comfort in the old routines with her sisters. At this time the sisters began hatching a plan that would both help them earn their living and keep their health and sanity. They began dreaming of opening a boarding school in their own home. In 1839 the girls, however, set about once more to earn their living among strangers. Anne was the first to go to work as a governess. Charlotte's first post as governess was with the Sidgwicks near Skipton. What

the sisters gained from the experience was inside information of those above them in the class system and Charlotte reached the conclusion that the wives were more concerned with the social standing of the family than the men. The position of the governess was also a disappointment for both sisters. They expected to be treated as part of the family because of their own social position as clergyman's daughters, but found that, as Charlotte puts it " a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil." (Gordon 1994: 78) To make matters worse the mental freedom, so important to the Brontës, was yet again constricted by the children and the chores they were made to do in the evenings.

Fortunately Charlotte's post lasted only for two months and Anne also returned home in December, apparently dismissed by the Ingrams as unsuitable for a governess. Charlotte did leave her home for a another post with the Whites of Upperwood House, Rawdon. This time the family was less snobbish but Charlotte was not happy there either. One reason for her unhappiness was the simple fact, stated by Ellen Nussey to Mrs Gaskell(1875:184) that Charlotte, as well as her sisters, were not adapted to teaching since they did not know how to handle or understand children. In addition, Gordon (1994: 82-83) suggests that Charlotte felt that while they lived with other people they were estranged from their real selves and were forced to adopt a cover which responded to class norms.

While Charlotte was with the Whites Miss Wooler surprisingly offered her the school at Dewsbury Moore, which coincided with the girls' idea of running a school. Charlotte, however, rejected the idea, and instead, after receiving a letter from Mary, who was finishing her education in Brussels, she got interested in the possibility of studying abroad. She managed to secure the financial help of her aunt by convincing her that the education would be later useful in their attempt of setting up a school and finally she and Emily were on their way to Pensionnat Heger in Brussels while Anne stayed at home.

The Pensionnat was run by M. and Mms Heger. M. Heger was a vocational teacher who studied the needs of his pupils and in this manner he also grasped the potentials of the Brontë sisters. In 1842-3 M. Heger was thirty- three, seven years older than Charlotte. She called him at first " a little black ugly

being" but soon her description changed into " a man of power as to mind", as Gordon (1994: 94-96) points out. M. Heger changed Charlotte's restricted ideas of manhood by encouraging her to write, unlike the other men she had known in her life. He directed her writing by warning her against the excessive use of imagery and told her to sacrifice everything that did not contribute to clarity. Their relationship was intensive but it was not an ordinary affair or infatuation, rather a union of minds. Charlotte and Emily returned home in the end of 1842 after receiving news that their aunt was dying. In January 1843 the Hegers asked Charlotte to return as a student teacher and she agreed. She studied German and taught English to the girls but also was a private tutor for Monsieur Heger. By now Mme Heger had become suspicious of Charlotte's and her husband's relationship and in April the private lessons were terminated. Monsieur Heger withdrew himself from Charlotte, which made her miserable. When she had returned, the Hegers had welcomed her into their home but now Charlotte felt that they both rejected her. Once again she was a stranger, with Emily gone she had no friends and evidently had no desire to make any. In January 1844 she finally left for England. According to Gaskell (1875:266), she confessed in a letter to Ellen Nussey that the parting from M. Heger had been difficult and that she found it hard to recover from her experiences even at home. This was the first time that Charlotte dealt with passion and love, although she had been proposed to twice in her life but rejected both suitors. Charlotte had made up her mind never to marry at the age of twelve believing that she would have nothing to offer with her poor financial situation and plain looks. Despite the passionate feelings displayed in her novels, she was very practical when it came to marriage in real life saying in a letter to Ellen Nussey that marriage would be possible if there was mutual respect, which would grow to love, but that intense passion was not a desirable feeling because it was hardly ever reciprocal and lasted only temporarily. (Gaskell1875: 204)

After her return from Brussels, the usual pleasures of home were shadowed by Patrick Brontë's failing eyesight and the decline of their brother. As Mrs Gaskell (1875:196-197, 280) points out, Branwell was in that curious position most only boys in family of girls usually were in that time. He was expected to do and succeed while the girls were expected just to be. He was not able,

however, to fulfil his youthful promise and his art studies in the Royal Academy never took place. Instead he drifted from a private tutor's post to the next, losing his work mainly for his love of drink. His final post he lost by having an affair with the lady of the house. Finally he drifted into drug abuse and remained mostly at home until he died in September 1848. By that time the girls were worn out by watching their brother's self-destruction caused by weak morals and Charlotte said that she could not weep from bereavement for her childhood's dream partner but from the lost possibility of what might have been. According to Gordon (1994:134-135), she was also jealous for her father's favour. He had been inconsolable after Branwell's death because his son had been the one from whom he had expected achievement. In fact Mr Brontë was not even aware that his daughters could write until Charlotte told him about Jane Eyre.

While Branwell declined the girls, however, began to flourish. Charlotte discovered some of Emily's poems and began planning to publish them jointly with hers and Anne's. The other two sisters agreed to this , although Emily was reluctant at first. To ensure their anonymity they came up with the famous pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Action Bell. According to Mrs Gaskell (1875: 285-286), the girls chose to hide their identity because they were averse to publicity and intentionally chose such ambiguous names so that they would be labelled as men. Furthermore, they thought that their mode of writing was not considered feminine and they felt that if their true gender was revealed they would be looked on with prejudice. The poems were published in 1846 but they were not a success. This did not, however, crush the girls and Charlotte finished writing The Professor, based on her experiences in Brussels, which she had began in the summer of 1845. The novel was rejected six times within a year but Charlotte was not discouraged. Their father's failing eyesight was finally corrected with an eye operation in Manchester and during the time after the operation when Charlotte nursed his father, she began writing *Jane Eyre*, a pilgrimage of a young woman, not unlike Charlotte herself. The book was published in October in 1847 by Smith and Elder and it was an instant success. The sisters were able to remain anonym until Anne's Tenant of Wildfell Hall was published. After that there was a confusion whether the Bell brothers were

one person and Anne and Charlotte travelled to London to meet their publishers.

In 1848 Charlotte began writing *Shirley* but he work was interrupted by a series of family tragedies. In September of that year Branwell died, as mentioned above, and soon after that Emily became ill with tuberculosis of which she died in December. Emily did not give in at the face of death, which amazed Charlotte. She bluntly refused any help from doctors and Charlotte witnessed " the conflict of the strangely strong spirit and the fragile frame before us- relentless conflict- once seen, never to be forgotten." (Gordon 1994: 185) Charlotte grieved Emily deeply but her strengths were to be tested even further, as Anne's health also was declining. If Emily raced to her death, Anne slowly faded between January and the end of May 1849. Charlotte felt powerless to ease her sisters pains who seemed to follow Emily readily into death. As an attempt to help Anne, Charlotte and Ellen took her to Scarborough for the see air where she, at last, died. According to Gordon (1994:187), her last words to her sister were "take courage, Charlotte."

Charlotte endured the deaths of her sisters through her faith and also through writing, which she had not completely given up. She managed to finish Shirley after Anne's death. *Shirley* has been considered the most feminist of Charlotte's novels because it presents the theoretic possibility what a woman might be if she combined independence and means of her own with intellect. The main character in the novel is said to be modelled after Emily (Gordon 1994:187). Another thing , which may have helped her was the gradual expansion of her world through travelling and meeting new people. Her publisher George Smith introduced her to the literary elite of the time, including Thackeray, Harriet Martineau, and her subsequent biographer Elizabeth Gaskell. She was finally also able to read the most resent books with the help of her publisher's manager Mr Taylor, with whom Charlotte corresponded about what she had read and who later also made a marriage proposal to Charlotte, which she refused on the grounds of not feeling more than respect for him. Evidently her standards had risen, since earlier she had considered mutual respect to be enough for marriage.

For the first time she also read Jane Austen, prompted by G. H. Lewes who reviewed *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte was, however, displeased with Miss Austen

because of her lack of emotion and refused to call her a genius. In the midst of the confusion about the identity and gender of the Bells, Charlotte had revealed that "we are three sisters" thus earning some hostile reviews for *Jane Eyre* because she was considered too coarse and rebellious. With *Shirley* she had specifically written to Lewes asking him not to review the book as being written by a woman but to no avail. Lewes attacked the novel on gender ground, which made Charlotte furious.

Charlotte's active social life outside her home had its drawbacks when she returned to the solitude of the parsonage. She responded to the loneliness with physical illness. Gordon (1994:236-237) also suggests that the reason behind her depressions was her attachment to her publisher, George Smith. He was considerably younger than Charlotte and handsome. Besides being considerate to Charlotte's wishes he was also capable of creating a relationship on the intellectual level with her through letters, something Charlotte had craved for since her relationship with M. Heger had been severed. As always, Charlotte was aware of the fact that she would have nothing else to offer except her mind to Smith and their relationship waned, partly through Charlotte's own initiative and partly through the resistance of Mr Smith's mother. Once again Charlotte used the experiences in her personal life as material for a new novel called *Villette,* a story of a woman's rise from passivity, which she began in 1851 and finished in 1852. Gordon (1994: 253) suggests that Charlotte incorporated her relationships with Mr Smith and M. Heger in this novel.

In December 1851 Charlotte was proposed to by his father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls. She was taken by surprise by his feelings, of which she had been unaware. Mr Nicholls had arrived at Haworth in 1846 and had been part of the daily life in the parsonage ever since. He was a rather handsome man, more practical than intellectual but with strong feelings, as Charlotte found out. Although Charlotte had her doubts about the intellectual capabilities of Mr Nicholls, she was intrigued by his steady attachment and by the fact that he was not interested in her fame as a writer. When she told the news to her father, he, however, forbid his daughter to marry Mr Nicholls for some reason, the most evident being his fear of becoming abandoned. After that Charlotte, as the obedient daughter, refused Mr Nicholls, who in turn handed in his notice to Mr Brontë as a protest. Charlotte and Mr Nicholls, however, continued to write to

each other and in November 1853 Charlotte finally accepted Nicholls' proposal. The reason behind this is the relenting of Mr Brontë when Mr Nicholls promised to remain in the parsonage after the marriage to look after him with Charlotte. They got engaged in February 1854 and were married in June, Charlotte was then thirty-eight years old. Throughout her engagement Charlotte did continue to have doubts about marriage and how it would affect her writing, asking advice from Mrs Gaskell (Gordon 1994: 302).

Her doubts were cleared after the their wedding tour in Ireland and Charlotte was increasingly happy and well and admitted to Ellen that her attachment to her husband was growing daily. She also happily acknowledged that her time was not hers anymore but to be shared with her husband. The lack of her own space did not seem to bother her as it had before the marriage. She consciously resigned her art for married life, as Gordon (1994: 317) points out, although in a letter to Ellen she did say how women must beware of wifehood wiping out their independent character. As she had previously separated the roles of the teacher and the writer and the daughter and the writer, she now separated the roles of the wife and the writer and, as before, she obeyed her principle of duty and independence.

The happiness was, however, a short one. In 1855 at the beginning of the year Charlotte started to feel nauseated and unable to eat, at first these symptoms were related to pregnancy but than she started to vomit blood from the stomach. After a six week fever she died on 31 March. Gordon (1994: 312-313) suggests that the reason for Charlotte's death was the same as the loyal, old servant Tabby's, a month earlier, a killer typhoid from the polluted drinking water, which was responsible of the deaths of many Haworth inhabitants at the time.

Her final words to friends in her letters confirm her deep bond with her husband " ...I find my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support- the best earthly comfort that any woman had... As to my husband –my heart is knit to him-". (Gordon 1994: 313-314) Charlotte had finally found happiness and peace.

3.3 A COMPARISON OF THE NOVELISTS' LIVES

Before moving on to the comparison of Austen and Brontë's novels I would like to draw some comparisons between the lives of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë in order to emphasise the importance of considering the interaction between the writers' circumstances in life and their work. First I will compare their lives in relation to their work on a more general level and then move on to compare Austen and Brontë in the light of the times they lived in on three different dimensions: education, social position and their position in society as women .

As mentioned above, their lives were defined by close family connections and they both had one dominant but distant parent, with Austen it was her mother and with Brontë, her father. This caused them to form tight bonds with their siblings. Jane, however, had her father to encourage and support her but Charlotte had only her brother and sisters to turn to, although it could be said that later she, too, found herself a father figure to guide her in M. Heger. Brontë experienced several losses in her life, starting with the death of her mother and later on her siblings, which may have caused her to turn more inwards and rely on herself only, while Austen had her whole family to support her, despite the emotional distance from her mother. Austen's work was also shared with the whole family, although she only confided to Cassandra with the actual process of writing. The Brontë children kept their stories to them selves and the sisters discussed and developed their stories with each other.

The greatest difference between the authors is perhaps found in their disposition towards life, which was formed partly by the internal and partly by the external factors in their lives and which shows in their writing. Austen wrote social comedy and in her writing, at least, could be considered an extrovert. The reason for her mode of writing can be explained by the sociable nature of her family and surroundings and furthermore her unsentimental and rational Georgian nature. Brontë was more introvert by her nature and in her writing because of the partly voluntary seclusion of her family and also because of the Romantic era, which affected the cultural atmosphere of the time by emphasising the exploration of nature and emotions. Their motives for writing were also different. When times were difficult, Austen wrote comedy

to forget her troubles, while Brontë dealt with her painful experiences in the novels and in general her work is more autobiographical than Austen's. These differences may have influenced Brontë's refusal to consider Austen as a great writer, although she admitted her social comedy to be shrewd and observant.

The effect of the times Austen and Brontë lived in also shows in their lives and through that in their work. This can be seen, for instance, in the education that they were given. Neither of them received the formal education that their brothers had and they were both sent to boarding schools, which did not offer much besides basic skills. It is no wonder then that as adults Austen and Brontë criticised the education girls received as inadequate in their novels. Brontë's own education was more extensive than Austen's and she even studied abroad, but it could be said that Austen had a more liberal education of the two, which can be explained by the difference in time and values. Austen was encouraged to learn and make use of her father's library, as mentioned above. Brontë , on the other hand was left to her own devises with her sisters, while her father concentrated on educating her brother in the hope that he would succeed to make something of himself. It is obvious, then, that Austen's father was a man of Regency and acted on the principles of the Enlightenment, which considered it important for women as well to educate themselves. Brontë's father, however, was decidedly more Victorian in his attitude towards the education of his daughters. His main concern was to educate his son and only when he understood that his daughters were not likely material for marriage and had to find a means to support themselves, did he send them to school.

The difference between Regency and Victorian eras and their values can also be seen in the attitudes Austen and Brontë had towards their own social position. During Regency social mobility was creating new classes into society and Austen, who while being secure of her own middle class status, had personal experience of this through her brothers, who were so called meritocrats and made their fortunes themselves. Austen also showed her support to meritocrats in *Persuasion*, where she describes the self made man, Captain Wentworth to aristocrat Sir Elliot. Brontë, on the other hand was a lot more insecure about her own position in society. Her father had led the children to believe that they were higher on the social scale than they really were and this created problems and disappointments for them when they found

out later in life that they were not considered equal by those who they thought belonged to the same social class. The reason for this lies in the Victorian society. When the new working and middle classes were formed, the ranks, as mentioned above, began to close again and social boundaries became as strict as they had been before. Social class had become a mark of identity and this was problematic for the Brontë, because the identity given to them at home was from the upper ranks of middle class but the outside world did not see it that way. Brontë's own insecurity reflects in her character *Jane Eyre*, who herself knows her own position and worth, while others do not and in the end Brontë forces society to accept Jane by giving her an inheritance, thus consolidating her position in society with money.

On one dimension of Austen's and Brontë's lives the women shared a problem, which shows well the change in values concerning women when Regency began to turn into Victorian era. Despite the time difference between the women the change in values and attitudes towards women's position in society affected both. Woman's life concentrated on her wifely duties and her domain did not reach the boundaries beyond home. The Victorian myth of the angel in the house was beginning to form. The only problem Austen and Brontë had, was that they had no house to be an angel in and so they were pushed aside in society, which made their position even more marginal than that of the ordinary passive housewife. Austen and Brontë had first hand experience of what it was to be a surplus woman with limited possibilities in life. Austen was bitter about having to depend on her rich relatives as Brontë was bitter about having to depend on working as a governess Those alternatives seemed to have been the only two that the unmarried women had. Their experiences also found their way into their work, for in Austen's *Persuasion* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* both, the main character is a woman already pushed to the side but whom the authors replace in the centre of society at the end. In spite of the frustration that the women probably felt as surplus women, they had very realistic attitudes towards marriage for themselves and both decided that mere respect without affection was not enough, although marriage would have made them independent from the charity of others. In their work they relied on the same principle and married their heroines to men they loved but also made sure that the happy couples were well off. Brontë,

however, in later life gave up her principle by marrying Mr Nicholls, a man she respected but was not sure if she would love. The reason why it was perhaps easier for Austen to hold on to her decision was that she had her sister and her family to fill her life but Brontë was faced with the discouraging prospect of solitude.

4. THE PRESENT STUDY AND HYPOTHESIS

There have been numerous studies done on the lives and novels of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. Patricia Beer (1974) for example has studied how Austen and Brontë depicted women and their situation during the period when the arguments and activities connected with the question of women's status in society were for the first time occupying a prominent place in English society. She has also explored the discrepancies between what the authors thought in real life and the views they set forth in their novels. Linda C. Hunt (1988) has studied the prominent Victorian female ideology and Austen's and Brontë's part in creating the ideology as well as the extent to which they were affected by it. Shuttleworth (1996), however, has put the woman question in the background and concentrates on placing Brontë's texts in the historical and cultural context from the viewpoint of the psychological discourse in the Victorian era. Similarly, Craik (1969) approaches Austen's text from the historical point of view by placing her work in the framework of the Regency period. Horsman (1990) also approaches Brontë's work from the historical point of view as an integral part of the Victorian fiction. Kennard (1978), on the other hand, has studied the works of Austen and Brontë in the light of the Victorian fictional conventions which had an effect on the writers. There are also many studies done on the female novelists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the feminist point of view in mind. Kelly (1995) for instance, has approached Austen from this angle and studied the role of women in creating and sustaining civil society in Austen's works. Poovey (1984) explores in the feminist tradition Austen's struggle to create a professional identity in a society where female writers went against the notion of a proper lady. Harris (1995) too, studies Austen's position as a female novelist in a male dominated profession.

What is lacking in previous studies, which have concentrated either on the question of women or the historical background of the authors' lives, is the combination of these approaches with the addition of an autobiographical point of view. This would consider the effects that the time period in question and the novelists' circumstances in life had on their work.

For the purposes of this study I have chosen to consider Austen as pre-Victorian, as Cunningham (1994:38) calls her, although she lived during the Regency period as well, which naturally had a great influence on her attitudes and values. However, Austen also lived in the critical period from Regency to the Victorian era and witnessed the changed values and morals. In addition, her novel, *Persuasion*, which will be part of my data, dates back to that period of change as it was written in 1815-1816. Furthermore, Austen can be considered pre Victorian because of the literary influence she had on Victorian fiction. As Kelly (1989:21) points out, Austen laid the foundation for the Victorian novel. Kennard (1978:11,18) notes that she established the convention of the two suitors, which dominated Victorian fiction. Kennard also points out that the convention is still very much at use in contemporary novels in the sense that women are still largely described in terms of their relationship to men.

In what follows I propose first of all that Austen's and Brontë's circumstances in life, in the context of the time they lived in, influenced their work. Secondly, I propose that the similarities and the differences between Austen's and Brontë's situations in life and the effect of the time account for the similarities and differences found in *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre*. Finally I suggest that these similarities and differences are the most tangible in the manner Austen and Brontë dealt with the question of women's status in the Victorian society.

For the purposes of this study I have divided the question of women's status in the Victorian society into three different aspects, in order to compare Austen's and Brontë's views and attitudes on the subject. The first aspect consists of the different dimensions of love and marriage, the second deals with money and social position and the last one considers women's education and work. I have chosen these three aspects because they form the central part of the world of the Victorian woman. Furthermore, the first two aspects, in particular, constitute the very material that Austen and Brontë wrote about, and

their views on the last aspect also come through in their work, although it may not be as centrally placed as the other two. In addition to the above, I will also consider the broader concepts of social justice, individuality and communality, since they too appear as themes in Austen's and Brontë's work. These themes are not exclusively tied to the question of women's status but they can be used in placing the question in the framework of society. Before moving on to the analysis I will present the storylines of *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* in order to provide a background for the analysis and to help clarify the references made to the novels in the course of the analysis. In the analysis *Persuasion* will be shortened to P. and *Jane Eyre* to
J. E.

4.1 THE STORYLINES OF *PERSUASION* AND *JANE EYRE*

PERSUASION

Eight years before the story begins Anne Elliot was engaged to Frederick Wentworth, a young naval officer, but she was persuaded by her godmother, Lady Russell, to break the engagement because of his lack of fortune, which made him unacceptable to her father, Sir Walter Elliot, and because he was brilliant and headstrong – too forceful a character for Lady Russell. Now Anne is 27 and her looks are faded and so are her prospects for marriage and happiness in the future.

Sir Walter's extravagant life style forces him to economise and he has to let his house to Admiral and Mrs Croft. This brings Anne and Captain Wentworth in contact again: Mrs Croft is Wentworth's sister. Wentworth has had a successful career and is now a rich man. Anne's younger sister Mary is married to Charles Musgrove, who has two sisters, and Wentworth becomes involved with Louisa Musgrove. Anne's presence disturbs him, however, and they both are aware that their former love for each other is reviving. But an accident to Louisa at Lymes Regis, for which Wentworth feels responsible draws him further away from Anne. In the mean while Anne has gone to Bath with her father and sister Elizabeth. In Bath Anne meets William Elliot, her cousin and father's heir. Elliot pays her marked attention, but Anne, who has renewed an old acquaintance with Mrs Smith, a school friend, now a widow and an invalid, learns from her of Elliot's past misdeeds and his present schemes. Unexpected

news arrives of Louisa Musgrove's engagement to Captain Wentworth's friend, Captain Benwick and soon afterwards Wentworth appears in Bath by now aware that Anne's love for him has remained constant and he is anxious to renew his addresses to Anne. He asks for her hand again and this time she accepts him gladly.

JANE EYRE

Jane Eyre is an orphan and is in the care of her aunt, Mrs Reed. She is treated harshly and one day turns on her bullying cousin, John Reed. This leads to her being sent to Lowood Asylum, a charitable institution, where she spends her girlhood in appalling conditions. The wretched conditions are somewhat alleviated by the friendship of the gentle, long-suffering Helen Burns, who dies of consumption, and Miss Temple, the mistress.

After some years as pupil and teacher, Jane leaves Lowood to take up a position of governess at Thornfield Hall where she finds she has one charge, Adele Varens, the illegitimate daughter of the master Edward Rochester. Life at Thornfiled is pleasant but rather boring and Jane welcomes the return of Rochester as a lively distraction. Soon she finds herself drawn to him, while he, attracted by her wit and self-possession, after various misunderstandings, asks her to become his wife.

Their marriage is, however, prevented at the last moment, by Richard Mason's disclosure that Rochester is already married – to Mason's sister, Bertha. The marriage took place in Jamaica; Bertha Mason's family had told Rochester nothing and he found himself tied to a madwoman. She is now kept in seclusion and under restraint in Thornfield Hall. Jane's strong sense of self-reliance and respect forces her, despite her yearning to comfort her lover, to flee temptation.

Jane leaves Thornfield Hall and wanders across the moors, destitute, finally collapsing at the door of the Reverend St John Rivers. Not wanting to be discovered by Rochester, she call herself Jane Elliot. The Rivers sisters, Diana and Mary, are kind to her and St John gives her the post of mistress at the village school for girls. Later Jane's identity is revealed by accident and she discovers to her delight that she has a family – the Rivers are her cousins; when St John brings news of a legacy left to her, Jane insists on sharing it with them.

St John, powerful and dedicated but narrow minded in his ideas of duty and sacrifice, proposes that Jane should accompany him as his wife in his mission to India. Jane is about to consent to his proposal, when she hears Rochester's voice calling to her. Resolved to find out what has happened to him, she returns to Thornfield to find it a blackened ruined and the master maimed and blind – the result of his vain effort to save his mad wife from the flames. Jane banishes Rochester's dejection when she returns to him, able at last to contract a marriage of spiritual equality, intellectual companionship and sexual passion.

4.2 COMPARISON OF THE NOVELS *PERSUASION* AND *JANE EYRE*

In the following I will analyse Austen's *Persuasion* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* according to the aspects of love and marriage, money and social position and education and work as mentioned above. I will attempt to show that the similarities and differences found in *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* in the attitudes and values the writers had concerning women's position in the Victorian society are due to the circumstances of Austen's and Brontë's lives as well as the context of the times they lived in. I will start by considering the aspect of love and marriage and then move on to money and social position and finally discuss the aspect of education and work.

4.2.1 LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Finding love and getting married seem to be two of the most important themes in Austen's and Brontë's work, which is not surprising since those themes continue to affect people even today. However, in today's light their books might be considered merely as romantic novels if it was not for the fact that that finding love or at least finding a husband was crucial for a woman in the Victorian times, unless she was financially independent. Only through marriage and through their husbands could women achieve some sort of position in society as well as some means of social security. As mentioned above, Mary Wollenstonecraft had pointed out, as early as 1772, the lack of women's rights concerning their married lives. Without the safety net of marriage, however, women basically had no rights at all and virtually no

influence on their own lives. In addition the Victorian society was faced with the problem created by the unmarried and poor surplus women to which Austen and Brontë also belonged. Thus Austen's and Brontë's views on love and marriage do not simply represent their romantic ideals but rather the realistic choices and limitations they and their contemporaries had in their lives.

Both novels, *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre,* deal with the above mentioned themes and at first sight they even seem to approach the subject in very similar ways. In *Persuasion* the heroine, Anne Elliot, as a young girl, is persuaded to break off her engagement to Captain Wentworth because he has an uncertain future and is below her in social rank. She, however, continues to love him and when they meet again eight years later Captain Wentworth has made his fortune and risen in the social scale, so that they are now equal and finally able to find happiness together. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane falls in love with her master Mr Rochester, who is considerably older than she and higher in the social scale. They, too, are separated from each other because Mr Rochester turns out to be already married, their feelings, however, remain the same. When Jane in the end returns to Mr Rochester she finds that their positions have changed, she is an independent woman now, and equal to Mr Rochester and her crippled master is in turn dependent on her help.

It is interesting to note that in both novels it is the woman who makes the difficult decision to leave the relationship. It could be said that this reflects the Victorian ideal of the angelic woman who holds on to principles and duty when men fail to do so. As Hunt (1988: 27) states, women were beginning to be seen as "the nobler half of humanity ". She also points out that in Austen's case, it is possible to study the effects of two different decades. The difference in the tone of *Persuasion*, which is more serious when compared to Austen's earlier novels, can be explained by the mood of the day, which had become more conservative and may have guided Austen's attention towards the family and woman's role and duty in society. Thus the conventional feminine ideal affected also Austen. She did not, however, adopt it as such, but assigned her heroines social roles, which enabled them to realise their personalities, thus combining the feminine ideal with her commitment to realism. Kelly (1995:18) notes that Austen invested her heroines with a key role in creating and

upholding civil society which was threatened by the political, social and cultural upheaval that was taking place in society thus making her heroines active agents in the surroundings they inhabited.

Therefore Anne's decision to break off her engagement against her own will, was an act of duty to her family because she had a social responsibility which had to come first. Here we can also see the difference between Austen and Brontë: Austen studies the individual as a part of community, who is responsible for the consequences of her actions to her surroundings. Brontë concentrates solely on the individual and her emotions and experiences apart from society. This tendency can be easily traced back to the novelists' own lives. Austen lived among a large community, forcing her to be a social being, perhaps sometimes against her own will. Brontë, in turn lived a more secluded life, which probably made her turn more inwards. However, also the ideas of the Romantic movement had an effect on Brontë. Because of the influence of Romantic poetry in her background she dealt with the question of individuality by detaching it from society in the Romantic tradition. In Austen too, we can see the effect of the Regency period influencing her concept of individuality, which dates back to the time when industrialisation had not yet disrupted the tight rural communities of people living together.

The emphasis of either communality or individuality can be seen in Austen's and Brontë's work. In *Persuasion* Anne is an integral part of her surroundings, whether she realises it herself or not, and she expresses herself through her role and place in the family, but Jane is an rejected orphan, which conveniently cuts her off from society. Hunt (1988:59-97) explains that Brontë uses this to her advantage because she wants to explore the life of a single woman, like herself. By cutting her heroine out of the family circle, the domain of traditional womanliness, she also frees her from the prevailing notions of female character and is able to probe into the layers of personality that exist beneath the social role. Hunt calls Jane Eyre a "counter-ideal" of traditional femininity, for she is not submissive or timid, although she does learn the value of one of the most important Victorian feminine ideas, self-regulation, from Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Jane, however, does not use the principle of self-regulation in order to serve others but for self-preservation when Rochester tries to persuade her to stay. Furthermore, Shuttleworth (1996:182) calls *Jane*

Eyre "as the quintessential expression of Victorian individualism" because Brontë concentrates on describing how to achieve individual desires and ambitions. Horsman (1990:174), however, points out that at the same time Brontë also had to accept the limitations of Victorian society and therefore Jane has to learn to recognise the demands of others and, without giving them up, to modify her own expressions.

In spite of the new ideas in her novels, in her own life Brontë accepted the key aspects of the Victorian feminine ideal by submitting first to her father, then to her husband. Furthermore, in *Jane Eyre* she does eventually link Jane into society by first giving her a family and fortune and finally by marrying her off to a man she loves, thus bringing Jane back within the boundaries of the Victorian society. Both novelists seemed to live in a state of continual conflict and ambivalence between what they thought and how they lived. Kennard (1978:10) explains this discrepancy between what Austen and Brontë wrote and what they really thought, by literary conventions, which influenced their work. She suggests that the writers were not merely imitating life as they experienced it, but were having to rely on a fictional form, which in turn either hindered or aided their creativity.

The process leading up to marriage, in other words the courtship period was a strange mixture of activity and passivity on women's part. As was mentioned above, young women used their accomplishments in music and drawing as well as dancing to attract the opposite sex. There was, however, as Beer (1974: 69) points out, a degree of passivity enforced upon women which restricted their freedom to influence their situation. Victorian women were tied to the duty of regulating the expressions of their feelings and the propriety of their conduct to such an extent that in Austen's *Persuasion* Anne, for example, has no means of turning down the unwanted attention of Mr Elliot in a straightforward manner, except by being passive:

> ... but it was her intention to be as decidedly cool to him as might be compatible with their relationship; and to retract, as quietly as she could, the few steps of unnecessary intimacy she had been gradually led along. (P. 214)

Anne is also unable to reply to Captain Wentworth's letter of proposal but has to leave everything up to meeting him accidentally in the street and there, by accepting his invitation for a walk, she also accepts his proposal. Austen never intentionally breaks the rules of conventional behaviour but she does, however, bend them to achieve her goal. Because it would be impossible for Anne to discuss her feelings with Wentworth directly, she uses her conversation with Captain Harville, about constancy and fidelity, as a medium, fully aware of the fact that Wentworth realises she is in fact talking to him:

> I am every moment hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice when they would be lost on others. (P. 239)

Harris (1995:94) goes as far as to suggest that Anne in fact proposes to Wentworth by means of the constancy debate mentioned above and thus defies the doctrine of feminine passivity.

Craik (1969:94) mentions that marriage in Jane Austen's time was a social contract with obligations. In an age where there was no social security, it was the husband's responsibility to take care of his family and it was a risky business for the woman to give the rest of her life to incapable hands. This explains why in *Persuasion*, Lady Russel had earlier been against Anne marrying Captain Wentworth:

> Anne Elliot, so young: known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! (P. 25)

In addition, until the married women's property act in 1882, women had no legal financial rights and they were at the mercy of their husbands, who could do anything they wanted with their wives' money. A tragic example of this is Mrs Smith in Persuasion, whose husband has lost all their money and she has been left with nothing.

Marriage was by no means to be entered lightly and it seems that Austen, who was forced to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of married life in her own live, felt that if women had financial independence, it was not necessary for them to marry:

> That Lady Russel ... extremely well provided for, should have no thought of a second marriage, needs no apology to the public. (P.3)

In addition, Austen seemed to consider love an essential ingredient in marriage:

> Anne was tenderness itself and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wenworth's affection. (P. 254)

Although Austen wrote about romantic love, she was realistic enough to invest her happy couple with money, to secure their future happiness. In her own life, Austen, as has been mentioned earlier, advised her niece to marry wisely, not without love but not without money either, although she herself refused a prosperous offer of marriage because she did not love the man. With her heroines Austen practised the same policy as with her niece; Anne and Captain Wentworth were allowed to begin their life together only after Wentworth's financial success had been secured:

> ... how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition? (P. 250)

Although Austen provides Anne and Wentworth with financial security, she does suggest that Anne would not have been wrong in taking the risk of marrying Wentworth eight years ago when he had nothing. On the basis of this it could be said that Austen modelled the relationship of Anne and Wentworth to her own relationship with her first love Tom Lefroy. Lefroy and Austen were forced to end the relationship because Austen's poor financial situation did not offer good enough prospects for marriage.

Equality between husband and wife seem to be one point in marriage that Austen endorses in addition to love and money. In *Persuasion*, in the beginning of the book, the only truly happy and at the same time equal couple are the Crofts. Instead of staying at home and living the quiet domestic life Mrs Croft has followed her husband to foreign stations and is a stronger woman for that:

> "... the only time I ever fancied myself unwell... was the winter I passed by myself... and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself .. but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience." (P. 69-70)

Harris (1995:94) calls Mrs Croft "a model of female health, strength and adaptability who shares the reins of power with her husband." Austen, however, considers equality between husband and wife through the framework of their social roles. Mentally they may be equal but they also have their own roles and duties to fill, as in Anne's case:

> She gloried in being a sailors wife... (P. 254)

Besides mental equality there is the question of social equality. With Anne in *Persuasion* it causes no problems because Captain Wentworth may be under her in rank but he compensates it with affluence. In addition, the old aristocratic society is breaking up, as can be seen in the corruptive state of Sir Walter Elliot and William Elliot who compare unfavourably to meritocrats such as Captains Wentworth and Benwick. Therefore the old formal social categories do not apply anymore.

In accordance to the counter ideal of Victorian femininity mentioned above Brontë, too, shows disregard of the model of passivity and empty conventionalities when comes to the courting rituals of her time. She makes Jane reveal her feelings to Mr Rochester first, even though she imagines he is to marry Blanche Ingram:

> And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit... (J. E. 25)

Both Austen's and Brontë's heriones seem to resist the idea of feminine passivity in their own way. Anne by working from within her social role and Jane by violating the boundaries of hers. It could be said that Austen's and Brontë's characters reflect their own position in society. Austen felt more apart of the established society than Brontë and their expressions of resistance towards society were formed on the basis of that.

Brontë also considered the serious implications that marriage had on women's lives in her day and in particular the possible consequences of not marrying wisely enough. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is a poor orphan because her mother had married against her family's wishes and been disowned by them:

> ... my father had been a poor clergyman; that my mother had married him against the wishes of her friends, who considered the match beneath her; that my grandfather Reed was so irritated at her disobedience; he cut her off without a shilling;...(J.E. 28)

Brontë, like Austen, seemed to believe in romantic love when it came to matrimony and also in the security provided by wealth. Therefore she places Jane in a marriage which is based on love as well as financial independence. The difference between the heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *Persuasion* is that Brontë has Jane acquire wealth on her own, while Austen places the financial security of Anne's life in the hands of Captain Wenworth. This reflects Brontë's own fear of losing her independence trough financial dependence on somebody else.

Brontë, who finally married Mr Nicholls, a man who did not quite measure up to her standards, but who saved her from solitude, presented more a romantic view in *Jane Eyre* by not letting Jane marry St John without love. As Kennard (1978:87) points out, by leaving Rochester Jane rejects passion without principle, but with St John she learns that principle without emotion is just as destructive:

> ...- at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly...- this would be unendurable... (J. E. 403)

Jane's words most likely reflected Brontë's own fears of marriage in general. When she was about to marry Mr Nicholls, she feared the most the loss of her own space, having to be "at his side always" and she also worried about her own difficult nature and how her future husband would deal with that.

Brontë agreed with Austen in that women did not need to marry if they could provide for themselves:

> ... and how averse are my inclinations to the bare thought of marriage. No one would take me for love and I will not be regarded in the light of a mere money speculation. (J. E. 383)

However, Brontë does acknowledge the power and importance of romantic love for a woman in Jane's case:

> I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. (J. E. 445)
> ...I am my husbands life as fully as he is mine. (J. E. 445)

Like Austen Brontë, too, dealt with the question of social and mental equality between a man and a woman. Jane, who is mentally equal to Rochester, lacks, however, social equality and suffers from it as Brontë herself suffered from social inferiority:

> "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain , and little, I am soulless and heartless?" (J. E. 251)

Jane hates the idea of being dependent on Rochester, probably reflecting her creator's negative attitude towards being treated as a charity case, which dates back to Brontë's school years. Jane tries to hold on to her independence by refusing the clothes and jewellery Rochester offers her:

> "And then you won't know me, Sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in an harlequin's jacket..."(J. E. 258)

Brontë seems to think that financial independence is required to achieve social equality between Jane and Rochester and in maintaining Jane's independence. Otherwise Jane is in danger of becoming Rochester's play thing:

> "If I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily around me."(J. E. 267)

Besides the question of financial independence the above quote also includes Brontë's attitude towards sexual passion. As Kennard (1978:83, 90) notes, Brontë, although on one hand valuing sexual passion, on the other hand believed that passion equalled loss of control and total submission to the loved one and thus a loss of independence.

There are two ideologies in action in Brontë's belief of passion. First the Romantic idea of passion as an overwhelming force, dangerous and uncontrollable. Secondly, the Victorian fear of that uncontrollable force and its effects in women in particular. Therefore, only by leaving Rochester and rejecting the slavery of passion without the sanction of marriage vows does she

maintain her independence. In order to join Jane and Rochester, Brontë first has to make Jane affluent, thus equal to Rochester financially as well as mentally. Secondly she has to kill Bertha Mason so that Jane and Rochester can get married and give in to sexual passion, now acceptable when it is constrained to the institution of matrimony. Rochester has been punished for his earlier behaviour by being crippled and is now purified from his sins, a concession on Brontë's part to pacify Victorian readers. Rochester's physical condition serves, however, another function as well. Jane becomes more than his equal, in the sense that he is now physically dependent on Jane. This in turn makes Jane the more active partner in their marriage, once again breaking the limitations of female passivity, while being confined to a proper wife's role:

> I love you better now, when I can be really useful to you, than in your state of proud independence... (J. E. 440)

If Austen modelled Captain Wentworth to her first love, as mentioned above, Brontë modelled Rochester to her mentor M. Heger. She had hoped for similar equality of minds with M. Heger as she gave to Jane and Rochester. It could even be said that in *Jane Eyre* Brontë realised her fantasy of M. Heger and herself with the mad Bertha Mason representing Mms. Heger who thwarted Brontë's relationship with her husband as Bertha did to Jane and Rochester's.

It seems that according to Brontë, mental equality requires financial equality in order to succeed, otherwise the dependent one will lose herself and become the creation of the master. While Austen saw that equality was achieved through social roles, Brontë gained the goal through independence. It is obvious that their opinions on equality and independence derive once again from their own lives. Austen gained her rightful place in her rather small world by fulfilling the social role of a maiden aunt that was assigned to her, even though she must have felt the restrictions of her role sometimes hard to bear. Brontë on the other hand did not have similar social network that Austen did, and therefore it is understandable that she can not identify with women realising themselves through social roles, because she herself did not have one. Without social roles she had to find another way of making herself equal to the rest of the world. Her task was by no means an easy one considering society's

attitude towards useless surplus women like her. Brontë's relationship with M. Heger brought her some validation of her equality because of the mental relationship they had.

4.2.2 MONEY AND SOCIAL POSITION

Beer (1974:85) claims that most of the differences between Austen and Brontë can be, at least, partly explained by their difference of class. Although they were both clergymen's daughters, socially their resemblance ended there. Brontë's father was a self made man who had social pretensions, even though the family was poor and the girls were required to support themselves. The Austens were not rich either but the family did have connections to the upper classes through Mrs Austen and the Austen brothers did reasonably well in life, which enabled them to look after their sisters.

In Austen's and Brontë's time, money was closely linked with social position and basically both were needed to guarantee a secure life. Craik (1969:7) mentions that, without any form of social security, "man was alone in the world from manhood to the grave". In the face of adversity he could not rely on anybody else to help him. As mentioned above, with the industrial revolution, however, wealth also began to accumulate to other parts of the population besides the landed gentry and aristocracy. Naturally there rose the question of the value and prestige of the inherited wealth compared to that of the newly acquired affluence and social position. Immune to the disdain of the upper classes, the new middle class, was aware of the power brought about by wealth and they began to demand a more prominent place in society as well as more influence in the decision making process of the government. Wealth was not distributed equally throughout society and with prosperity also poverty increased among the lower classes in the industrial towns. The discrepancy between the poor and the rich was heightened by the Victorian concepts of individuality and self-help which freed the community from taking responsibility of its members. In fact the whole concept of communality, prominent in Regency, was torn apart as a result of urbanisation. In a community of strangers it was easy to leave people to manage on their own and not to value social responsibility. Against this background Austen and Brontë

place their characters and study the importance and influence of money and social position.

In *Persuasion*, Austen deals with the question of social mobility when she presents us with Sir Walter who, being a voice of the decadent old world, compares unfavourably to Captain Wentworth who in turn represents the new professional middle class. Kennard (1978:43) points out that Austen has placed Wentworth in the navy, which is seen as an instrument of social change and also has Austen's strong approval because her brothers belonged to it. As Poovey (1984: 224) puts it, Sir Walter Elliot's financial and moral bankruptcy reflects the collapse of the social and ethical hierarchy of the landed gentry. Austen expresses her own disapproval of the upper classes's inability to recognise useful merit when she has sir Walter put into words the objections that the people who had made their own fortune were faced with:

> "...as being the means of bringing a person of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of..."(P. 18)

Austen, whose brothers belonged to the new class of self made men with Captain Wenworth, did not object to the distinctions of rank but despised artificial and pointless conventions. She expects a person of rank to behave in a manner that the role requires and to carry the social responsibility attached to the rank. Therefore, Sir Walter, selfish and vain as he is, is disapproved and ridiculed by Austen because he is unable to fill his role:

> ...a foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him... (P. 250)

> Anne had never seen her father and sister before in contact with nobility, and she must acknowledge herself disappointed. She had hoped better things from their high ideas of their own situation in life... (P. 146)

Austen also shows us that Lady Russel is wrong in her judgement of Captain Wentworth because:

> ...she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them. (P. 9-10)

When compared to her father or sister, Anne in *Persuasion* is the only one of the family who is capable of carrying the duties demanded of her by her rank because she is the only one to carry the social responsibility, for instance as the family leaves Kellynch –hall for Bath:

> ...Sir Walter prepared with condescending bows for all the afflicted tenantry and cottagers who might have had a hint to show themselves (P. 33)

> "...And one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature: going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. I was told they wished it..." (P. 37)

Austen's attitude toward social classes was that she accepted them as a natural part of life but she also expected people to behave according to their role in society. It was probably easier for Austen to accept the middle class distinction because she herself was firmly placed in the middleclass. Brontë, whose place on the social scale was not so certain because she had imagined herself to be higher than she really was, seems to have a more ambivalent attitude towards social position. Shuttleworth (1996: 153) sees this ambivalence reflecting in Jane and her attitude toward her relations, the Reeds. On one hand she wants to be included but on the other, her self-definition and self-worth stem form the feelings of exclusion and difference. Brontë experienced a similar situation in relation to the families where she worked as a governess, as was mentioned above. Although she had considered herself as a social equal to them, the families did not accept her as such, which in turn, caused resentment in her but which also helped her to define herself. That may be the reason why she gave her heroine, Jane a similarly insecure background as she herself had. Bessie and Mrs Abbot point to Jane her lowly position with the Reeds:

> "... you are less then a servant for you do nothing for your keep." (J. E. 14)

> "And you ought not to think yourself on equality with the Misses Reeds and Master Reed, because missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money and you will have none: it is your place to be humble..." (J. E 15)

Jane was however, decidedly of a high origin, a lady with all the usual accomplishments, which she gained at Lowood and as Bessie later had to acknowledge:

> "You are genteel enough; you look like a lady..." (J. E. 93)

Unlike Austen, who had inside experience of the gentry, Brontë described them as the outsider she was. The party at Thornfield, where Jane is forced to go by Mr Rochester, expresses Brontë's resentment of her betters. In particular the women are described as proud and cruel and their wealth and position is undermined by their coldness and selfishness. As mentioned above, Brontë had bad experiences with the wives of the families where she worked as a governess, which affected her view of upper class women. At the party she has the ladies make cruel remarks on governesses in general and on Jane herself:

> "Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day, half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous..." (J. E. 175)
>
> "I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class." (J. E. 176)

Jane is very aware of this division of wealth and rank between her and the guests, including Mr Rochester, but like Brontë , she feels herself equal to him on other dimensions:

> ...I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves that assimilates me mentally to him. (J. E. 174)

This was the source of Brontë's ambivalence toward her betters, she felt that she was equal with them on mental level but lacked the money and position and never quite became what she aspired to. Brontë has Jane defy the empty importance of wealth and social standing when she scolds old Hannah:

> "...you just made it a species of reproach that I had no 'brass' and no house. Some of the best people that ever lived have been as destitute as I am... ... you ought not to consider poverty a crime." (J. E. 339)

If Brontë did not achieve the sort of equality she would have wanted in her own life she realised it through *Jane Eyre*. According to Shuttleworth (1996:148), Jane makes the transition from an outcast and a position of social marginality to confirmed membership of the gentry but she does this through her own work and so avoids the vice of upper class idleness.

Like Austen, Brontë emphasises the importance social responsibility, which comes with wealth. When Jane gets her inheritance she is immediately willing to share it with her cousins in order to help them. This incident can also be traced to her own life and her wish to help her sisters who struggled as governesses like Jane's cousins:

> Those who had saved my life, whom, till this hour, I had loved barrenly, I could now benefit. They were under a yoke – I could free them: they were scattered – I could reunite them: the independence, the affluence which was mine, might be theirs too. (J. E. 381)

The concept of social justice is closely linked with the concept of social responsibility and Austen and Brontë dealt also with the latter. The difference is that Brontë's heroine experiences it first hand, like she herself experienced it in her own life. Austen presents social injustice through the character of Mrs Smith, who after her husband's death finds herself alone, sick and poor. Craik (1969: 62) points out that in the Victorian society, when the safety net of marriage failed, as it did in Mrs Smith's case, there was little to be done. For a woman the situation was made even worse by the fact that she was unable to act for herself:

> ...she could do nothing herself, equally disabled from personal exertion by her state of bodily weakness, and from employing others by her want of money. (P. 210)

Brontë presents a young girl's view point to injustice in Jane's experiences at Lowood in the hands of Mr Brockelhurst, among the other girls of the school. The charity of Mr Brockelhurst turns out to be Victorian hypocrisy:

> "You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying." (J. E. 65)

Mr Brockelhurst's speech is little later contradicted by the appearance of his wife and daughters:

> They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs. (J. E. 67)

Jane confronts social injustice as a grown up when she leaves Thornfield and finds herself in the same situation as Austen's Mrs Smith in *Persuasion*, outside the society and no one to help her. Jane, however, actively tries to alleviate her situation by begging but she nearly loathes herself for having to do it:

> ... the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on. I blamed none of those who repulsed me. (J. E. 325)

There is an interesting difference between Austen's and Brontë's attitudes towards the object of social injustice. In *Persuasion* Mrs Smith does not dwell on moral degradation, although the reason for her present predicament lies in the excessive lifestyle she led with her husband. This could be explained by the fact that in Austen comes from a time when it was thought natural that people were rich or poor and when fortunes could reverse in an instant. In Brontë's work Jane, who is quite innocent of her situation would:

> "... rather die yonder than in a street or a frequented road... ...And far better that crows and ravens... ... should pick my flesh from my bones, than that they should be prisoned in a workhouse coffin and moulder in a pauper's grave". (J. E. 326)

In Brontë we can see the influence of the Victorian age, according to which it was the individual's responsibility to keep up with the progress and steer away from poverty and there was the idea, as was mentioned earlier, that the poor must have done something to deserve their fate. What is also worth noting is that Austen does not expect Mrs Smith to do anything about her situation, except to bear it and wait until Captain Wentworth comes to her aid. Brontë, who had personal experience of helping herself, and was probably more influenced by the whole Victorian self-help concept than Austen, made her heroine find a solution for her situation.

4.2.3 EDUCATION AND WORK

As mentioned above, women's education in the Victorian period was limited and mainly concentrated on acquiring a set of accomplishments like drawing, needle work and conversational language skills, which were thought to be enough for them, considering the fact that women lived within the boundaries of home and therefore had no use for further education. The more scholarly approach to studying was reserved to men and when women finally achieved the right to study the same subjects as men, they still were not allowed to use their knowledge outside the home, with the exception of governesses. The reform in women's education went along with yet another of the Victorian concepts, namely self-improvement, which also concerned women. However, unlike the men in lower classes who used education to get ahead in society, women were not supposed to advance their position in society through education but to benefit others with it, which was also part of women's role as the self-sacrificing angel of the house. Work was also a restricted area for women and in particular for the middle class women, who basically only had the profession of governess open to them. Having to work for a living had social consequences and was considered demeaning because it meant taking a step down on the social scale.

On the subject of women's education, Austen and Brontë seem to have come to the same conclusion that it was inadequate. Of the two, Brontë had more extensive education and she even studied abroad, but still she felt that her options were limited. The two following quotes show quite clearly Austen's and Brontë's opinion on the subject:

> "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands." (P. 235)

> " She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French Drawing and Music" (in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments would have been tolerably comprehensive). (J. E. 89)

Anne is the only one of Austen's heroines to go to a boarding school. However, Anne's experience has not been a happy one, probably a reminder of Austen's own unhappy time at school:

> Anne had gone unhappy to school, grieving the loss of a mother whom she had dearly loved, feeling her separation from home. (P. 150)

Similarly Brontë's description of Jane's time at Lowood derives from her own childhood and the tragic story of the saintly Helen Burns, who is continually mistreated by Miss Scatcherd and finally dies of typhus epidemic, is based on the story of Brontë's sister, Maria. In addition to her latent tuberculosis , Maria was in the teeth of the headmistress because of her untidiness. Charlotte was forced to watch how her sister was humiliated and she was powerless to do anything. Maria submitted herself to this cruelty without resistance. She, like Helen in *Jane Eyre*, was mature for her age and deeply religious, preaching endurance and turning herself from this life to the one after death. Gordon (1994:21) points out that Charlotte did not adapt herself to her sister's model of resignation from this life, instead she turned herself into a survivor who did not conform to false authorities. Gordon further suggests that Charlotte saw through the real goal of the regime practised in Willson's school, which derived more from class ideology than from religion. The wretched conditions were a form of punishment, since the middle class tended to believe that poverty was largely deserved.

Besides describing the tragic life of her sister in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë also reflects herself in Jane. Jane's willingness to learn and her reaching the top of her class and finally becoming a teacher is what happened to Brontë in real life:

> ... a fondness of some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all... I availed myself fully of the advantages offered to me. In time I rose to be the first girl of the first class; then I was invested with the office of teacher. (J. E. 85-86)

Craik (1969:50) notes that in Austen's time it was the individual's responsibility to acquire further education after the short formal schooling. Austen considered education as important as Brontë, but like her contemporaries, she emphasised the ability of education to train character and morals more than its ability to provide knowledge. This might explain Austen's disdain of the young women's accomplishments if they were only used for getting a husband.

During Brontë's time the question of women's education was also under discussion as a part of the debate on women's position. Hunt (1988: 5) mentions that the intellectuals of the time, like Auguste Comte and Louis Aimé- Martin began to realise women's intellectual potential and propositions were made to improve women's education. The Victorian ideal of femininity was, however, so constricting that the suggested reform still did not free women from the sphere of home. All it meant was that women's wider education was to be used within the home to benefit the education and morals of the rest of the family. Brontë, who enjoyed learning, probably would not have agreed with the above sentiment, but shows that she was aware of the tendency when she put Jane in a position where she was asked by St John to study Hindustani to benefit him, unaware that he is preparing her for the destiny he has chosen for her, thus reinforcing the idea of women's passivity and ability to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others.

Before discussing Austen's and Brontë's attitudes towards work, there is one important distinction to be made. Because of the difference of their positions on the social scale and their personal experiences, they were likely to understand the concept of work differently. Austen, who had no experience, or need to work outside of home, sees women's work as the duties they had at home as the mistresses of the house and in the society whose members they were. According to Craik (1969: 56), Austen considered suggestions of idleness as suggestions of inadequacy. Austen, coming from the rational Regency period did not agree with the Victorian concept of a lady who is freed by progress into idleness. In fact she relentlessly mocks in *Persuasion* the Victorian ideal of idleness in the character of Mary Musgrove, who is presented as a selfish hypochondriac:

> ...any indisposition sunk her completely. She had no resources for solitude; and, inheriting a considerable share of the Elliot self-importance, was very prone to add to every other distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used. (P. 35)

She compares very poorly to Anne, who seems to represent the rational and capable woman of the Regency. She is shown to fulfil her duties as a woman when she arranges the family's move and consults the servants, takes care of Mary's children, or visits the poor, like Mrs Smith. Captain Wentworth finally

realises Anne's real worth when he observes her acting rationally and efficiently in dealing with Louisa's accident at Lyme:

> There he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. (P. 244)

Brontë, who was socially inferior to Austen, had as ambivalent an attitude towards work as she had towards rank and wealth. For Brontë, working for living meant, on one hand, going down on the social scale, on the other, it meant independence, even if it was a limited one. In *Jane Eyre* Jane and Rochester express Brontë's feelings towards governessing in the following manner:

> "A new servitude! There is something in that... "I know there is because it does not sound too sweet. It is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment:... (J. E. 86)
>
> " You will give up your governessing slavery at once" (J. E. 268)

In real life Brontë dreamt of opening a school of their own with her sister, which would have guaranteed a greater independence than "the governessing slavery". However, being a schoolmistress was not the ideal solution either, according to Jane:

> Much enjoyment I do not expect in the life opening before me:... -I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. (J. E. 355)

And when Jane gets her inheritance there is no question whether or not she gives up her work:

> "... I will retain my post of mistress till you get a substitute." (J. E. 348)

Jane becomes a lady, who executes her duties by only visiting the school as an act of charity.

Out of the growing prosperity grew the Victorian ideal of femininity, which emphasised idleness as a mark of a lady. The lady of leisure was relieved of all the duties women had, except her accomplishments. Both Austen and Brontë

reacted against this idealised passivity, which tied women to the sphere of home. In *Persuasion* the only happy and content woman in the beginning of the novel is Mrs Croft who has shared her husband's active life-style and she scolds her brother for talking:

> "... like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days." (P. 68)

In *Persuasion* Anne has personally experienced the limitations of home and in particularly, its effect in the matters of the heart as she confesses to Captain Harville during their discussion on the constancy of feelings and attachment among men and women:

> "Yes. We certainly do not forget you so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world..." (P. 233)

In *Jane Eyre* Brontë voices her frustration towards women's passive position in society even more strongly and in a more straightforward manner than Austen, through Jane:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags." (J. E. 111)

This may sound like radical feminism compared to Austen's statements if it is taken out of its nineteenth century context but, in fact Brontë, like Austen, is only demanding more freedom to function within their roles as women, not rewriting them, although Kennard (1978:88) calls *Jane Eyre*, "a feminist tract" in which Brontë brings up issues such as the position of governesses in society and the lack of suitable work for women, both of which she had personal experiences. In the light of Kennard's statement it is interesting to note yet another example of Brontë's ambivalence concerning the Woman Question, because Jane's longings for a more active life disappear the moment Mr Rochester enters the picture:

> Thornfield Hall was a changed place. ...A rill from the outer world was flowing through it. It had a master; for my part I liked it better (J. E 120)

This ambivalence can be understood on the basis of Brontë's own life. She suffered from loneliness which stagnated her life even more and she longed for a partner who would change that.

5. DISCUSSION

In this following section I will discuss my findings and try to draw together the nature of the time Austen and Brontë lived, as well as the influence of their own experiences on the way they described women in their novels. I will also compare Austen and Brontë and discuss whether the similarities and differences concerning women's status in Victorian society found between them in the analysis of *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* are explainable by the time difference between them. Furthermore, I will consider the influence an author's life on his/her writing in general and also the extent to which Austen and Brontë depict the social and historical reality of their times.

Austen's time in particular, was a time of change in values and attitudes as the Regency turned into the Victorian era. Regency had been an era of great innovations and progress fuelled by the industrial revolution. The side effects of that revolution were, however, beginning to show with new form of urban poverty and over crowded cities, which had come to replace the peaceful rural communities of Austen's youth. The long war against the French that England had been engaged in also took its toll on the nation. In addition the new powerful force in society, the middle class, feared that the French revolution would repeat itself in England because of the moral corruptness of the English aristocracy, which was also characteristic to the Regency period. This led to the moral reformation of the middle class led by the Evangelicals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Austen was very well aware of the changes in society and its values, and even though she did not point to them in her novels her writing was influenced by them. This can be seen in the serious tone of *Persuasion*, as has been mentioned above, which reflected the mood of the dawn of the Victorian era.

Austen's representation of naval officers in a favourable light in *Persuasion* indicates another change in society, namely social mobility and the formation of new professional classes, which was central to the Regency period. As mentioned above, the comparison of aristocracy and meritocrats in the novel shows the latter as having higher morals and ethics than the former and the aristocracy represent the decay of the old social system. Austen, belonging to the middle class, expresses the middle class superstition of the moral corruptness of the aristocracy. The same attitude affected also Brontë, which can be seen in her depiction of upper class women such as Mrs Reed and Blanche Ingram. Here we can also see the effects of the time continuum form Regency to the Victorian era, because the middle class propriety valued by the Victorians clearly has its roots in Austen's time. As White (1963:138) notes, the middle ranks of society considered themselves "the most wise and the most virtuous part of the community".

Austen's description of society is otherwise rooted in the days of Regency and in the central theme of communality. Her characters are not isolated individuals of an urban community but belong like Austen to a rural community and like her, are responsible for the consequences their actions have on other people. In most of her novels Austen never raised doubts about the validity of the established society, she like her heroines belonged to it and on the surface it seemed that she accepted it. *Persuasion* is different in this sense, however, because the established society represented by the aristocracy is a corrupt one and it is the professional middle class that offers the model for a civil society, indicating, once more, the change in society.

Brontë saw the changes in values and attitudes that started to take place in Austen's time becoming the established moral codes of society. The Victorian society was urban and individualistic place, where the middle class had established its position as the guardians of morality. Social mobility had come to a halt, which resulted in a stagnated, class conscious society, where people were expected to accept their own position in it as God given. Social problems were dealt with the self-help concept in accordance with the Victorian individualism or charity, which was used in part to validate the propriety of the middle classes. This was the society that Brontë portrayed in her work. She had personal experiences of the class consciousness of the Victorians as well as

their charity, the effects of which she transferred to her main character in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë also knew the hypocrisy of the Victorians because her literary influences were from the Romantic period but she lived at a time and in a society which abhorred and moralized the ideas and values represented by the Romantics.

Brontë also experienced the limitations imposed on women by the Victorian society more acutely than Austen. The Victorian doctrine of female passivity reigned and, although it had already affected Austen's time as well, Brontë got to feel its full force, as seen in Southey's letter, mentioned earlier, warning Brontë against becoming a writer and telling her that writing was not a woman's job. The intellectual sphere was reserved only to men, women were expected to excel in the matters of the heart within the boundaries of home while keeping in mind the dangers of excessive emotionality, which had to be kept in check. This is in sharp contradiction to Austen's Regency and the ideals of rationality and practicality for both sexes.

Against this background Austen and Brontë created their works. In accordance to her experiences and the time Austen lived, she developed her female characters from familiar middle class surroundings like her own. Austen does not question the established society or the place of women in it, her criticism is directed towards the structures of that society and women's right and need to participate in it according to their own role. In the previous novels before *Persuasion* Austen describes the moral growth of the heroine ~~and~~ who as the mark of her maturation marries the man she loves and establishes her own position in society, as Kennard (1978:44) notes. She points out that in *Persuasion*, however, the heroine does not adopt herself to the established society, which points to Austen's own view of the changed society. By Anne's breaking away from the old social order, which endorses the passivity and idleness of women, Austen expresses her own frustration over the limitations she experienced as a woman. Anne, like Austen herself, does not openly rebel, against the restrictions imposed upon her by her society, rather she opposes the system within her own role in society by holding on to her high moral code. Austen does not encourage rebellion in her characters but suggests that the best way to operate is to take advantage of the role and duty one is give and use it to influence one's surroundings.

Brontë's heroines, however, are rebellious by nature, as Jane's rebellion against her aunt Mrs Reed shows. Her heroines come from the outskirts of the established society and share many of the similar circumstances of her own life. Brontë too, writes about things familiar to her, such as horrid experiences in boarding schools and working as a governess as well as the fight against social inferiority imposed from the outside. It seems that her heroines are on the opposite side in society to Austen's. They do, however, deal with the same issues concerning women's position in society but from a different point of view; Austen from the inside, Brontë from the outside. Brontë's women are rebellious and passionate and are not afraid to show their feelings but in the end they are assimilated in society and they learn to control and express their emotions in a suitable Victorian manner as in *Jane Eyre*, where Jane learns to balance passion with reason. Kennard (1978:81) notes that Brontë's heroines experience similar process of maturing as Austen's, but their maturing is, as Jane exemplifies, inner and spiritual. Austen considers the question of passion and reason from the point of view of the consequences of the individual's behaviour to other people, while Brontë deals with the matter concentrating on the effects it has on the individual. Individuals have to learn to control their feelings in order to protect themselves and to survive in society.

Neither of the novelists describes her heroines as confirming to the model of female passivity and they both consider women capable of rational thinking and owning intellectual abilities and that women are equal to their husbands. The differences between Austen's and Brontë's portrayal of women derive from the concepts of independence and individuality and the relationship between an individual and society. Austen sees society forming a community like the rural ones before urbanisation, where people had to recognise the reality of others and accept responsibility towards them. Brontë on the other hand, lived at a time when urbanisation had broken down the safe little rural communities and in the spirit of Victorian individualism, it was every man for himself. Urbanisation had resulted in an individualistic society where the old social safety net of rural communities had broken down and people were looking for freedom and self-fulfilment. Despite the fact that Brontë was influenced by the Romantic period, her work was in accordance with Victorian individualism. What is more, it is interesting to note, that the concept of

individualism in fact derives from Romanticism as it was a response to the urbanisation of society which isolated people from their earlier communities and forced people to be considered as individuals. So, although the Victorians moralised Romanticism and its instinctive, passionate and non- ethical drive towards self-fulfilment, they had, at the same time, been influenced by it.

Also in the question of women's position in society we can see the effect of the time and circumstances at work. Although, basically Austen and Brontë had the same complaints about women's position, Austen responded to them from her middle class surroundings and Brontë from hers. Austen had a clear opinion of working as a governess but the difference to Brontë was that she did not have personal experience of it because she had no need to do work as Brontë did. In addition, the limitations imposed on women were not as tight as they were during Brontë's time and, most importantly, Austen looked at the situation only from the point of view of her own class. Therefore it is obvious why Austen does not demand more possibilities for work to women like Brontë does, but the freedom for the women of her own class to act within the boundaries of their social roles. Brontë, on the other hand calls for the freedom to act beyond the limited artificial boundaries of women's societal roles.

It could be said that it was probably easier for Austen to write in her time. The Regency period approved of female novelists, which can be seen in her father's encouragement of his daughter and also by the fact that she wrote under her own name and was asked to dedicate *Emma* to Prince Regent, whilst Brontë took a pseudonym to protect her identity and to compete in the male dominated world. Halperin (1984:286-287) points out that Austen did, however, resort to underestimating her own abilities as a writer to Prince Regent's librarian, Mr Clarke, by calling herself "the most unlearned and uninformed female, who ever dared to be an authoress" but that was only to get rid of him and his suggestion for her next novel. Despite Austen's mock self depreciation, it does indicate that times were changing and women's role was becoming more restricted. Brontë on the other hand wrote at a time when, as mentioned above, it was not considered appropriate for females to try their skills at writing and in addition her style, based on the Romantic tradition, offended the sensitive Victorians, which accounts for the explanations she had to offer on behalf her book and her sex. Her use of the pseudonym Currer Bell

was also necessary because she did not want her novels to be judged on the basis of her sex and therefore inferior to the works of male writers. However, her attempt to hide behind the mask of a man failed and she was treated in the manner she feared, only as a female novelist.

In order to create a novelist has to have a stock of material to write about and what else would provide that material for two middle class women with limited life experiences and environment than their own life. However, it is just as erroneous to expect that their novels imitated their own life exactly. How and what they wrote depended on various factors. Society and the prevailing culture are in constant interaction and writers are affected by what they read, in other words the products of that culture. It is obvious that they are influenced by the literary culture of their time and society. This context of time society and culture forms literary conventions, which writers more or less follow and the conventions have an effect on the way the writers are able to deal with their subject. As Kennard (1978:18) points out, literary conventions also affect the extent to which writers can depict reality. According to Kennard, an example of this is the Victorian convention of two ~~the~~ suitors, which forces the heroine to make a choice between the wrong and the right suitor, as is the case both in *Jane Eyre* and *Persuasion.* The situation of having two suitors at the same time and the fact that the one happens to be the right and the other one wrong, is hardly realistic in life. It is obvious that there is a common convention at use in *Jane Eyre* and *Persuasion.* It is interesting to note that it was Austen who established this convention, and that despite the time difference between her and Brontë, both of them use it.

At first glance Brontë seems like the greater social realist of the two because she describes the situation of governesses, the horrid conditions of the boarding school at Lowood and the hypocritical attitude of the Victorians to the misery of others in the form of Mr Brocklehurst , the head of that charitable institution. Brontë's realism, however, ends when Jane becomes a governess at Thornfield and his master falls in love with her.

Austen, on the other hand never looses her realistic grip, but she does not make a point of trying to connect her story to reality either. As Craik (1969:7) says, Austen writes with the assumption that her readers are aware of the same things in society as she is and therefore she does not have to pay attention to

them. In *Persuasion* there are, however, allusions to current events in English society of the time. As has been mentioned above, Austen uses the naval officers Wentworth and Benwick as examples of the changed society. Kelly (1995:30) notes that Austen does not have to point out to her contemporaries the fact that the navy officers are the heroes of British resistance to the French revolutionary forces. The fact, however, that she uses them in her novel links it to the historical event of her time.

6. CONCLUSION

Society and culture are in constant interaction, they both change and mould each other. Social and historical events during a particular period of time produce a particular kind of response from the people who experience those events. This is how culture develops, as we can see in the Romantic movement; it was artists' response to the changing society. Naturally, the circumstances and experiences of individual artists affect their view, but the context of the time can not be ignored. The context of time is important, because with the historical and social events, it also determines the cultural atmosphere, which has an effect on the manner artists are able to approach their material. With Austen and Brontë, the literary culture of their time was influenced by the Romantic movement, to which they, however, responded differently because of the distance in time between them and also because of their different circumstances in life. In addition, as a part of the cultural atmosphere there is also the concept of literary conventions to consider. In Austen and Brontë's time it was the convention of two suitors.

The context of time and life experiences are intertwined in the formation of a novelist's work, as Austen and Brontë demonstrate. They both wrote about women and their life in the context of their own time and, to a certain extent, based on their own experiences as women in Victorian society. As writers they were, however, also tied to the literary conventions of the time. The life experiences and the time Austen and Brontë lived shaped their attitudes and values concerning the issue of women's position in society. In voicing their attitudes and in conveying their view on women's situation they also had to follow the guide lines set forth by the literary culture as well as the general

cultural atmosphere of their time. The more serious tone of *Persuasion*, compared to Austen's earlier novels, is an example of a novelist following the mood of the day as a response to the changed atmosphere of the early Victorian England.

As I stated in my hypothesis, the difference in Austen's and Brontë's views on women's status in Victorian society is due to the time difference between them, as well as the difference between their circumstances in life. Austen was a part of the established society and therefore did not question its existence, except in *Persuasion.* In the novel she expresses her disapproval only of the upper classes and gives her approval of the middle class as the new leading segment of society. Austen saw women as well as men having important social roles in society. She approached the question of women's place in society from the point of view a community and considered women as having integral roles in upholding a civil society. She also argued against the limitations in women's social roles within the community. It has to be underlined that Austen's view on women was influenced by the fact that she deliberately dealt only with a portion of English society, the middle class, and did not consider the position of women from the point of view of any other social group.

Brontë felt like an outsider in a society where she herself was expected to belong. Her marginal position as a middle class woman influenced her opinions on the woman question. Although Austen, too, was an unmarried surplus woman like Brontë, the difference between them was that the safety of Austen's social class prevented her form having to work for a living. On the other hand, Brontë's view of women's position in society was also effected by the Romantic idea, endorsed by the Victorians, of individualism. Brontë faced the linking of the concepts of individuality and independence with the demands of society. The situation was made even more difficult by the fact that the Victorian society, with which she was trying to assimilate her independent heroines, as well as herself, denied women their independence. Despite her radical ideas about women in Victorian society, Brontë was not demanding a whole new social order but was on the same lines with Austen within the context of her own individualistic time: the expansion of the restricted role of women in society.

In conclusion it could be said that Austen and Brontë took advantage of their own personal experiences, the historical events of their day, and the social reality around them but did not use them as such. They modified them according to the literary conventions of the time and their own purposes and wrote stories of fictional women, who shared similar experiences and characteristics with their creators. In this fashion they were able to write about and criticise women's place in society and do their part in changing the role of women within society.

Austen and Brontë, the two prominent female writers of the nineteenth century, provide ample sources for further study. First of all, the comparison of Austen and Brontë could be expanded by taking into account their other novels besides *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* and analysing also them to further illuminate the relationship between the context of time and an author's life and the influence they have on his/her work. Another possible direction would be to consider the effects of literary conventions of Regency and Victorian eras more closely and the extent to which they helped or hindered Austen's and Brontë's work in portraying women's position in society. One further approach would be to study Austen and Brontë comparatively from the view point of women studies and to concentrate on their contribution to the development of women's position in English society in the nineteenth century.

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