Common critical knowledge holds that Charlotte Brontë often modelled her characters off of families, friends, and acquaintances.¹ Charlotte’s regrettably platonic involvement with M. Héger saturates her novels with fantastical realizations of her longing. The next most influential presence in Charlotte’s writing, Emily Brontë, “about whom she is never tired of talking”, provided Charlotte with a vivacious personality from which to draw caricatures and dialogue. Of course, the rest of her family held their places in both Charlotte’s heart and literature. For Charlotte to walk through a town such as Roe Head is to pass by a plethora of possible characters. To converse with or to debate with Charlotte would have run the risk of finding such an interaction staring back at them from one of Charlotte’s novels. In short, Charlotte Brontë was a sponge. Her world at times may have been restrictive, but she soaked up even the smallest of details. Through dutifully transcribing her experiences into tomes, she expresses her world in meticulously painted high definition. With all the above stated, I find curiosity in the fact that there has been little acknowledgement of the nonhuman members of the Brontë family and their impact on Charlotte’s fiction.

This essay is an argument for those with no voice and no means to hold a pen—the Brontë’s dogs. Keeper, Emily’s bulldog-mastiff and Flossy, Anne’s King Charles spaniel influenced Charlotte’s writing in similar fashion as the human characters in her life. Both of these dogs outlived their masters and served as inspirations to Charlotte. After her sibling’s deaths, the two dogs served as bittersweet reminders of her loss. Once, upon returning to an empty Brontë home, the dogs exuberantly greet her and she notes her melancholy reaction:

… this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent—the rooms were all empty. I remembered where the three were laid—in what narrow dark dwellings—never more to reappear on earth.²

One of the more memorable images of Emily’s funeral was the solemn participation of Keeper. Susan Glaskell writes of him in the Life of Charlotte Brontë, along with the suffering he endures once bereft of his master:

As the old, bereaved father and his two surviving children followed the coffin to the grave, they were joined by Keeper, Emily’s fierce, faithful bull-dog. He walked alongside of the mourners, and into the church, and stayed quietly there all the time

that the burial service was being read. When he came home, he lay down at Emily’s chamber door, and howled pitifully for many days.³

When Keeper dies some three years later, Charlotte remarks that Flossy (the ‘fat curly-haired dog’) “is dull, and misses him. There was something very sad in losing the old dog.”⁴ These observations show that Charlotte must have been keenly aware of a dog as a sentient, emotional being. She was actively monitoring animal behavior through noting their traits and actions.

Many of these doglike qualities find themselves infused into her characters, a tactic most obvious in The Professor. The master-pupil relationship dynamic found often in her works frequently comes close to that of master-pet. These dogs were also transfigured as characters themselves, often becoming character-developing extensions of their human masters. Such is the case with Shirley who can’t be seen as complete without Tartar’s presence. Through her dogs, Charlotte also touches on precarious themes such as gender. Furthermore, Brontë’s plots are heavily laden with human-mutt interactions and the threat of rabies remains ever present. While canines appear in all of Charlotte’s mature and finished novels, this project adheres closely to The Professor and Shirley.


Charlotte Brontë wrote in an era where “dogs could be at once vilified and love”.⁵ In the most positive light, dogs were viewed as “models for human behaviour, Job-like figures of endurance, members of what we might now call a humanimal family, or as projections of the (human) self or of idealized human virtues”.⁶ Before reaching hate, we find a large middle ground in the Victorian dog owner’s world - animal neglect. The dog was still often valued for its utility alone; their sentience held little importance. People would use dogs to pull carts, often with heavy loads and with little consideration for their wellbeing.⁷ Charlotte would have come into direct contact with these dogcarts during her stay in Brussels where this practice was “used well into the twentieth century”.⁸ Back in England, dog carting was a

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⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
hotly contested subject. In Brontë’s home country, the practice would ultimately be outlawed in 1854.9

Pets turned to pests with the rise of rabies hysteria. People remained fearful, for “potentially rabid dogs lurked everywhere: at home, in the yard and on the street, in popular memory, and in the imagination.”10 The Victorian’s fear is rooted in fact, for death by hydrophobia is particularly painful. To be bit by a rabid dog alone would mean being subjected to “the surgical removal of tissues around the bite, cauterisation of the wound, and weeks of worry over whether they would be the unlucky one … that developed hydrophobia”.11 To be “the unlucky one” meant a slow, torturous death in which the mind was attacked along with the body. Considering these risks, sympathizing with the Victorians’ paranoia of dogs isn’t hard to do. The ensuing wanton violence against dogs, though, caused a rift of social debate. Stray dogs started to be systematically destroyed, “People would batter dogs to vent their personal anger”.12 It was at this point terms such as “‘Mad Dog’ [became] separated from rabies and associated with aggression and violence”.13 Some people began placing the image of the noble dog above that of the ignorant human, and the line between man and beast started to blur.

One such “Mad Dog” is Edward Crimsworth. When Mr. Hunsden “hounded on the people to hiss” him as a cruel master, Edward lashes out violently against his brother William (44). Edward “wished to be an inexorable tyrant” (31), and he cannot stand to give generosity to what may be the better man. We are told “If he could have once placed [William] in a ridiculous or mortifying position, he would have forgiven [him] much” (25). He persecutes William much in the same way dogs were being battered by the ignorant:

You have gone and told it far and near that I give you low wages and knock you about like a dog. I wish you were a dog! I’d set-to this minute, and never stir from the spot till I’d cut every strip of flesh from your bones with this whip. (43)

Edward believes “his money gave him sufficient superiority over a beggar like [William]”, much how William’s status as a human saves his life (44). At this point the younger brother is forced into action, and metaphorically bears his teeth (with the threat of legal action). His assertion of independence spares him a whipping. The breaking of his bonds to Edward leads William on a journey towards becoming the antithesis of his brother – a kind master. This

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9 Ibid., 142.
11 Ibid., 11.
12 Ibid., 41.
13 Ibid., 2.
family dilemma takes place early in the book because “the author was anxious to establish the strength and masculinity of her male character”. The rest of the book sees William mature, often comically, from beaten dog to loving alpha pack leader. His evolution isn’t a full one, for even towards the end of the book, “Humor and irony [continue to] pervade his youthful self, after Frances has accepted him, as blissfully content—and blissfully unaware of his betrothed’s less complete contentment.” He may not be the perfect master, but he is not malevolent. His main fault is an innocent sort of ignorance, with which the reader is more likely to sympathize. In a letter, Charlotte comments to Ellen Nussey exhibit how a dog’s ignorance can be both pain-inducing and yet forgivable. It was some years after writing The Professor when she came home to console her father in the wake of Anne’s death, the letter reads:

The dogs seemed in strange ecstasy. I am certain they regarded me as the harbinger of others. The dumb creatures thought that as I was returned, those who had been so long absent were not far behind.

A dog’s ignorance is a trait that is both loathed and loved. We love a perennially happy puppy, but the attribution of doglike characteristics to a human remains an insult. William Crimsworth mocks Hunsden’s ignorance of his true situation in Brussels, by stating, “Hunsden, you’re a puppy. But you’ve only seen the titlepage of my happiness; you don’t know the tale that follows; you cannot conceive the interest and sweet variety and thrilling excitement of the narrative” (243). Later, after Hunsden’s contextual grasp of William’s situation matures he becomes a stalwart friend to the Crimsworth family. He is always there to help William, even though his character is compared at times to “Mephistopheles” (208), and William—fearing Faust’s victimization—consistently doubts him. Hunsden only wants praise from William, to be thanked for being such a trusty acquaintance. He even becomes a sort of pseudo-member of the family, and when the Crimsworths’ successfully retire, they decide to live near him. This cycle concludes with Hunsden, once a puppy, giving a puppy to William’s son, Victor:

Mr. Hunsden gave him a mastiff cub, which he called Yorke, after the donor; it grew to a superb dog, whose fierceness, however, was much modified by the companionship and caresses of its young master. He would go nowhere, do nothing without Yorke… (263).

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15 Ibid., 42.
16 Gaskell, ”The Life of Charlotte Brontë.”
To shed light on the seemingly random and sudden rise-and-demise of Yorke, the Crimsworth’s ill-fated family pet, I present some rabies statistics. There were no human deaths by rabies from 1843-1846, “Official figures show no deaths in London between between 1846 and 1853; hence, the increase that began in 1846 was mainly in Lancashire and West Riding of Yorkshire.”17 In other words, there was a local outbreak of rabies near the Brontë Family and during the time Charlotte penned *The Professor*. Considering the amount of attention each incident garnered, if a local occurrence did happen, Charlotte would certainly have been made abreast of the situation (and quite possibly wrote it into her novel).

Making all the right decisions for a dependant is no easy task. To love an object does not necessarily entail protecting it. Charlotte explores this notion with William’s ultimate decision as a master, one that decides life and death. The dilemma occurs when Yorke “was bitten in the street by a dog in a rabid state” (264). Acting as a lone master, without consulting anyone, William immediately executes his son’s dog in what he considers a humane fashion: “he had not seen me level the gun; I stood behind him” (264). There are two forces at work within Charlotte when she wrote this passage. The first is the concept of a painless, ignorant death. She conveys this appreciation in November, 1854 to Ellen:

> Did I tell you that our poor little Flossy is dead? She drooped for a single day, and died quietly in the night without pain. The loss even of a dog was very saddening; yet, perhaps, no dog ever had a happier life, or an easier death.18

A contrasting conscience, which is soon represented by William’s accusing son, is shown through her reaction to Keeper’s death:

> Poor old Keeper died last Monday morning, after being ill one night; he went gently to sleep; we laid his old faithful head in the garden … There was something very sad in losing the old dog; yet I am glad he met a natural fate. People kept hinting he ought to be put away, which neither papa nor I liked to think of.19

William is bereft of such sensitivity. He only sees the necessity of the act and teaching his son (who at first condemns the act) why doing what he did was humane. The line between caring for and abusing the ones we love, pets or human alike, is a thin one. This divide is shaded in obscurity - to find the side on which we stand is often a difficult or impossible accomplishment.

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18 Gaskell, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë."
19 Ibid.
Master-Pupil / Master-Dog

For many, to be benevolent is to experience pleasure. I consider myself to be a generous person, yet I find it impossible not to take pride in being so. In fact, I find it just as hard not to hate those who are selfish. Naturally, dogs appeal to people like me, for they exhibit a unique ability to reciprocate the love you put into them. All kindness invested is reciprocated. The dog owner’s happiness is thusly fanned to a fire by wag of the dog’s tail.

In comparison, the teacher relishes the respect of his pupil. When a pupil reciprocates the knowledge the master bestows, a mutual satisfaction is achieved. This feeling is surely comparable to teaching a dog a new trick. Therein lays the dynamic of William Crimsworth and Frances Evans Henri’s relationship.

When Frances is first introduced, the class accepts her as would a dog pack. Her peers (and students) strive to dominate her into submission. The comparison stops there, however. Crimsworth describes to the reader that humans alone hold the ability and penchant for excessive cruelty. He narrates:

Frances toiled
for and with her pupils like a drudge, but it was long ere her conscientious exertions were rewarded by anything like docility on their part, because they saw that they had power over her, in as much as by resisting her painful attempts to convince, persuade, control—by forcing her to the employment of coercive measures—they could inflict upon her exquisite suffering (108).

For those of us that enjoy benevolence, who relish respect of our wild kingdom, there are many others who remain ignorant. Crimsworth elaborates, “Human beings—human children especially—seldom deny themselves the pleasure of exercising a power which they are conscious of possessing,” (131, 132). By now, Crimsworth is the alpha presence in the classroom. As such, he feels it necessary to investigate this new addition. To accomplish this, he examines her devoir to “see a glimpse of what she really is” (132). He is happy with what he finds and soon approaches her. He beckons her as he would a dog: “‘Come here’, said I, lifting my finger at the same time” (136). She is told to sit, and she obediently obliges. Now that she has listened to his commands, he begins to lavish praise upon her work, “her countenance was transfigured, a smile shone in her eyes” (137). One might even envision her tail starting to wag a bit. She grants him dominion over her, which culminates in the physical handling of his marriage proposal to her: “I held Frances on my knee, placed there with sharpness and decision, and retained with exceeding tenacity” (222).
To clarify, I don’t mean to characterize Frances as a dog. We find she is a very independent, diligent, and intelligent woman. In fact, after reading about her devoir and witnessing her interactions with Mr. Hundsen, one might wonder that she probably hasn’t even learned very much from William. Perhaps she has been so intelligent from the start. It is the master-dog dynamic (the validation she feels from William’s praise and his concurring pride in having such an esteemed pupil) that is my chief concern. Their master-pupil relationship is not then as simple as teaching a dog a new trick, but has an added dimension. Their mutual affinity grows between two unfortunate people in an impersonal, industrialized world. Mr. Hundsen describes England, from which William has come and which Frances sees almost as a Utopia:

Come to England and see. Come to Birmingham and Manchester; come to St. Giles’ in London, and get a practical notion of how our system works. Examine the footprints of our august aristocracy; see how they walk in blood, crushing hearts as they go. Just put your head in at English cottage doors; get a glimpse of Famine crouched torpid on black hearthstones; of Disease lying bare on beds without coverlets, of Infamy wantoning viciously with Ignorance, though indeed Luxury is her favourite paramour, and princely halls are dearer to her than thatched hovels … (236)

Their coming together coincides with their change of fortune. One becomes an extension of the other. The union is not only Master-Pupil, or Husband-Wife, but also Keeper-Pet. This notion is later echoed in Charlotte’s more mature novel, Shirley. Shirley, fiercely independent, is subdued by Louis Moore: “I am glad I know my keeper and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose” (522). Both relationships exhibit a characteristic that Charlotte has attributed to dogs. She writes about Keeper’s affinity for Emily: “Like most dogs of his kind, he feared, respected, and deeply loved her who subdued him.”

20 Ibid.
Tartar and Gender

In Shirley, the heiress constantly finds herself navigating the boundary between genders. She enjoys ladylike ventures with Caroline, and yet demonstrates a willingness to engage the men of the town in political matters of discussion. Her masculinity is embodied in Tartar, her mastiff. The first time her dog is referenced, we find Shirley in the company of Mr. Helstone. He physically grabs her hands “causing her to let fall her whole cargo of flowers—and seated her by him on the sofa” (169). Mr. Helstone demands that she recite the Apostle’s creed. Being so physically and verbally dominated, “She said it like a child” (169). It is at this point, where we see Shirley in one of her most subservient, “girlish”, moments that Tartar comes barging in. Shirley instantly takes back a measure of control, ignoring Helstone’s request for further recitations: "Let me gather up my flowers. Here is Tartar coming; he will tread upon them” (169). Tartar, “a rather large, strong, and fierce-looking dog, very ugly, being of a breed between mastiff and bulldog,” (169) is the antithesis of ladylike etiquette. Being no lapdog, Tartar embodies the Victorian woman’s rebellion of the soul. This notion is demonstrated by his reaction to the flowers on the floor:

He seemed to scorn them as food; but probably thinking their velvety petals might be convenient as litter, he was turning round preparatory to depositing his tawny bulk upon them, when Miss Helstone and Miss Keeldar simultaneously stooped to the rescue (169).
Tartar’s perception of the flowers as a nest on which to settle his buttocks may be Charlotte’s metaphorical release of frustration over her gender’s social limits. At the very least, this scene depicts female sensible foresight preventing a male-made mess. With Tartar now present in the room, the reader is filled in on the origin of Shirley’s male-gendered name, how she had been “bestowed [with] the same masculine family cognomen [her parents] would have bestowed on a boy” (170). Shirley, after all, is “a portrait of Emily Brontë as she might have been if rich and free.” 21 The portrait of Emily is not complete, however, without her dog. For at Emily’s side, overlooked by literary criticism and history alike, sits Keeper, her bulldog-mastiff of whom Tartar appears to be an exact replica. It is Tartar’s presence which completes Shirley, and truly “made her seem as if she was Lord of the Manor” 22. To counteract the brutish presence of Tartar, Shirley early on exhibits mannerisms of the Brontês’ King Charles spaniel, Flossy. Caroline and Shirley are sitting out on the grass collecting flowers, when Shirley examines Caroline. Her “temporary expression” appears “in the attitude and with something of the aspect of a grave but gallant little cavalier (a pseudonym for Flossy’s breed)” (163).

While Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys wrongly date Shirley’s setting as being the “1820’s and 1830s” (the story takes place in 1812 23), they correctly contend that the “gender politics of the novel are sometimes expressed through dogs”. 24 At one point in particular, Tartar lends Shirley his physicality so that she may be equal to (and the better of) “the curates [who] provide a low version of … Moore’s corruption of marital desire into mercenary deviousness, the diversion of affection that hurts Caroline so much and drives a wedge generally between the sexes”. 25 Though John Maynard’s notion is inherently true, it is unfair to use the term curates generally, for its usage lumps the well-meaning Mr. Sweeting in with Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne. This being said, Malone and Donne’s suiting of Shirley is “wonderfully broken up by Shirley’s big dog.” 26 Tartar first engages the two in the front yard, which is ‘off stage’ to the reader. We hear Donne’s “imperious voice” and a violent lashing of the dog by Malone (232). The entering of Shirley’s estate in a male-dominant fashion would not be allowable. Shirley exclaims this fact: "They have struck him. A blow is

21 Bentley, The Brontês, 79.
22 Pemberton and Worboys, Mad Dogs and Englishmen : Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000, 59.
23 Bentley, The Brontês, 77.
24 Pemberton and Worboys, Mad Dogs and Englishmen : Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000, 58.
26 Ibid., 201, 02.
what he is not used to, and will not take" (232). When Mr. Sweeting arrives with Mr. Hall, both respectable men, we are told “Tartar had no ill-will to” either of them (234).

Like Tartar, Emily’s “Keeper was faithful to the depths of his nature as long as he was with friends; but he who struck him with a stick or whip, roused the relentless nature of the brute, who flew at his throat forthwith, and held him there till one or the other was at the point of death.”27 This disposition is why Charlotte used Keeper as Tartar’s major influence and not the smaller, harmless Flossy. Keeper’s ferociousness lends physical muscle to Shirley’s wealth and status thus completing her claim as a male’s equal.

Shirley begins to lose her manliness once bit by a neighbouring dog Phoebe, who she fears is rabid. When she reveals the story to Louis Moore, he remarks that she has been acting “very nervous and womanish” (428). Her interaction with Phoebe is an integral part of Shirley’s re-gendering as female; “Shirley [becomes] outwardly more passive as she settles for marriage, though her internal strength remains.”28

The marriage between Louis and Shirley seems to be less Charlotte’s “wish fulfillment, a union bringing restoration of loved ones to secure and lasting happiness”29 than Frances and William’s elopement in The Professor. Losing Emily during the writing of Shirley must have had some impact to this effect. Frances never loses, she only gains. On the other hand, Shirley loses much to her new husband; he takes her title, her wealth, her status. There is no problem when we see a well-fed dog on a leash that is happy and ignorant. When a “tigeress” such as Shirley is domesticated, although still beautiful and capable, she loses the essence of the wild that makes her unique. The conformity of Shirley’s character was most likely a struggle for Charlotte, who’s “strong Tory belief in a class-based status quo … struggles with her compassion for and identification with those, whether factory hands or women [or dogs], who are marginalized in an industrialized and patriarchal society.”30

Conclusion

Both Shirley and The Professor can be seen as prime examples of the Victorian Social Novel. Josephine M. Guy defines this genre as a “body of English fiction written in the late 1840s and 1850s … takes as its subject-matter large scale problems in contemporary British society, problems which in turn were the product of changing demographic patterns

27 Gaskell, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë."
28 Pemberton and Worboys, Mad Dogs and Englishmen : Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000, 59.
and changes in work practices associated with the accelerating industrialization of the British Economy". 31 Charlotte Brontë wrote during the Era of Dickens, Disraeli, Gaskell, and Kingsley, in whose novels “the rise of compassionate interventionist spirit [during] 1830-1850” can be seen. 32 In Carole Beebe Tarantelli words:

These were years of suffering: of little children whose limbs were bent out of all human shape by their work at the machines; of hungry paupers thrown out of their work on the land by the increasing capitalization of agriculture and left to rot in village workhouses or carried in loads to the northern cities to see the health of their families destroyed bit by bit by the factories … These were the years of the Luddites, of Peterloo, of radicalism, reformism, and Chartism, or revolts of the farm laborers, and of the replies of England’s rulers – of agents of provocateurs like Oliver the Spy, inflexible magistrates, transportation, the gibbet. 33

One goal of my essay has been to extend this notion to include that these were also times of excessive animal cruelty and concurrently increasing animal advocacy. Early “attention to animal suffering often encompassed animals that could have been ‘pets’: mutts, despised street mongrels, overworked carters’ dogs,” 34 and resulted from emotional attachments such as the Brontë’s experienced with their dogs, Flossy and Keeper. Charlotte Brontë wrote in the period slightly preceding Darwin’s On the Origin of Species, a book that would inspire an even harsher social world where “survival of the fittest” ensured the exploitation of man and beast alike. The plight of the poor, women, and of nature would be rationalized by the necessity of natural selection. In a concluding excerpt, Charlotte writes a clear parallel between the Victorian prejudice of women and dogs alike:

34 Morse and Danahay, Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture, 18.
The original of Mr. Hall I have seen; he knows me slightly; but he would as soon think I had closely observed him or taken him for a character–he would as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a book–a novel–as he would his dog, Prince.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Figure 1} 'Flossy' by Emily Brontë

\textsuperscript{35} Gaskell, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë."
Bibliography


