Shirley: A Portrait of ‘Un-English’ English Society
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Abstract
Charlotte Brontë’s novel Shirley, which deals with suffering middle-class women unfairly marginalized in society, critically depicts the condition of contemporary England. In its criticism of patriarchal English society, the novel suggests its un-Englishness. In Shirley, as a general rule, Englishness represents virtues, while un-Englishness represents despicable vices and things to be avoided. The novel criticizes the evils of nineteenth-century England by exploiting such stereotyped nineteenth-century images of Englishness as Protestantism, liberty, being democratic, and foreignness, which are the opposite of Englishness. It ends with a pessimistic view of England without offering any solution to improve the condition of suffering middle-class women and reflects the author’s view of the hopelessness of contemporary English society, whose reality contradicts reputed English virtues.

Introduction
Shirley (1849) is a social novel that focuses on English middle-class women—especially single women victimized in contemporary English society. In a letter to W. S. Williams written during the planning of Shirley, Charlotte Brontë expresses her wish for ‘the better ordering of the Social System’:

I often wish to say something about the ‘condition of women’ question—but it is one respecting which so much ‘cant’ has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked—but where or how could another be opened? . . . One can see where the evil lies—but who can point out the remedy?

Labelled ‘the weaker sex’ by patriarchal society, middle-class women’s lives were separated from men in nineteenth-century England. As economic conditions changed in
the eighteenth century, the middle-class home became ‘only a place to live, not a place to work’. Removing the economic aspect from the home excluded both wives and daughters from the world outside the home. It was widely believed that the physical superiority of men allowed them to survive in the ruthless world of the marketplace; a powerful reason to oppose the employment of women was that women needed the protection of the walls of home. When Victorian patriarchal society argued that women were unfit to compete for work, it rationalized its belief that a woman’s place is in the home by ‘superficially’ asserting that women were endowed with moral superiority over men because of their maternal instinct. It also ‘theoretically’ defined women’s nature as not self-interested, ambitious, or aggressive but ‘naturally’ self-sacrificing and tender. Decent, women, pure of heart, religious and self-sacrificing were idealized by English men as ‘perfect wives’ or the embodiment of ‘true womanhood’: middle-class English women were increasingly confined to the private sphere, expected to perform domestic duties rather than public ones. As the middle-class prospered, servants undertook more and more tasks, relegating daughters to ‘decorative’ roles. In the mid-1850s English poet Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) described the image of woman as a domestic deity, morally superior as an ‘Angel in the House’. Another popular image of nineteenth-century English women was of an ivy-like wife, who shows great love for her husband and children, sacrifices herself for them, and is totally dependent on her husband.

Despite having time to spare, middle-class women were constantly discouraged from taking paid work. In such situations, engaging in charitable work was a limited public activity considered suitable for ‘respectable’ women that could provide women of the leisured classes with a place for self-expression and an opportunity to satisfy their zeal for being part of society. They spent their free time visiting the needy, holding charity bazaars, offering soup or blankets, managing Sunday schools, and giving lectures.

In nineteenth-century England, women constantly outnumbered men; as we are told in Shirley, ‘the matrimonial market’ was ‘overstocked’ (391). Although the majority of single Victorian women belonged to the lower classes, people generally argued about the ‘surplus’ female population by concentrating on middle-class single women. The overabundance of single women became a serious social problem because
it was difficult for many of them to support themselves. English middle-class women faced limited options outside the home; socially acceptable activities for such women were limited to a handful of professions.

Among the limited choices available for middle-class women to earn money, private teaching was widely considered the most ‘genteel’ because a governess’s work seemingly resembled that of middle-class mothers. Governesses were expected to represent domestic ideals and virtues and to serve as role models for young children, controlling excessive ‘assertiveness’ and ‘sexuality’ unbecoming to young children and daughters. Since their salaries were inadequate and working conditions were harsh, the work of a governess was represented as ‘white slavery’.

Written in such a social background, Charlotte Brontë’s Shirley contains four female characters who are perfect prototypes of victimized middle-class women: ‘an angel in the house’, ‘single women engaged in charitable works’, and ‘a governess’. Mary Cave, admired as ‘a monumental angel’, reputedly died because of her husband’s harsh treatment. Not expected to play any important role, she was confined to the house by Mr. Helstone who believed that women were different from and probably also inferior to men (52-53). Miss Mann and Miss Ainley self-sacrificingly devote themselves to charitable work and Mrs. Pryor has worked as a ‘governess’ most of her life.

Societal convention and expectations limit the options of English middle-class women. If Caroline fails to marry a man and becomes ‘an angel in the house’ like Mary Cave, her limited choices are working as a governess like Mrs. Pryor or performing charitable deeds like Miss Mann and Miss Ainley. Shirley Keeldar protests against the labels attached to middle-class English women and the roles society unfairly expects them to play. She deplores that British men are under an illusion about women and misunderstand them; they consider a female who is ‘half doll’ or ‘half angel’ to be a good woman, while they identify a bad woman as a ‘fiend’ (352).

When Shirley critically depicts the condition of contemporary England, it exploits stereotyped images of Englishness and foreignness. As Phyllis J. Read observed in ‘Charlotte Brontë: the Importance of Being British’, the moral centre of Charlotte Brontë’s universe is ‘England and the English’ in her novels. In Shirley, as well as in her other novels, as a general rule, Englishness represents virtues, while foreignness (un-Englishness) represents despicable vices and things to be avoided. An exception to
the rule is that being French is sometimes used to represent being 'liberal'.

I

When British historian Linda Colley discussed how national identity was created in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, she defined 'Protestantism', 'being freedom-loving', and 'being democratic' as things that represented the idea of 'Britishness' and helped to prove British people's superiority over foreigners in that period. The British often compared themselves with the Continentals, especially the French, who were Britain's greatest economic and military rival at that time. As a representative of the continental nations and the world's most important Catholic power, Frenchness was often synonymous with Continental Europeanness and it typically represented un-Britishness (un-Englishness). British people in those days believed 'Catholicism', 'tyranny', and 'lack of liberty' to be noteworthy features of Continental nations.

Protestant British people assumed that they were a 'chosen people', provided with special protection by God precisely because they were Protestant. They were encouraged by believing that Britain was a 'promised land', richer in every respect than other countries—especially Catholic countries and pre-eminently France. On the other hand, many Victorians considered Catholic religious practices and features—monks, nuns, convents, idolatry, and the worship of the Virgin Mary—despicable and unacceptable vices. They viewed the girls in convents as 'helpless victims', deprived of opportunities for happiness and usefulness, whose freedom of action is restricted, and who are bound to seclusion lasting all their lives and separated permanently from society.

The nineteenth-century British proudly viewed their country as a 'land of liberty'. The British social and political system was widely perceived to be founded on freedom, liberty, and justice. Nearly every time British people criticized the Continent, the lack of 'liberty' was the main reason. Viewing the French struggle for liberty in the late eighteenth century as a frightful carnival that caricatured liberty without attaining it, the English could distance English liberty from a similar model. The terrible tyranny of Jacobins, the orgiastic corruption of the revolutionary French government, and Bonaparte's military despotism merely demonstrated how profoundly
Believing in English superiority over foreigners, the British despised foreigners not only due to hostility to foreigners themselves but also because they opposed anything perceived as 'backward and illiberal'. However, nineteenth-century Britain's self-identification as the source of liberty actually did not apply to all facets of British life. In some respects, British citizens did not enjoy more liberty than foreigners. Victorian British travellers abroad noticed that the Continent was less aristocratic and hierarchical than Britain. Class and gender distinctions were strictly maintained in British society, but they were not in Continental countries. British travellers were surprised at the mingling of classes which they commonly encountered in railway stations, recreational areas, and the private homes of Continental countries. Journal writers recognized the higher regard for democracy and equality in Europe. British people who visited the Continent were also surprised by the types of work engaged in by continental women. Frenchwomen seemed far more socially emancipated than their counterparts.

II

In *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone, one of the middle-class heroines of the novel, is victimized by patriarchal English society; her actions are restricted by gender. Being illiberal and tyrannical, males around her are 'un-English' in their attitudes towards her. When Caroline tries to become involved in Robert's business, he teases her by calling her 'a little democrat' (93) and does not treat her as equally as males. Her uncle, described as a 'black-coated tyrant' (539), thinks women are not fit for anything except sewing and cooking (93). Realizing that she cannot marry Robert Moore and fearing that she will be an old maid, Caroline plans to be a governess. However, Mr. Helstone opposes his niece's plan and deprives her of liberty by restricting her activities.

Caroline complains about a society which offers only limited fields of activity deemed suitable for middle-class single women: they have 'no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting', though they should have 'more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now' (390-93). Seeking her place in the world, Caroline criticizes
English society for its ‘un-English’ treatment of middle-class English women. Caroline does not believe that the place of old maids is ‘to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted’. Considering societal expectations of old maids unjust, Caroline compares their condition to the detestable and un-English practice of self-sacrifice. She doubts that self-abnegation is a virtue because in her view, excessive humility creates an un-English vice of ‘tyranny’. She criticizes English people who think that women without a husband or children should sacrifice their lives to others. She justifies her own view by describing self-sacrifice as un-English and heretical. She asserts: ‘The Romish religion especially teaches renunciation of self, submission to others, and nowhere are found so many grasping tyrants as in the ranks of Romish priesthood’ (174). Caroline likens Miss Ainley’s good works to those of ‘a Sister of Charity’ (182). By painting her with foreign images, Caroline concludes that as an old maid, Miss Ainley has led her life with little enjoyment, no bright hopes, and no close friend in the same way as ‘nuns’ and ‘the Hindoo votary’ (390).

When Caroline faces the possibility of becoming an old maid like Miss Ainley, whose nun-like life Caroline dislikes, she is symbolically involved in something Catholic: something un-English. She confesses that she has been there many times and prefers going without men to the forest called ‘Nunnwood’ that has ‘the ruins of a nunnery’ in a dell (212-14), which foreshadows her possible future. In the last chapter, Caroline mounts a fragment of sculptured stone, ‘a monkish relic’, and sees the ‘Star of Love’ twinkle (638), a sign that Robert will shortly propose to her and she will be able to escape from such difficulties as she has to face if she cannot successfully avoid becoming a self-abnegating old maid.

Hortense Moore, who has no intention to do as Romans in Rome and adheres to her old Belgian habits even in England, considers Caroline as ‘not sufficiently girlish and submissive’ and suggests his brother should not spoil her (67). She sometimes gives Caroline a French lesson by making her read ‘French poetry’. While Caroline is generally apathetic towards French works and easily gets bored with them, suggesting her unwillingness to have her emotions controlled by Hortense and Robert who are half-English and half-foreigners. However, one French piece written by André Chénier touches her. The title of the French poem, ‘La Jeune Captive’ [The Captive Maiden], symbolically shows the situation Caroline faces in patriarchal society.
Shirley Keeldar and Mrs. Pryor point out the un-Englishness of the treatment governesses receive in English society. Comparing the position of English governesses to an un-English image of slavery, she even insists that Caroline might as well become a ‘slave’ as a governess (241). Mrs. Pryor is also against Caroline’s plan, revealing her own bitter experiences as a young governess. She questions why civilized Protestant nations treat governesses like slaves. Mrs. Pryor entered a family who believed that they were endowed with good birth, mental superiority, and extraordinary Christian graces. However, their belief was inconsistent with their cruel treatment of their governess as ‘a burden and a restraint in society’: they did not consider her their equal and she did not receive their sympathy. A remark by the family’s eldest daughter shows an aspect of English society where evils that contradict widely believed English virtues simultaneously manifest themselves. Mrs. Pryor remembers that Miss Hardman justified her cruel behaviour by insisting that ‘in the inherent constitution of English habits, feelings, and prejudices’, there was no possibility that the current situation where there were hardships and difficulties in the position of a governess would improve; governesses have to be isolated to maintain ‘that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact’ (375-76).

Turning to Robert Moore, one of the male protagonists of the novel, he is portrayed as only half-English; he is French on his mother’s side, speaks French, and was born and partly raised in Belgium. It is true that by making him from Belgium, Brontë could put her knowledge about Belgium based on her own memorable experience in Brussels into this novel. However Robert’s foreign origin is also introduced into the novel to symbolize his personality. Caroline cannot expect to marry him because he is scheming to marry Shirley to improve his business. The narrator suggests that he is prone to confine his attention and efforts to the pursuit of self-interest because of his foreign blood. Because he is ‘a hybrid in nature, he has ‘a hybrid’s feeling’ (27); it is not impossible that he is unconcerned with philanthropic considerations in general. He despises France, but he is ‘no self-sacrificing patriot’; he is just hoping that the international situation will turn to his own advantage (167-68). His foreignness suggests that he is an imperfect figure. Robert is repeatedly described as ‘alien’ (38, 44, 72). His appearance and way of speaking emphasize the high degree
of foreign strain in him. He is 'thin, dark, sallow; very foreign of aspect'; his features have 'a southern symmetry, clearness, regularity in their chiselling'; 'his dark, thin face, with its fine though rather wasted lines,' has 'a most anti-British and anti-Yorkshire look'. He speaks English with a foreign accent, and French without an accent; his outlandish accent 'grates on a British, and especially on a Yorkshire, ear' (27, 51).

In her quest for happiness, Caroline must cultivate Robert’s Englishness. Expecting that Robert is 'not going to be French, and sceptical, and sneering', Caroline suggests that he should read 'an old English book' to waken his nature and make him 'entirely English.' She claims: 'Your French forefathers don't speak so sweetly, nor so solemnly, nor so impressively as your English ancestors.' She urges him to read Shakespeare, expecting that he will learn from Coriolanus not to be haughty to his employees. Caroline wants him to become more compassionate and to abandon his self-interested behaviour (89-93). However, actually, Caroline cannot hardly influence his behaviour. Robert just happens to become humane because of the miraculous rescue of his business through the sudden change of the political circumstances that have conditioned the management of Robert's business. After 'the Orders in Council' are repealed, Robert becomes more compassionate and considerate of workmen, does some good, and becomes less selfish (634-41).

We must not overlook Robert's attitude towards Caroline at the end of the novel. He finally becomes conscious of her worthiness. In his marriage proposal to her, Robert thinks: 'the sense of her value is here, in my heart; the necessity for her society is blended with my life' (640-41). However, the role he expects Caroline to play is a traditional female one like an 'angel'. Robert believes and hopes that Caroline will care for him in her way to bring him 'a solace—a charity—a purity' that he has never experienced. He does not neglect to provide her with a field of activity, yet he suggests she should engage in charitable works, managing with Shirley and Miss Ainley a Sunday school and a day school whose master and mistress's salaries are provided by Robert's mill. At the end of the novel, Caroline's wish to marry a man she loves is realized, but not her wish to earn money.

At the end of the novel, Robert has became more humane, without acquiring full Englishness, as symbolically shown in his remark that his mother was a 'Roman
Catholic' and that he will embrace her faith. He worships Caroline in an un-English way and compares her to the Virgin Mary as well as an angel by associating her with 'les litanies de la sainte Vierge. Rose céleste, reine des Anges' [the litanies of the Blessed Virgin. Heavenly Rose, queen of the Angels] (606). Mary Cave who had the same first name as the Virgin and 'the face of a Madonna' (52), was confined to the house and not allowed to play any important role by Mr. Helstone. In a similar way, claiming that Caroline resembles the Virgin Mary, Roberts expects her to act like an 'angel'.

### III

Both heroines of the novel, Caroline and Shirley, are English. After stating that Caroline has 'a little Raffaelle head' and is 'Raffaelle in feature', the narrator does not fail to add that on the other hand she is 'quite English in expression' and has 'all insular grace and purity' (525). We are also told that she has 'English sensibility' (312). On the other hand, Shirley expresses her love for England: 'Our England is a bonnie island' (212), while it is also suggested that she is fascinated with French things: Mr. Sympson accuses his niece of reading French, claiming that her mind is badly affected by French novels and she has been absorbed in 'French principles' (550). As Enid. L. Duthie points out, what Mr. Sympson argues here is not only the 'immorality' of French novels but also more importantly, Shirley's 'liberal belief' in the equality of both sex and class, apparently affected by republican ideas. As the narrator of Bronte's *The Professor* tells the reader, Yorke Hunsden's bookshelves are full of French and German books, apparently suggesting his liberal beliefs. In *Shirley*, Shirley Keeldar's liberal tendency is suggested by showing her interest in French books.

Shirley is strong enough to resist male domination, having strong aspirations for a reputed English virtue of liberty and a hatred of un-English vice of tyranny. Louis Moore describes her as a 'Pantheress' that 'gnaws her chain' and hungers for 'virgin freedom' (629). She rebels against Mr. Sympson because he does not behave as a virtuous English citizen. She disobeys her 'despotic' uncle (471), who tries to force her to marry Samuel Fawthrop Wynne, associating his behaviour with Russian bondage.
and comparing him to a Russian ruler: 'Were Britain a serfdom, and you the Czar, you could not compel me to this step' (473). She shows a strong will to fight against any 'tyrant' (552) who wishes to control her. She reproaches her uncle, describing him as un-English and heretical; she insists that because Mr. Sympson is worshipping foreign gods, he is going to marry her niece to a wrong man, not afraid of the marriage resulting in one like that of 'blue blood of Spain' or 'French domestic life' (557).

Shirley rejects not only such suitors as Samuel Fawthrop Wynne but also Sir Philip Nunnely, although the baronet's ancestry and wealth are good enough for her and he is '[an] English gentleman in all his deportment'. As implied in his family name that suggests a convent (nunnery), the village where he lives has 'monastic ruins' and the ancestral hall he owns is called 'the Priory' (474-77). Thus, Sir Philip Nunnely, one of the men Shirley considers unsuitable for her future husband, is seemingly 'English' but is symbolically 'un-English' in another aspect.

Shirley's ideas are too modern to be accepted by contemporary English society; Louis Moore concludes that there are no men in England she can rely on for support and be given peace of mind (511). The only man who can manage Shirley is Louis Moore, who has French blood from his mother. He can successfully soothe the 'blue-stocking' (485) who revolts against male authority; telling her about the Continent, afterwards making Shirley, who once wrote a work entitled 'Femme Savante' [Blue-Stocking] as a French exercise, learn a piece in Bossuet's 'Le Cheval Dompté' [The Domesticated Horse] as a punishment-lesson, he subdues the rebel (491-92).

Even though Robert Moore and Louis Moore are brothers, they are very different. Robert is engaged in trade, while education and his natural bent prevented Louis Moore from becoming a selfish merchant and instead made him a teacher. He was sent to England when he was very young and studied at an English school. Robert incarnates what are imagined to be Continental evils because of his foreign blood; Louis is 'seemingly' free from foreign vices because of his English education and is marked by the Continental trait of being more liberal in his view towards women than the Englishmen.

Shirley expects her husband to guide her without being a despot. Before accepting a husband she wants to determine whether he will be good to her and 'never tyrannize' her. When she decides to marry Louis Moore, not Robert Moore,
Samuel Fawthrop Wynne, Sir Phillip Nunnely, her judgement is not based on the conventional hierarchy of social class and gender but on her potential husband’s real nature, reflecting her liberal belief. She wishes to marry a man who is equal or even superior to her and learns Louis is so. She feels glad to recognize that Louis is inferior to her in social class and wealth, while she is inferior to him because she is ‘younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant’ (623).

Shirley gradually realizes her real position in society. As a tutor who is employed and poor, Louis is a marginalized figure in society, and Shirley is also marginalized as a woman. Not only because of his foreign origin but also because of his occupation, Louis Moore is an outsider in society. As a tutor of the Sympsons’s only son, he moves ‘outside’ rather than in the middle of their family-circle—like ‘a satellite’ of the family. He is officially treated with a certain degree of respect without actually being seen as a gentleman or a man. He is ‘isolated’ with ‘no sympathizing friend’ (455). He confesses that he has ‘such a thirst for freedom’ because he has never been free since he was a child (614).

On the other hand, Shirley has ‘a man’s name’ and holds ‘a man’s position’ as the squire of Briarfield. She is proud that she is something more than a woman because she is engaged in business, which makes her feel ‘quite gentlemanlike’ (200). Seemingly she is as powerful as a man; even Mr. Helstone, who always speaks ill of women, estimates that she is more fearless than many Englishmen (166) and agrees with Shirley who insists he must choose her as a ‘churchwarden’ and make her a ‘magistrate’ and a ‘captain of yeomanry’ (200). However, the men in Yorkshire actually do not treat Shirley as equally as the male associates. Joe Scott, the foreman at Robert Moore’s mill, considers himself superior to Shirley because of his gender, despite being socially inferior. He gives her a disdainful look when he hears Shirley say that politics are her habitual study and she reads a newspaper every day for the leading articles, the foreign intelligence, and the market prices, that is, ‘just what gentlemen read’. He believes that she—as a woman—has no right to get involved in such subjects (327-29). When Mr. Helstone asks Shirley to stay with Caroline while he is absent for a night, she willingly accepts the post of guardian of his niece, feeling honoured: ‘you want me as a gentleman—the first gentleman in Briarfield, in short, to supply your place, be master of the Rectory’ (333). However, when she learns that she was
completely excluded from the project in which Mr. Helstone and other gentlemen
prepared for the labourers’ attack on Robert’s mill, she is upset that she was treated
unfairly by men because of her gender (352).

After these incidents, Shirley acts like a man on the one hand, but quite like a
woman on the other. When Louis happens to see Shirley wearing her indoor dress and
apron and holding her needlework in her hand, he finds that she is ‘no Thalestris from
the fields, but a quiet domestic character from the fireside’ (505). Shirley admits
herself that she is as weak as others: ‘In fact, I am neither so strong, nor have I such
pride in my strength, as people think, Mr. Moore; nor am I so regardless of sympathy’
(513). Earlier in the novel she claims to be strong enough to control her own life
without interference. She is ‘glad to be independent as to property’ (224), while she is
afraid that if she is married, she could never be her own mistress and might become ‘a
burden and a bore’ to her husband (216-17). However, afterwards she contradicts what
she said earlier by asserting that her husband must be ‘a master’ who can control her,
although she is still unwilling to be ruled or guided by other men (551-52).

After Shirley accepts Louis’s love, he becomes virtually her ‘absolute’ master. The
narrator adds that she ‘partly yielded to her disposition’ but ‘partly also acted on
system,’ expecting that the wooer of a wealthy bride should be thoroughly absolved
from being subordinated and become ‘master of Fieldhead’ in reality as well as in name
(638). Because of Shirley’s wealth and social rank, Louis is hesitant to propose to her. He
believes that even if he wins her heart, he ‘must be her slave’ and will ‘lose [his]
freedom’ (527). However, after Shirley accepts his proposal, he is saved from being a
slave of a wealthy bride and virtually becomes the master of Fieldhead before their
wedding. Although he was unintentionally compelled to assume a paramount role due to
Shirley’s intention to free him, marriage might encourage latent despotism. In a soliloquy
Louis remarks that Shirley ‘must be bent’ and ‘curbed’ (525) and wishes he could find
a woman to ‘tame first, and teach afterwards’ and train her to be an ‘exemplary and
patient mother’ (620). These suggest that even Louis Moore might become a real
tyrant in the future.

As the story draws to a close, Shirley loses her power and becomes fully
dependent on Louis (637-38). After Louis’ love has conquered Shirley and her love for
Louis becomes apparent, she is not her own mistress or free any longer. She is now a
'bondswoman', a 'fellow-slave' of Caroline, and a slave of 'Abraham; the hero of a patriarch' (604-05). Shirley allows herself to be controlled and influenced by her 'captor', like a 'chained denizen of deserts' (637).

Conclusion

As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, Shirley is concerned with the 'impotence' of English women.26 Caroline is too weak to revolt directly against the patriarchal system; she can do nothing but complain to herself about society. Even Shirley, who is seemingly powerful, must eventually depend on a man. Although the author recognizes the evils that exist in patriarchal society, the novel, which Charlotte Brontë planned to make 'real, cool, and solid', where the reader cannot expect 'passion', 'stimulus', or 'melodrama' (5), doesn't offer any solution to improve the condition of suffering English middle-class women.

Shirley ends with a description of the reality of English women at the mercy of the 'un-English' English patriarchal society and shows the seriousness of evils in England through its ambiguous ending. The novel concludes with the seemingly happy marriage of the two couples, yet the ending also seems to fear for their future in conventional patriarchal society. In an earlier chapter Mrs. Pryor warned Caroline that she should not expect marriage to make her happy. She asserted that it is wrong to 'anticipate—look forward to marriage as the end, the goal of their hopes'; marriage will prove that 'this life is a mere state of probation, wherein neither rest nor recompense is to be vouchsafed' (378-80).

The ending of the novel describes how the 'once green, and lone, and wide' Hollow is replaced by a highway, cottages, and a mighty mill (645). It symbolizes a pessimistic view of England. In an earlier chapter, the narrator of the novel cites the phrase used by Adam Smith in Wealth of Nations27 and Napoleon,28 'a nation of shopkeepers,' and states with emphasis: 'Long may it be ere England really becomes a nation of shopkeepers!', implying that the mercantile classes are characterized by striking selfishness. Like some of her contemporaries,29 Charlotte Brontë also worried about the Victorian tendency towards 'Mammonism', considering it a menace to society: 'A land ruled by [merchants] alone would too often make ignominious submission—not at all
from the motives Christ teaches, but rather from those Mammon instils’ (166-67). The ending of the novel ominously presents an England where industrialization, which greatly influenced people in England, especially affected middle-class women’s lives by marginalizing them in society by gender, is steadily progressing. When the narrator’s old housekeeper Martha states that the ‘fairy’ her mother saw in Fieldhead Hollow fifty years ago is the last one that was ever seen in that countryside (646), Brontë implies that in the actual world we cannot expect such happy endings because English society is in a hopeless state and actually quite ‘un-English’. Caroline realizes that she has no power to do anything to turn the tide in her favour. Shirley, who is proud that she is as powerful as men, also realizes the limits of her power.

Notes
1 Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shirley are to the following edition and given in brackets in the text: Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (1849; Oxford and New York: World's Classics-Oxford University Press, 1998).
4 Kei Imai, *Igirisu Fyosei Undo-Shi: Feminism to Fyosei Rodo-Undo no Ketsugo* [The


7 Poovey, p. 127.

8 Poovey, p. 128. The phrase 'tabooed woman' comes from the controversial review of Lady Eastlake [Elizabeth Rigby], 'Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre', Quarterly Review 84 (December 1848), p. 177; and 'Hints on the Modern Governess System', Fraser's Magazine 30 (November 1844), p. 573.


11 In Charlotte Brontë's fiction, the words 'English' and 'British' are almost interchangeable. When Brontë refers to 'British' or 'Britons', she includes 'English', 'Scottish', and maybe 'Welsh'. However, Brontë privileges English identity over a more comprehensive British identity, revealing a prejudice that being English is superior to being merely British. Therefore, I prefer the word 'Englishness' to 'Britishness' to discuss Brontë's fiction.


13 In Victorian English newspapers the French and the Russians were the most common targets for ridicule (Bernard Porter, "Bureau and Barrack": Early Victorian Attitudes towards the Continent, Victorian Studies 27.4 [1984], p. 411).


15 Marjorie Morgen, National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain (Basingstoke,


21 Black, pp. 195-96; Porter, p. 426.

22 Morgan, pp. 149-51, 169-84; Porter, p. 419.

23 From Roman Catholicism came the model of sisterhoods, and from Protestant Germany came the deaconess; both offered examples of fully trained and educated single women dedicated to nursing, teaching, and good works (Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920 [London: Virago Press, 1985], pp. 46-47). Self-sacrifice was a kind of behaviour Brontë hated. In Brussels she saw a teacher who used her male relatives to convey notes to unmarried men in the hope that one of them could be persuaded to marry her and save her from becoming 'a sister of charity' when her present employment failed. It terrified her as a vision of her own possible future (Juliet Barker, The Brontës [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994], p. 447).

24 Duthie, p. 142.


28 In Napoleonic France, describing England as a 'nation of shopkeepers' was an

29 A helpful discussion of the Victorian horror of 'Mammonism' since the early nineteenth century is found in David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 242-43.