

subject for study here, another author who, like Eliot (the focus of Shuttleworth's earlier major book-length study) is not conventionally associated with the history of science. The achievement of this book is to raise Charlotte Brontë to the status of a writer who needs to be taken seriously in relation to the medical and social debates of her time: our understanding of this author is thereby significantly illuminated. In this study, these debates do not remain at a generalised level of context, but are shown to provide the very linguistic tissue out of which Brontë's complex fictional identities are woven.

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### **Christine Alexander**

In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe is subjected to the interpretive gaze of the medical expert. Dr John Graham says: "I look on you now from a professional point of view, and I read, perhaps, all you would conceal—in your eye, which is curiously vivid and restless; in your cheek, which the blood has forsaken; in your hand, which you cannot steady." Lucy is a text that can be read, but read only by those who have the knowledge and skills required to decode the new language of selfhood. Dr John, based on Thomas John Graham, the author of Mr Brontë's much used and revered medical text *Modern Domestic Medicine* (1826), speaks with all the authority of current medical theory, framed by a patriarchal culture. In *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Sally Shuttleworth sets out to show, first, that the exercise of this scientific authority is part of a gendered struggle for power and, second, that Charlotte Brontë's fiction challenges and subverts this culture of surveillance.

*Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* is a fascinating exploration of Brontë's work within the frame of the dominant social and medical paradigms of her era. The argument is clearly divided into two sections: 1) a general study of aspects of Victorian psychology, concentrating on notions of insanity and selfhood, phrenology, and female bodily economy; and 2) the way Charlotte Brontë condenses and explores these ideas in her early writings and in each of her novels. The result is a new view of Brontë as a novelist who is far from culturally isolated: her fiction is seen to "actively encode the language and preoccupations of mid-nineteenth century social, psychological and economic thought" (2). As a female writer, Brontë both assimilated and challenged Victorian constructs. Like Vashti, she "grapples to conflict with abstractions," with such clashing ideologies as those of self-improvement (bolstered by the authority of phrenology) and respectable feminine containment (as articulated in Southey's rebuff to Brontë's urge to write).

Recent studies have sought to enlarge our understanding of Brontë's engagement with Victorian economic, religious and artistic debate. This book is the first to examine Brontë's work in relation to Victorian medical science. It adds to the growing body of literature that sees Brontë not as the intuitive genius of critical tradition, but as a thinker formed by, and integral to, her era. Shuttleworth argues that at the hands of critics ignoring the linguistic connections between the representations of self and the body politic, Charlotte Brontë has been depoliticised, her writing drained of its "class and gender power." Thus, by restoring the focus on language she shows anew how social and political debate actively informs the depiction of the individual psyche. This is

demonstrated most starkly in several of Brontë's early writings. In "The Bridal," for example, female madness is aligned directly with working-class rebellion: Zenobia's sexual frenzy, frustrated by the Marquis of Douro's engagement to her rival, causes a temporary insanity that is mirrored in the Great Rebellion among the "lower orders" in Verdopolis. Douro himself proclaims:

There is a latent flame of rebellion smouldering in our city, which blood alone can quench! The hot blood of ourselves and our enemies freely poured forth! We daily see in our streets men whose brows were once open as the day, but which are now wrinkled with dark dissatisfaction, and the light of whose eyes, formerly free as sunshine, is now dimmed by restless suspicion.

Such speeches, Shuttleworth argues, demonstrate the mutual reinforcement of Victorian political and psychiatric discourse. Images of concealed disruption and insanity, blood-letting and body legibility engrossed the Victorian alienists. Zenobia herself is "a magnificent landscape trenched with dark drains" (from "A Peep into a Picture Book"), a female body that functions metonymically for the polluted industrial organism that needs cleansing and controlling. After *The Professor*, in which Brontë demonstrates "the art of self-control," the disruptive potential of female rebellion holds centre stage in her writing.

Brontë's fiction demonstrates the increasingly rigid demarcation of gender roles presided over by medical science in the Victorian era. Male self-control is contrasted with female subjection to the forces of the body. In *The Professor*, Crimsworth's social ascent from his position of "feminine" powerlessness to masculine identity is accomplished through the exercise of his faculties for self-control and for interpretative power. Shuttleworth's subtitle "lurid hieroglyphics" for her chapter on *Jane Eyre* encapsulates her exploration of "madness" or female sexuality as central to the narrative of self-improvement through self-control. In *Shirley*, management of the "female economy" has broken down: women and workers are subject to overstocked markets, surplus commodities and blocked circulation. Explosive energies (of the rioters or of a Bertha Mason) must necessarily erupt in violence or else be directed inwards, causing violence to the self (as in the case of Caroline Helstone or Helen Burns). Here, the language and diagnoses of Victorian medicine inscribe not only personal but also national health.

Much is known about Brontë's attraction to phrenology—her texts are peppered with characters who scrutinise, analyse and direct our gaze—but Shuttleworth offers us a reason for this attraction. Since phrenology offered a new system of social classification based on innate endowment, Brontë might pursue the exercise of unused faculties with an aim to self-improvement, despite her marginal status as a governess and middle-class single woman. "In phrenology she would have found a philosophy which offered a legitimating faith in hidden talent, and suggested the possibility of an individual resolution to the social impasse" (66).

Phrenology, however, also constituted a system of power relations clearly demonstrated in Dr John's reading of Lucy. Power resides with those who can penetrate the hidden secrets of the other while preserving the self unread. Here Brontë moves

beyond a simple assimilation of the language of medical science to an interrogation of the structure of self. Lucy continually seeks to avoid surveillance, to render herself illegible; and in doing so she is trying to assume control over the processes of her own self-definition. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault argued that the modern interiorised subject is dynamically constructed by the internalisation of the social structures of surveillance. Thus, for Shuttleworth, Lucy's form of "creative evasion" (even from the reader who acts as yet another layer of social surveillance) leads to "a new vision of embodied selfhood" (243). The narrative form itself shows that, despite entrenched divisions between public and private, the private self is, in fact, a social creation, constituted through the experience of the power to withhold.

Here, Brontë also offers a challenge to the dominant narrative form. Like physicians, novelists took on the mantle of social authority, interpreting the secrets of psychological and social life. Lucy, with her obsession for concealing rather than revealing the self, is the last of a whole host of unreliable narrators, reaching back to Brontë's earliest little stories, that constitute Brontë's challenge to realism. The dangers of a book like this, so persuasively argued and well supported with textual evidence, is that its concentration on a single discourse might endow that discourse with a special influence over Brontë's texts. Shuttleworth is aware of this and warns that phrenology drew much of its authority from the fact that it reinforced other ideological strands in Victorian culture (59). Yet, apart from a glance at Roman Catholicism in relation to "the penetrating gaze" (40), and again—more interestingly—in relation to sexual fear (226), and a nod at portraiture as "a system of espionage" (41), there is little attempt to explore in Brontë's texts the way in which phrenology intersects with religious or artistic discourses, despite the frontispiece (Brontë's "Study of Eyes" from Alexander and Sellars, *The Art of the Brontës*) which raises the issue. In the chapter on *Shirley*, for example, Shuttleworth only briefly touches on the religious discourse that is central to the psychological and social debates in that novel (189, 213). Again, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane's surrealist paintings might fruitfully be read within or against Victorian psychological theories—if not as an earlier instance of that assertive imagination that, Shuttleworth argues, is finally affirmed in *Villette*. Having said this, however, the study might well gain as much as it loses from its clear if somewhat partial focus. We are treated to a brilliant analysis of Brontë's manipulation of the dynamics of medical discourse in a way that cannot help but give us a new appreciation of her intellectual response to her own time. And we are seldom overwhelmed, though the evidence is a veritable battery of fascinating detail in favour of the case, derived from newspapers, advertisements, journals and library lists of the period. Nor are we ever at a loss in following the argument: Shuttleworth deftly guides us at the beginnings and ends of chapters, and by key repeated statements throughout.

*Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* is part of the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, which aims "to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the fields of nineteenth-century literary studies." It certainly earns its place in the series, demonstrating a ground-breaking approach which sets Brontë's writing solidly within the framework of Victorian psychological debate. This book challenges our assumptions of Brontë's texts as the products of Romantic individualist ideology. In doing so, Sally Shuttleworth has

made a major contribution to Brontë studies and indicated the way forward for further studies of Brontë's work within Victorian cultural debate.

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## Response

### Sally Shuttleworth

When reading reviews of your own work, it is often the case that you end up wondering whether the critic was actually reading the same book. This is certainly not the case here: all three reviews thoroughly enter into the spirit of the work and engage deeply with the arguments presented. After three such positive reviews, it seems almost churlish to respond; important points and methodological issues are raised, however, that I would like to address.

Rylance suggests at one point that my use of Foucault is opportunistic. In many ways this is not a Foucauldian book. The Foucauldian model of dominant discourse is inadequate to the extent that it does not address the questions of who had access to these discourses, in what form, and to what effects? These questions are particularly pertinent with reference to a study of Charlotte Brontë where one still has to combat the much-cherished myths of her cultural isolation. I sought, therefore, through intensive local research, to build up a picture of the local intellectual and cultural community to which Brontë belonged. Even here, however, there are problems: it is not always possible to state which books Brontë borrowed, which lectures she attended. Then, there are the problems of linking such local research to the national picture. Rylance suggests that I have created an impression of a "compliant self-repeating discursive formation stretching from the metropolitan establishment to the platform of the Haworth Mechanics' Institute." In moving from local configurations of ideas to their expression in metropolitan culture, I realise that I probably have not sufficiently highlighted other competing theories. Similarly, I should probably have explained more clearly that I was not covering the entire field of Victorian psychology, but only those areas I see as impinging particularly on Brontë's work. That said, I hope I have shown that Brontë's relations to these discursive formations were neither passive nor straightforward. I was especially concerned to demonstrate the ways in which she negotiates in her work the contradictory models of femininity and selfhood as they found expression in her local culture.

Both Rylance and Flint take issue, in different ways, with my assertion that in *Villette* Brontë "finally, tentatively, asserts the claims of the realm of the imagination." Rylance wishes to save me from endorsing either a reactionary Romanticism or the "celebratory essentialism" of a Cixous, while Flint, by contrast, would like me to think further about the feminist forms of Brontë's writing with its play of imagination and rhythms of desire. I would nonetheless stand by my original statement: the play of imagination is, of course, crucial in all of Brontë's work, but in *Villette* she explicitly (rather than implicitly) addresses the question of its conflict with masculine reason and science. The endorsement is tentative, however; imagination is no redemptive force