Religious Sensibility in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

『アグネス・グレイ』と『ワイルドフェル・ホールの住人』におけるアン・ブロンテの宗教的感受性

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アン・ブロンテは英国国教会の司祭の娘であったが、彼女の小説『アグネス・グレイ』と『ワイルドフェル・ホールの住人』に信心深いヒロインが登場することはしばしば指摘されてきた。アン・ブロンテの作品は、エミリー・ブロンテの『嵐が丘』やシャーロット・ブロンテの『ジェイン・エア』ほどの文学的価値が与えられてこなかったのだが、その理由の一つとして、ヒロインの感受性の欠落が挙げられる。また、テリー・イーグルトンも述べているように、アン・ブロンテのヒロインは道徳心を備え、穏やかな信仰心をもつ女性であると評されることが多い。このような批評は、彼女の宗教的思想を万人救済を唱える福音主義の色合いが強いからだと結論づける傾向にある。

しかし、アン・ブロンテの作品にはエミリーやシャーロットとは異なる性質の、つまり「宗教的な」感受性が描かれている。例えば、彼女の詩からは明らかに（神の審判を恐れる）カルヴァン派・メソディズムへのシンパシーがうかがえる。メソディスト的な熱狂や宗教的感受性が表れている典型例として 18 世紀の詩人ウィリアム・クーパーの詩作品が挙げられるが、ブロンテの詩は魂の救済を祈りつつも絶望するクーパーの感受性に共鳴し、『アグネス・グレイ』、『ワイルドフェル・ホールの住人』にも同様の不安や熱狂が描き出されている。彼女のクーパーに寄り添う詩（'To Cowper,' 'The Contrite Heart,' 'Self-Communion' など）を丹念に分析しながら、そこに映しだされるメソディスト的な宗教観が従来のアン・ブロンテの小説作品の解釈にどのような変化をもたらすか検証したい。

Introduction

Religious sensibility is pivotal to Methodist believers, for it is the feeling of salvation which relieves them of their anxiety, while the feeling of damnation unsettles their faith. For some commentators of the Brontës, this religious sensibility has become a vital component in early nineteenth-century contexts in discussing their works.[1] Amongst them is G. Elsie Harrison's *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontës* who was the first to show the profound influence of Methodism on the Brontës.[2] Logistically there were at the time interesting concentrations of Methodism in the West Riding (Haworth) of Yorkshire and also in Cornwall where Elizabeth Branwell, their Methodist aunt, came from,[3] which solidifies Mrs. Gaskell's statement that Haworth was becoming "famous in the religious world as the scene of the ministrations of the Rev.William Grimshaw," a Methodist preacher proverbial for his fervent manner of preaching.[4] According to Harrison, the Brontës were influenced by the same enthusiasm, or "hidden vital quality of religion in its most passionate form."[5] To show that Methodism had an overriding influence on their creative imagination, she goes so far as to say, "Had there been no Grimshaw there would have been no fierce tale of *Wuthering Heights*,"[6] and calling

1 Ken C Burrows, "Some Remembered Strain; Methodism and the Anti-Hymns of Emily Brontë." *West Virginia University Philoloical Papers* 24 (1977) 48-61, Stevie Davies's *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, (London: The Women's Press, 1994), and James Fotherington, "The Work of Emily Brontë and the Brontë Problem," *Bronte Society Transactions* 2: 11 (1900) 107-33.

2 *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontës*, (London: Epworth Press, 1937) 20-1.

3 Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (London: Epworth Press, 1989) 287.

4 He served as a curate of Haworth for about twenty years between 1742 and 1763. See Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 1857, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997) 25.

5 G. Elsie Harrison, *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontës*, (The London: Epworth Press, 1937) 31-2.

6 G. Elsie Harrison 44.

them "children of fire," she characterises the impassioned love of Jane Eyre as enthusiastic. Charlotte Brontë certainly called her natural self "a wild, romantic enthusiast," alluding to a person pursuing freedom and romantic (imaginative) notions.[7] It is therefore intriguing to observe that these forgoing terms of eulogy were not directed towards Anne Brontë or her works. With the exception of a short commentary on her second novel *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Harrison's references to Anne Brontë as a writer of vivid and inspirational imagination are minimal. The tendency to characterise her as down-to-earth is also evident from Charlotte Brontë's letters. She gave the epithets of "true" and "unexaggerated" to *Agnes Grey* (1847), while characterizing Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as "vigorous" and "original."[8]

Why is it that Anne Brontë alone, while being called a faithful religious believer, is excluded from the cult of enthusiasm? Far from lacking in "fire," her poems are shot through with the language of enthusiasm. In her poem, 'The North Wind' (January 1838),[9] she calls her younger self an "enthusiast" who was as wild and free as the north wind. The representation of the wind signifies a "feeling being" who is carefree to express grief as well as joy. Her preference of "Hot tears" to "that dull gnawing tearless [time]" (lines 33-35) would suggest her willingness to become an "enthusiast," endorsing the effusive nature of knowing God's grace. Also Elizabeth Langland characterises Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as her "intense religious questioning,"[10] suggesting her fervour. Mrs. Gaskell notes that she was one of the favorite (among the Bronte children) of her Methodist aunt, who must have taught the religious sentiments to the Brontë children.[11]

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7 Elizabeth Gaskell 127.

8 Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letter, (*Harmondsworth: Viking Press, 1997) 174.

9 Edward Chitam, *The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary*, (Otawa & New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979) 63-64.

10 Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontës The Other One*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1989) 126.

11 Elizabeth Gaskell 139.

While Harrison highlighted the enthusiasm of love, and not of fear, Emma Mason's meticulous study reveals that the original tenet of Methodism—to have faith in God—and the religious doubt often associated with the conversion experience do not always go hand in hand.[12] Having broad implications and a meaning too slippery to single out, Methodism as a category of influence may not provide a stable or definitive interpretation for reading a nineteenth-century novel. However, the revelation of Methodism as a vital literary source for Anne Brontë, is observable through her strong empathy towards eighteenth-century poet William Cowper whose fear of damnation is expressed in his *The Castaway* (1799). In this essay I would like to place Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* within the tradition of enthusiasm, thereby recovering them from an undeserved status as lacking in imagination, for they are truly a mark of her devoted religious enthusiasm and literary genius.

I. Religious Sensibility in Anne Brontë's Poems

Although "Methodist" is originally a term applied to the members of a religious society established at Oxford in 1729 by John and Charles Wesley and the other members of the University, the term did not necessarily evoke, in those who distrusted enthusiasm, an image of religious piety and morality, for Methodist conversion involved the feeling of fear and anger, often with the symptom of paroxysms, followed by the sentiment of love or joy.[13] This violent oscillation between these extreme feelings popularly characterised Methodist "enthusiasm" which subsequently became the object of ridicule, though not necessarily an accurate picture of the Movement.[14] A closer

12 Emma Mason, "Emily Brontë and the Enthusiastic Tradition" in *Romanticism On the Net* 25 (Feburary 2002).
13 Sydney Dimond, *Psychology of the Methodist Revival,* (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 171.
14 Frederick Gill, *Romantic Movement and Methodism: A Study of English Romanticism and the Evangelical Revival*, (London: Epworth Press, 1937) 25.

examination discloses many facets of Methodism. William Hazlitt, for instance, in "On the Causes of Methodism" calls Methodists "religious enthusiasts" and condemns them as "religious invalids," weak in body and mind, excessive in imagination. He claims that Methodists are "carried away with the motions of the spirit—are lost in the abyss of unfathomable mysteries, election, reprobation, predestination,—and revel in a sea of boundless nonsense."[15] Used as a term of abuse, Methodism in the early nineteenth century incited in people the image of "reprobates" who feared God's judgment. What the Brontë children were familiar with was not just Weslyan "Pure celestial fire," but also Calvinistic Methodist doctrine which is full of images of "hell-fire," "glorious saints" and "sinner[s] eternally damned," and these were, to them both "fearful and exciting."[16] Daphne du Maurier, writing the biography of Branwell Brontë, underscores the infernal imagination propagated by Grimshaw's sermons.[17]

Cowper's *The Castaway*, which was Anne Brontë's "favorite,"[18] demonstrates the imagery of darkness cast by the fear of lost faith and of eternal damnation. This kind of religious enthusiasm originally had its source in John Wesley's dictum that it is through "our hearts" that we "feel" God's grace, as he said, "God give us grace to know these things, and to feel them in our hearts,"[19] but Methodist believers had no control over their spontaneous feelings, and so made themselves vulnerable to their own anxiety or despondency. *The Castaway*, about a sailor cast out of the boat, is suggestive of Satan's despair at the conviction that he is damned: "Nor soon he felt his strength decline / Or

15 *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu. Vol.2. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) 58-60.

16 Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson, *The Four Brontës: The Lives and Works of Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne Brontë*, (London: Archon Books, 1967) 13.

17 Daphne du Maurier, *The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969) 55.

18 Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson 52.

19 John Wesley, "Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" quoted by Frederick Gill. (1937) 25. Wesley may have anticipated its consequent fervour amongst the followers.

courage die away; / But waged with Death a lasting strife / Supported by despair of life."[20] In expressing his religious pessimism, Cowper also uses the trope of a "felon" in his early poem 'Hope' in *Olney Hymns*.[21] Personified "Hope" rises above his "darkness" and "heart-chilling fears" which had fettered his feeling of "joy."[22]

Brontë is direct about her literary and religious influence by Cowper. Her commiseration with him is recorded in her poem, 'To Cowper' (1842): "I did not know the nights of gloom, / The days of misery, / The long long years of dark despair / That crushed and tortured thee."[23] It appears that she is aloof from Cowper's affliction in that she addresses him "thee" instead of "you." Note, however, that she uses the past tense "I did not know," implying that she now "knows" what it is to have misery and despair. Du Maurier acknowledges that Brontë had a pang of religious doubt when she was suffering from asthma. Brontë who adored Cowper's poems and "read them o'er and o'er again / With floods of silent tears,"[24] may well have wondered why he doubted his salvation. Cowper to her was "the source of every good, / The spring of purity" and she rejects the possibility that these were "the symptoms of a heart / Of Heavenly grace bereft, / For ever banished from its God" (lines 37-39). We may adduce that Brontë's understanding of moral goodness is inherently linked with her notion of religious purity. Therefore if Cowper were truly good, but believed himself to be damned, there could not have been anything more perplexing, and his suffering expressed in his poems must have exacerbated not only her "morbidly delicate religious conscience"[25] but her moral conviction.

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20 *The Castaway*, *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Martin Price. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973) 703.

21 John Newton wrote a biography of William Grimshaw.

22 *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, ed. James Sambrook. (London and New York: Longman, 1994) 263, ll. 728-731. Such a darker side of enthusiasm had penetrated the imagination of the Brontës. See also Elizabeth Gaskell 108.

23 'To Cowper' in *The Poems of Anne Bronte: A New Text and Commentary*, ed. Edward Chitam (Otawa and New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979) 84, ll.13-16.

24 Anne Brontë, 'To Cowper' (ll.3-4) ed. Edward Chitam 84.

Rarely would any critics deny Brontë's religious piety, but her association with Methodism is more refuted than approved, because of her belief in Universal Salvation.[26] However, some of her early poems would be considered incongruent with her adamant evangelical virtue. As her poems, 'The Captive's Dream' (January 1838) and 'The North Wind' (January 1838), amply document, the theme of imprisonment persisted in Anne's imagination throughout her writing career. The captive in a dungeon in 'The North Wind' is Brontë herself, and this confined and benumbed author is the direct opposite of the wild and free wind, the messenger of God. The recurring sounds *ear* and *air*, which are also frequently used in her later poem 'Self Communion' (November 1847-April 1848), are observed in seven lines out of forty in 'The North Wind,' and certainly produces the effect of "arresting plangency," as if to stir up the wind: "Blow on, wild wind" (line 29).[27] The north wind is given voice, which speaks to Brontë: "I have passed over thy own mountains *dear*" (line 8); "No voice but mine can reach thine *ear*" (line 24, italics added). However, while *ear*-sound such as "dear," "drear," "ear" and "here" are all used to connect the wind with the author, *air*-sound such as "bear" and "despair" are used in the context of her disconnection from Heaven.

Religious epistemology, to know God's judgment through one's feelings is the greatest legacy of the Methodist conversion experience. Cowper's 'The Contrite Heart' manifests his introspective process of searching for the sign within his own heart. He doubts that his is a contrite heart: "I hear, but seem to hear in vain, / Insensible as steel; / If ought is felt, 'tis only pain, / To find I cannot feel."[28] His sensibility is

25 Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson 52.

26 On this issue, see in particular Elizabeth Langland's *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

27 Edward Chitam's insightful analysis of Anne's poems shows that there is a unified theme of freedom in the sound "ear."

28 William Cowper, *Olney Hymns*. In *Selected Poems*. ed. Nick Rhodes (New York: Carcanet Press, 1988) 35.

exalted in vain to find that he is "Insensible" to God's grace. The only thing he feels, paradoxically, is his pain. This is worth pointing out, for it is this epistemological assurance that constitutes Brontë's moral sentiment. 'Despondency' (December 1841) is also a captivity poem, and one is reminded of Cowper's fretfulness in losing the feeling of love. Brontë regrets that she has even lost "a fervent zeal, An earnest grief—a strong desire" and remembers how she used to raise her "suppliant hands on high, / While tears fall thick and fast," describing herself as an "enthusiast" in retrospect. Like Cowper, she laments that she "cannot feel" this earnest grief any longer,[29] and wishes that her spirit could be set free of "these iron chains." The theme of imprisonment suggests her desire that the feeling be erased by apathy and numbness which impede her communication with God.

II. Methodism and Anne Brontë's Narratives

Terry Eagleton argues that the moral principle of *Agnes Grey*'s heroine, like Brontë's, was grounded in God alone, but it is over-succinct to portray Agnes as having unwavering religious faith which represents her "unruffled objectivity" possessing the virtues of "compassion and integrity."[30] Of course these virtues are at the center of debate in depicting the moral principle of Brontë's heroines in her novels, but as far as their emotional realism is concerned, their faith, let alone their narratives, are by no means objective. Religious sensibility is what gives them authority in narrating the tale of an elect, but is also subjective and dangerously unstable.

In her first novel, *Agnes Grey*, the Methodist influence is observable in the way the narrator records her past. She faithfully describes her

29 'Despondency.' In Edward Chitham's *The Poems of Anne Bronte: A New Text and Commentary*. (Otawa & New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979) 80-1.

30 Terry Eagleton's *Myth of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1988) 124-7.

emotional and psychological reality rather than what she says or does: she is often awkward in conversing with others or taking action. We may say that her realist approach again parallels that of Cowper. He writes of *The Task*, in a letter: "My descriptions are all from nature. Not one of them second-handed. *My delineations of the heart* are from my own experience."[31] This requires the skill, he claims, "T' arrest the fleeting images that fill / The mirror of the mind, and hold them fast, / And force them sit 'till he has pencil'd off / A faithful likeness of the forms he views."[32] These words manifest Cowper's upright attitude towards mirroring his own emotive reality in his poetry. This language of the heart shares its emphasis with Methodist doctrine, to which Cowper had long devoted himself.[33] In the same manner, Agnes is as direct and eloquent as she can be, opening her narrative with the intimation that her story is a true one. Anne's early experience and also as a governess are made use of in illustrating Agnes's upbringing in the household of "a clergyman of the north of England"[34] and her predicament in the two households. However *Agnes Grey* seems to lean towards a kind of realism which can be explained more by its narrative device.

At the outset, Agnes, rather than choosing to be didactic, entrusts the reader to judge the usefulness of her story: "shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend" (*AG* 61). Such discursiveness

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31 See *William Cowper: Centenary Letters*. ed. Simon Malpas. To William Unwin, 10 October 1784. (Manchester: Fyfield books, 2000) 79-80. Italics added.

32 See William Cowper's "The Time-Piece" (Book II of *The Task*). ll.290-3. in *The Task and Selected Other Poems*. Ed. James Sambrook. (London and New York: Longman, 1994) 94.

33 There are some studies on the relationship between the Romantic movement and Methodism. See for example Frederick C. Gill's *The Romantic Movement and Methodism: A Study of English Romanticism and the Evangelical Revival*. (London: The Epworth Press, 1937).

34 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998) 61. Hereafter cited as *AG* in parentheses with page numbers.

and her use of the first person singular strongly impress the reader with Agnes's own sensibility, and her train of thought or "sentiments" is juxtaposed with the appearances of spontaneity. While Agnes tries to still her "rebellious flutter of [her] heart" in meeting with her first employer, Mrs. Bloomfield, she "almost forgot to answer her polite salutation" (*AG* 74). But when she narrates, she opens up the feelings which she "conceal[s]" (*AG* 71) from other characters in the novel. She does not, for instance, impart to her employer her feeling of disappointment at not being allowed a full vacation: "I had never told her my feelings, and she could not be expected to divine them" (*AG* 92).

The new environment into which Agnes throws herself as a governess forced her to adapt to the fanciful world of the upper-class. First, her governess narrative censures her pupils' immoral inclination. Agnes's moral affections, virtues of integrity and plainness are granted very little power, leaving her quite helpless against the "vicious tendency" (*AG* 87) of the Bloomfield children and "highly disagreeable" manner (*AG* 142) of the Murray girls. She is disillusioned by the realisation that the "name of governess" was a "mere mockery as applied to [her]" (*AG* 84). When the Bloomfield children misbehave in front of guests, Agnes is accused of lacking in power to instruct, but she well knows that her modest looks and her persuasion without fancy words would not move them. When her pupils' uncle Mr. Robson, rather than remonstrating with Tom about his cruel treatment of birds, encourages his "propensity to persecute the lower creation" (*AG* 103), Agnes admonishes Tom not to do such a "horrible thing" (*AG* 78). The only means of persuasion is to appeal to the heart: "I thought if he had any affections at all, I would endeavour to win them . . . but I looked in vain for that generous, noble spirit" (*AG* 79). Over and over again, Agnes feels resigned in the face of these reckless, unamenable and "unimpressible" (*AG* 111) pupils and their willful parents. Gradually, her governess narrative is superseded by her Methodist rhetoric. It demotes these children almost to a renegade status, namely "reprobates," denominating them

"insensate" creatures (*AG* 89). Agnes lingers in vain for some "symptom of contrition" (*AG* 89) when Mary Ann was a "naughty girl," but seeing that Mary Ann really "didn't care," Agnes concludes that the child is insensible to another's affection. She leaves Mary Ann "alone, and in darkness" (ibid.). Anne figuratively traps Mary Ann in darkness, just as when Brontë was once a captive herself in her dream: "I could not rise from my dark dungeon floor."[35] What Agnes faces in reality falls short of her "bright hopes" and "ardent expectations" (*AG* 70), for she cannot "wake the contrition of the erring" (*AG* 69) in children, which she expected to achieve as a competent governess. This reverberates with Cowper's lamentation that his is not a "contrite heart."

Second, her narrative severely criticizes anything superficial, whether it be clothes or language. A truly virtuous heart will be perceived through, even if the appearance is plain. With the discursiveness that is permissible to a humble Methodist, Brontë censures the artificiality of manners without being overtly expressive. It is the discursiveness between herself and God that is at issue and not necessarily the articulate and manipulative communication represented by one of the Murray girls, Rosalie, who attempts to attract Edward Weston, the new curate at the parish. The tenets of Methodism is in direct opposition to anything superficial. While partially charmed by the splendid clothes and "gentle and playful" manner of Rosalie, Agnes consistently rejects and disdains a "false, deceitful charm over defects and foibles," considering her an angel "whose form conceals a vicious heart" (*AG* 193).

While Agnes is the sole narrator of the novel, the heroine's narrative of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is only inserted in the form of a diary, but this in fact highlights the significance of her subjective voice. The novel opens with the main narrator, a middle-aged Gilbert Markham,

35 'The Captive's Dream" (January 1838) in *The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary*. ed. Edward Chitam. (Otawa and New Jersy: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979) 34, l. 19.

writing to his friend Halford about the heroine, Helen Graham (Huntingdon) who has left her husband. Although Gilbert's narrative centres on his attraction to this mysterious "single lady," Mrs. Graham, who arrives with her son in his town as a new tenant at Wildfell Hall.[36] As Elizabeth Langland has argued, Helen is an attractive subject of rumour, scandal, conjecture, slander and various kinds of oral reports,[37] because she is a Fallen woman. As his friendship with Helen develops and Gilbert's infatuation with her becomes stronger, he tries to quell the rumours about her. But when he himself witnesses with his own eyes Helen seeing a man (who in fact is her brother), he misreads the situation and accuses her of doing "an injury [she] can never repair" (*TWH* 126). Brontë demonstrates the fallibility of one's physical senses by having Gilbert thus misread the context, saying "You could not have enlightened me further, on the subject which alone concerned me; nor could you have made me discredit the evidence of my sense" (ibid.). To dispel the fallacy, Helen hands over to Gilbert her diary which is a "thick album or manuscript volume" (*TWH* 127).

It contains details of her marriage with Arthur Huntingdon which begins in 1821 and last until 1827 when Gilbert's narrative commences. Her diary has the authority to overturn Gilbert's preconception and the gossip circulated in town, for it gives a full account of her inner truth. Brontë authorises Helen's narrative while discarding town's gossip as "small talk" (*TWH* 79). The diary begins with her rash decision to marry Arthur, the master of Grassdale Manor. He is described as "a man without self-restraint or lofty aspirations, a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments" (*TWH* 246). She marries him for love, but also has a prospect of effecting changes in his behavior. Helen's constant fear was whether she could teach his son to "respect his father, and yet to avoid his example" (*TWH* 249), because of Arthur's

36 Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1973) 4. Hereafter cited as *TWH* in parentheses with page numbers.

37 Langland 121.

injustice and ill-humour towards his inferiors. On one occasion, he swears at his servant, Benson, with "savage coarseness" when all he did was trip in front of him. In seeing this, Helen justifies the servant's blunder, saying "the carpet caught his foot" (*TWH* 257). Arthur's class-conscious judgment is evident from his calling Benson an "insensate brute" who racked and tore his nerves to pieces (*TWH* 257). The use of the word "insensate" is ironic here. Helen perceives Arthur's cruelty and heartlessness, and would not sympathise with the condition of his "nerves." Like Agnes, Helen's emotive language stresses the importance of moral and religious sensibility. Because she is deeply concerned about her husband's soul's judgment after death, she cries for him, throwing herself on her knees, and says "do you think you can injure and degrade yourself [by doing injustice to others], and I not feel it?" (*TWH* 260). But she realises that it is all in vain: "God might awaken that heart, supine and stupefied with self-indulgence, and remove the film of sensual darkness from his eyes, but I could not" (*TWH* 263). Finding herself and her son sinking into corruption, she flees from him. Her diary, which mirrors her own emotive reality, reminds us of Cowper's language of the heart which shares its emphasis with Methodist doctrine. Gilbert tells his friend that the effect of reading the diary was to "fill my heart with joy, as if some friend had roused me from a dreadful nightmare" (*TWH* 403).

Anne Brontë has made the authority of a written narrative a key issue in her novels, for she has her heroines use their written voices as evidence of their truthfulness. In other words, what makes Brontë's realism possible is the self-assurance of these two heroines who utilize narrative voice as proof of being forever faithful to their hearts.

III. Insensitive Reprobates in Anne's Novels

At least when Anne Brontë faced death, she was free from the religious doubts peculiar to Methodism. Ellen Nussey's transcription

of her deathbed soundly substantiates this. When asked whether she would be "easier" if she was moved from a chair to a sofa, she replied gratefully, "It is not you [Ellen] who can give me ease but soon all will be well through the merits of my Redeemer."[38] Of course, she believed that God is the only "Redeemer," but it does not mean that she was indifferent to a religious question of how one's soul is to be saved. Brontë's novels reiterate the Cowperian theme of reprobates who cannot feel God's love. Of utmost concern for Helen Graham (Huntington), for example, is everlasting glory of the afterlife, and therefore her husband's insensibility to his own sins confounds her. For many nineteenth-century religious writers, sinners' lack of feeling was a prime subject: deficient awareness of sin or "hardened" sinfulness can be a major obstacle to salvation. In other words, both Cowper and Brontë believed in the necessity of making people *feel* their sinfulness as a way to be forgiven by God. While the Brontë novels do not devote much space to explicit treatment of humility, its opposite is frequently and harshly decried.[39] In her poem "Self-Communion," the warmth of fire and blood enabling one's heart to feel and the chill "creeping o'er the shuddering heart" are counterpoised to invoke the true virtue of sensibility.[40]

In *Agnes Grey*, the heroine, ascribing moral degeneracy to the absence of sensibility, makes a clear demarcation between herself and the Bloomfield family. The epithets used to describe Mrs. Bloomfield are "chilly" (*AG* 74), "frigid" (*AG* 98) and "dark and chill" (*AG* 105). These words show hardness as well as coldness of her character. Children can only become "stone-like" brought up by such people lacking in warmth. This is a reiteration of Cowper's metaphorical "steel." Without

38 Julie Barker's *The Brontës: A Life in Letters*. (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1997) 235.
39 Thormählen, p.155.
40 'Self-Communion' (November 1847~April 1848) in *The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary*. ed. Edward Chitam. (Otawa and New Jersey: Rowman an Littlefield, 1979) 156, ll.160-171.

portraying Agnes as "fervent" or overexcited, Brontë conjures up the figure of an insensate "reprobate" by simply concatenating her narrative with the image of a "stone" in her poetry. In "Self-Communion," the pliable clay is endowed with the power to feel God's grace which figures the elect, and the elect divested of its qualities becomes a stone. "Stone" is metaphorically the heart which failed to survive the drought of "kindly showers." Brontë's imagination hence is fueled by enthusiastic notions that extol the warmth of fire. The same thing applies to the Bloomfield children. To Agnes's greatest disappointment, they "had no hearts, or such as they had were so strongly guarded, and so well concealed, that I, with all my efforts, had not yet discovered how to reach them" (*AG* 107). The rhetoric emphasises the credibility of truth on account of her moral sense of superiority in possessing the heart. This was typically observed in Methodist rhetoric as I mentioned earlier, not just entailing moral implication, but conveying the religious dictum that endorses a sensitive heart. Agnes's mother later compares these Bloomfield children to an insensate "stone" and says that one cannot expect "stone to be as pliable as clay" (*AG* 111).

Agnes's ideal pupil reflects Rousseauvian sentimentalism in that he or she must possess a "sensitive soul" that can be impressed with the spectacle especially of suffering, pain and tears. The only difference may be that "insensibility," for Rousseau, arises from "ignorance," because he believes that children will learn to become sensible,[41] while Agnes's sense of resignation indicates her disbelief in that notion. Interestingly, animals such as birds are characterised as sensate, while these children are portrayed as "insensate." In confronting Mrs. Bloomfield, Agnes makes a point that Tom's amusements consist in injuring "sentient creatures" (*AG* 105). Agnes's decision to kill the birds once and for all to

41 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Emile: or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991) 226-7. Sensible in this context means "Having sensibility; capable of delicate or tender feeling" or "Sensitive or readily accessible to some specified emotional influence." See the word "sensible" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

stop Tom from torturing them is strictly based on saving the birds from physical pain inflicted upon by the child. This makes a sharp contrast with Mrs. Bloomfield's statement that "a child's amusement is scarcely to be weighed against the welfare of a soulless brute" (*AG* 105). By acknowledging "sensibility" in what Mrs. Bloomfield calls a "soulless brute," Brontë has triumphantly reversed the order of things that takes human arrogance for granted. This lack of humility in Mrs. Bloomfield reverberates with Arthur Huntington's disparaging phrase ("insensate brute") which he used to describe his servant. In this way Brontë can effectively set these characters against the heroines whose feelings are often too acute.

Therefore, one's capacity to treat people (even those in the lower classes) or animals with care and respect becomes the touchstone for one's moral virtue. Agnes meets widowed Nancy Brown during one of her alms visits to cottages, and is appalled at the "highly disagreeable" manner of her new pupils, Rosalie and Matilda Murray who showed no consideration for cottagers' feelings, "regarding them as an order of beings entirely distinct from themselves" (*AG* 144). Mrs Murray is depicted as a "heartless" (*AG* 194) mother who equally lacks consideration for others, especially for a "hireling" like Agnes. From Nancy, she hears about Weston who stroked a cat and gave a smile to Nancy. On the contrary, when Nancy meets Hatfield, who turns out to be an egoistic, vain and inconsiderate Rector, he knocks the same cat off. Hatfield carelessly frightens Nancy by telling her what will happen to "a reprobate," that is, "to enter in at the strait gate" (ibid.), and this denomination of her is a more immediate embodiment of Methodism. Unlike Hatfield, Weston painstakingly explains to her what the Bible[42] says and what she can do to "dwell in love" (*AG* 152). We should note that this Methodist character, Nancy, is not portrayed negatively.

42 Evangelicals believed that they would be saved from damnation only by faith in Christ's atonement for mankind's sins, and that the Bible, read literally, was the only authority for Christian doctrine.

Rather, her thoughtfulness and care for her cat is given credit and is eventually saved by Weston's Evangelicalism.

It is ironic that Agnes, while claiming to possess ample sensibility and "impressibility," is more susceptible to external influence through "habitual associations" (*AG* 155). Her acute sensibility, through her "eyes" and "ears," involuntarily takes in the actions and words of those who are forever present. Whether she likes it or not, Agnes starts to "act and speak as they do." Enthusiasts do not only receive messages from God in the way they do in 'The North Wind,' but their feelings transmit visions and sounds of most trivial occurrences. She fears "exceedingly that they would make [her] worse—would gradually bring [her] feelings, habits, capacities, to the level of their own" (*AG* 155). She continues:

> Already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, *my heart petrifying*, my soul contracting, and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last…. (*AG* 155, italics added).

Agnes is afraid that her moral virtues, or rather "perceptions," will eventually be deprived of her. This statement makes it clear that her moral basis is not pre-fixed, but is in concert with her feelings. Agnes's heart expands when she feels grief or joy, but when it contracts and petrifies, she loses the fire which is the principal make-up of an enthusiast.

In her Methodist rhetoric, God's messages are "assimilated" by a sensate subject, but it turns out that Brontë's heroine fails to suppress the fear of moral degeneracy by the very nature of its "power of assimilation" (*AG* 155). Until the very end, Agnes is cut off from her aristocratic relatives both financially and socially. Furthermore, Brontë bars Agnes from wealthy employers, for fear that her alter-ego's

acutely sensitive heart will be defenselessly exposed to the cold and chilling world. Brontë's heroine is surely an enthusiast, and her passion oscillates between the fear of damnation and her faith. Even if Agnes, or more likely Brontë, knew that it was wrong to be "desponding" and that she had to practice "Salvation by Faith," she also knew that faith was not possible without the spontaneous feeling of love, which was gradually being chilled by solitude. The feeling of despondency lingers until the last two chapters of the novel as Agnes says, "It was wrong to be so joyless, so desponding; I should have made God my Friend, and to do His will the pleasure and the business of my life; but Faith was weak, and Passion was too strong" (*AG* 201).[43] When the author calls herself an "enthusiast" in her poem, the voice of wind speaking to her is not literally an articulate one, for she only "knows" through her own sensibility. The sweeping rhetoric in *Agnes Grey* is predicated on the religious certainty (uncertainty) of hearing God's voice.

What is foregrounded in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the same problem of corruptibility. Arthur's sensual darkness (*TWH* 263) spreads its influence on Helen who continuously aspires to become a "better Christian" (*TWH* 209). As Marianne Thormählen states, there is never any indication that Arthur was susceptible to Divine influence of any kind. His corrupt and *corrupting* nature is in evidence from the first,[44] and Helen's entry in her diary gradually reveals its influence over her. The heroine's struggle for purity, order and control at the side of her immoral husband fails when his friend, Walter Hargrave starts to frequently visit their house and eventually tries to win her affection. She welcomes him as a "real friend to the family, a harmless companion for Arthur" (*TWH* 265). However, she begins to feel that there exists a "secret understanding" between them. She convinces herself in

43 This passage deserves a closer analysis, for it implies that Agnes's lack of earthly pleasure should be sacrificed for God. This is typical of Evangelical doctrine which was often associated with a puritanical disapproval of social pleasures.

44 Thormählen 84.

vain that "If it is wrong, surely Arthur's is the fault, not mine." She continues:

> And indeed I know not whether, at the time, it was not for him rather than myself that I blushed; for since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own : I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence I must be, and I am, debased, *contaminated by the union*, both in my own eyes and in the actual truth. (*TWH* 266, Italics added)

While blaming Arthur for degrading himself by seeking pleasures in London and neglecting his duty as husband and father, she is also aware of the "contaminating" effect of their union. She increasingly feels the degradation because things that formerly shocked and disgusted her now seem "only natural": "I am gradually losing that instinctive horror and repulsion which were given me by nature, or instilled into me by the precepts and example of my aunt" (*TWH* 266). In her diary, she justifies her leaving home with the need to shield her principles against the corrupting influence of her husband.

The visions of both Heaven and Hell are shown in the novel, but the latter is much more vividly depicted. There is no visual description of Heaven, but we know that Helen is hopeful of entering it with Gilbert (she does not anticipate her marriage with him at this point) as a reward for "keeping up a spiritual intercourse" (*TWH* 410). It is characterised by Helen as a place where "there is no more pain and sorrow… where both will behold the same glorious truths, and drink exalted and supreme felicity from the same fountain of light and goodness" (*TWH* 412). On the contrary, Hell is given more graphic image. After leaving Arthur and spending time at Wildfell Hall, Helen returns to Grassdale Manaor to attend her very sick husband. Arthur

has to suffer from the effects of early indulgence, and Helen attends his sick bed. He says sarcastically, "Yes, now, my immaculate angel; but when once you have secured your reward, and find yourself safe in heaven, and me howling in hell-fire, catch you lifting a finger to serve me then!" To this, Helen's reply is somewhat cold and detached: "If so, it will be because of the great gulf over which I cannot pass; and if I could look complacently on in such a case, it would be only from the assurance that you were being purified from your sins" (*THW* 452). The implication is that the sinned will not suffer in hell-fire eternally, but goes through a period of purgation. Arthur does not take it seriously and calls it "a fable" (*THW* 452). However, when death approaches, Arthur's language turns into that of a reprobate: "Oh, Helen, if I had listened to you, it never would have come to this! And if I had heard you long ago—oh, God! How different it would have been!" (*TWH* 455) Helen's universalist belief that God will "redeem us from the bondage of the evil one" is observed from this dialogue, but her assurance that Arthur will see "joy and glory after [death]" is contradicted by the reprobate, for he cannot feel repentant. When she urges him to repent ("But if you sincerely repent—"), he only replies, "I can't repent; I only fear" (*TWF* 457).

Just like the ending of *Agnes Grey* when Agnes's "utter darkness" (*AG* 155) is lifted by Weston who "appearing like a morning star in her horizon" saves her, the final scene of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* offers a relief from earthly suffering. Helen accepts Gilbert's proposal and is trying to overcome the "painful associations connected with Grassdale" (*TWH* 501). Gilbert's narrative is closed with his report "I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived together" (*TWH* 502). Arthur represents Helen's disastrous first choice, Hargrave her seducer whom she rejects, and Gilbert her eventual choice, showing a moral progression in the heroine. Religious sensibility is powerfully shown in both novels, but what needs to be emphasised is that this sensibility

is what brings about the fear of corruption. Methodist enthusiasm in *Agnes Grey* is circumscribed, since it does not seem to occupy any significance in the heroine's narrative, except for Nancy Brown's anxiety about and aspiration to salvation; however, when we read the novel side by side with Brontë's poems, the Methodist concern with the "feeling" of God's grace becomes visible, and this eschatological theme is further developed in her *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The narrative penetrates into the subjectivity of the heroine, gradually giving her portraiture a Methodist tinge. The petrifaction of the heart is what Agnes dreads in her pupils, and the very same "darkness" which encloses Mary Ann gathers round her. Helen Graham (Huntingdon) similarly feels a loss of "instinctive" power to repel the evil, and is gradually assimilated by her husband's corrupt nature. It is said that all members of the Brontë family disapproved of the Calvinist doctrine of election, according to which God decrees that a limited number of designated human beings shall be saved,[45] but from Brontë's poems and novels, as far as can be ascertained, she was not convinced of the Universal Salvation.

45 Thormählen 86