NO MORE HEROINES LIKE OUR GRANDMOTHERS! HARRIET MARTINEAU ON CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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When Currer Bell was invited to come for tea one December evening in London, 1849, her hosts and their cousin Harriet Martineau[1] had already guessed that the mysterious author of the daring new books *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* must be a woman.[2] They were not prepared, however, for the footman's announcement of a "Miss Brogden," and the entrance into the drawing room of a diminutive young woman whom Harriet later described as "the smallest creature I had ever seen (except at a fair) and her eyes blazed, as it seemed to me."[3] It was particularly to meet Harriet Martineau that Charlotte had come to tea, for Charlotte had found Harriet's novel *Deerbrook,* "a new and keen pleasure," and ranked it with the writings which had "really done her good, added to her store of ideas, and rectified her view of life."[4] Charlotte knew Harriet on first sight from the large India rubber ear trumpet always at her side, and advanced to "salute" her. She was later to record that Harriet's

[1] Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) came from Norwich; her family were manufacturing and professional people of Huguenot ancestry, Unitarian in faith. She gained literary fame with a series of popular tales, *Illustrations of Political Economy,* 1832-1834, and subsequently wrote one major novel as well as hundreds of articles and other books on political, social and educational problems of the age. She was a radical, a Utilitarian, and eventually an agnostic. Though she never married she lived an independent and full life, and she knew most of the important figures of her day.

[2] Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) published *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849) under the name of Currer Bell.

[3] *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography,* ed. Maria Weston Chapman (Boston: James E. Osgood, 1877), II, 23 (hereafter cited as *Autobiography*).

[4] *Deerbrook* (London: Moxon, 1839); quoted in *Autobiography,* II, 21.

presence seemed "visionary," and that she had been so thrilled to meet the woman called by Winifred Gérin "indisputably, the leading woman writer of her day," that she "could scarcely credit the reality of what passed."[5] After their tea the two writers were left alone for an hour of busy tête-à-tête, although exactly what was said by Charlotte and what was heard by Harriet was later in dispute. For the time, the two women felt a sense of mutual sympathy and interest, and they began one of the intense female friendships for which the Victorians are well known.

This meeting of the Yorkshire clergyman's daughter, destined to be viewed as a major novelist of Victorian England, and a woman journalist whose wide reputation in her own day has left almost no trace on modern times, is naturally of interest to biographers and social historians. What importance does it have to a better understanding of Charlotte Brontë's artistry and satisfaction with her work? Some recently discovered letters of Harriet Martineau give insight into her—finally disastrous—friendship with Charlotte Brontë, and provide an example of the unrelenting power of social pressure throughout Victorian society, particularly on woman writers, to conform to a carefully guarded choice of subject matter and familiar narrative structure.

At first Harriet had responded to Charlotte Brontë's artistic truth in a very personal way. Brontë's portrayal of childhood in *Jane Eyre* had an affinity with those writings of her own which described childhood traumas made worse by incipient deafness. In an unpublished letter to Fanny Wedgwood of 18 February 1848, Martineau asks, "Can you tell me about 'Jane Eyre,' —who wrote it? I am told that I wrote the 1*st* vol: and I don't know how to disbelieve it myself,—though I am wholly ignorant of the authorship. I cannot help feeling that the writer must know not only my books but myself very well. My own family suppose me *in* the secret, till I deny it. With much improbability of incident, it is surely a very able book... and the way the heroine comes out without conceit or egotism is, to me, perfectly wonderful."[6]

Harriet, then, must also have had a lively interest in meeting Charlotte Brontë. Soon Charlotte was to speak of her friendship with Harriet as comparable to that with Ellen Nussey, her former

5 Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 412.

6 "Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgwood 1834-1871," ed. Elisabeth Marie Arbuckle (Diss. University of Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 148-49 (hereafter cited as "HM to FW").

schoolmate and life-long confidante.[7] A year after their first meeting, Charlotte went to stay at The Knoll, the home and small model farm Harriet had built for herself in the Lake District. At the time of this visit, in December 1850, Charlotte had just finished editing the novels and some unpublished poems of her sisters. Her surviving adult brother and two sisters—Branwell, Emily and Anne—had all died within nine months of each other, between September 1848 and June 1849. For Charlotte, the re-reading of her sisters' novels and private papers was a depressing experience. Her visit to Harriet was one of her few diversions for that year, and it is not surprising that she was captivated by Harriet's hospitable manners, and amazed at her self-discipline and efficiency. The stay with Harriet also made it possible for Charlotte to meet several other literary figures who lived or were visiting in the neighborhood, like Wordsworth's son-in-law Edward Quillinan (Wordsworth had died the previous spring), and Matthew Arnold.[8] While she stayed with Harriet, Charlotte wrote to other friends describing Harriet's activities and telling them of Harriet's daily routine: she was up at five o'clock Charlotte said, had a cold bath and starlight walk before breakfast at seven, worked in her study from then until two, dined, and spent the rest of the afternoon in conversation with her guest and in needlework. After the evening meal she wrote letters until midnight, Charlotte reported. Charlotte also spoke of Harriet's efforts on behalf of the poor in the community, and commented that Harriet was both liberal and despotic. Harriet, however, had denied this charge, Charlotte said. Finally, Charlotte noted that Harriet had attempted to mesmerize her.[9] Harriet was an accomplished mesmerist and also claimed that she had been cured, by mesmerism, of a large tumor which had kept her bed-ridden for five years.

In a slightly later letter to one of her friends, Charlotte spoke of her alarm at the effects which she felt would be produced by Harriet's atheistic avowals in a forthcoming book, to be called *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*,[10] which Harriet was proof-reading when Charlotte was with her. In this work Harriet serves as a Socratic questioner for letters written by the amateur phrenologist and mesmerist Henry Atkinson to disprove, rationally, man's belief

7 See Clement K. Shorter, *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1970), p. 205.

8 Arnold's poem "Haworth Churchyard" (1855) commemorates his meeting with the two women at Quillinan's.

9 See Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Smith, Elder, 1857).

10 Henry George Atkinson, F.G.S., and Harriet Martineau, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (London: John Chapman, 1851).

in an afterlife, and to urge the wisdom of a biological approach to human behavior. In another later letter Charlotte expressed her sympathy for Harriet's "abandonment" and "desertion" by former friends because of the book. Harriet was, of course, unaware of what Charlotte was writing about her, and the two friends continued to keep in close touch when Charlotte returned to her father's parsonage. Eight months after Charlotte's visit, Harriet asked Charlotte to intercede for her with the highly regarded publishers Smith, Elder and Company on behalf of a novel she had begun. This was an abortive venture, Harriet's novel being unacceptable to the firm, but it is evidence of Harriet's respect for the younger woman's literary reputation.

In the two years following her stay with Harriet, Charlotte worked at her fourth and last novel, *Villette.* During that time she was again overcome by periods of depression when she could not write. In *Villette,* Charlotte made direct use of her experience as pupil and teacher at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels from 1842 to 1844. There Charlotte had fallen in love with her tutor M. Heger, a married man, and had suffered acutely from this hopeless passion. Her feelings seem to have been obvious, and naturally offensive to Mme. Heger, while M. Heger, whether or not he was aware of Charlotte's infatuation, continued to treat her as only a pupil. Charlotte's surprising return to the Pensionnat in 1843 after a return home with Emily, and her inability to leave throughout much of the second year of her stay in spite of the breakdown in relations with Mme. Heger, attest to her helplessness in the sway of her emotions. For the first time in Charlotte's life, a real man had come before her to fulfill the role of all her juvenile literary lover-heroes.

Eventually Charlotte tore herself away and returned to her father's home. She and her sisters had known for some years that they must be able to support themselves in the event of their father's death, so she and Emily had gone to Brussels to prepare themselves for conducting a school. All three Brontës, including the youngest, Anne, rebelled against their experiences as private governesses. Charlotte was particularly determined not to repeat her two short spells in this capacity. No romantic hero like Rochester, Jane Eyre's "master," had appeared in those episodes of Charlotte's life, and she bitterly resented the restrictions imposed upon her. But Harriet's questioning of Charlotte about her experience as a governess, when they first met, was somehow misunderstood—possibly because Harriet, being hard of hearing, did not clearly hear what Charlotte told her, or possibly because of the wording of the question she put to Charlotte on the matter.

Although the Brontës took some steps towards opening a school after Charlotte's return from Brussels, the dilemma of their having insufficient capital to move to another community and the unsuitability of their own home for such a purpose ended the school project. All four Brontë children were now living at home, and—as the alcoholic Branwell destroyed himself before their eyes—Charlotte, Emily and Anne set to work to make a living by their pens. Their years of juvenile apprenticeship served them well, and within the next two years they managed to publish a joint volume of poetry and a novel each. As has been recounted earlier, Charlotte met Harriet several years after this crucial time, in 1849—after *Jane Eyre* had been published in 1847 and *Shirley* in 1849.

Because Harriet had praised both these books, it was natural for Charlotte to ask Harriet's opinion of *Villette,* just as she had previously asked Harriet to explain the objections of critics who called her books "coarse." Charlotte always insisted that she was guided by artistic truth in portraying the feelings and action of her characters, and such objections puzzled her. This misunderstanding is partially explained by Tom Winnifrith in *The Brontës and Their Background,*[11] where he notes that the Brontë sisters, brought up in relative isolation in Yorkshire, were out of step with the prudery of the 1840's. Their mores were based on the Romantic novels of an earlier age, which they read as children, and thus their views met with some hostile criticism. Gérin notes that Harriet Martineau failed to see the advance, morally, of Charlotte's heroines, who reject passion, over those of her juvenilia—of which Harriet had no knowledge—who accept passion. In *Villette,* moreover, Charlotte's original intention was to make Lucy Snowe, the heroine, acquiesce to her sad loss of love. This is evidence of Charlotte's triumph over her feelings for M. Heger—who served as the model for the French tutor, Paul Emmanuel, whom Lucy Snowe loves.[12] Paul Emmanuel was to die, and Lucy Snowe to spend the rest of her life alone. Charlotte was persuaded to alter the narrative to comply with her father's request for a happy ending to *Villette,* and so Paul Emmanuel's death is only suggested at the end. But this was not her original intention.

When *Villette* was published, in January 1853, Charlotte wrote to Harriet to ask for her "thoughts upon my book,—as frankly as if you spoke to some near relative whose good you preferred to her gratification. I wince under the pain of condemnation—like any

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[11] Tom Winifrith, *The Brontës and Their Background* (London: Macmillan, 1973).
[12] See Gérin, p. 574.

other weak structure of flesh and blood, but I love, I honour, I kneel to Truth. Let her smite me one cheek—good! The tears may spring to the eyes; but courage! There is the other side—hit again—right sharply!"[13]

Poor Charlotte surely did not expect Harriet's "truth," when it came, to hit quite so sharply. Harriet's answer was given partly in a letter and partly in the form of a review published in the London *Daily News,* 3 February 1853. There Harriet praised *Villette* as the best of Charlotte's novels in point of construction, but, she said, her

> clear sight and deep feeling are marred by her subjective misery. . . .An atmosphere of pain hangs about the whole, forbidding that repose which we hold to be essential to the true presentment of any large portion of life and experience. In this pervading pain the book reminds us of Balzac and so it does in the prevalence of one tendency, or one idea, throughout the whole conception and action. All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought—love. and, so dominant is this idea—so incessant is the writer's tendency to describe the need of being loved, that the heroine, who tells her own story, leaves the reader at last under the uncomfortable impression of her having either entertained a double love [Lucy Snowe gives up her impossible love for the handsome young Dr. Bretton, and somewhat later realizes she loves Paul Emmanuel], or allowed one to supercede [*sic*] another without notification of the transition. It is not thus in real life. There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love.[14]

Charlotte, said Mrs. Gaskell later, was "wounded to the quick."[15] After the early review of *Jane Eyre* by Elizabeth Rigby in the *Quarterly,* this review of *Villette* was one of those which hurt Charlotte most. For the moment, however, Harriet seemed totally unaware that she had done anything more than a kindness to Charlotte by giving her true opinion of *Villette.* In any case, this was her public position. In April 1853, two months after her review of *Villette,* Harriet wrote to Fanny Wedgwood:

[13] 21 January 1853; quoted in *Autobiography,* II, 24.

[14] Quoted by Gérin, p. 598.

[15] Gaskell, II, 279.

> "Villette." I suppose you feel with the rest of us;—that it is *marvellously* [*sic*] powerful, but grievously morbid, and not a little coarse. I held out strenuously against this last imputation on the other two, but am obliged to yield up the case now. In truth, I am deeply sorry. What has become of the old heroism which made our grandmothers bear their interior conflicts in silence and humility and cheerfulness? What apology *can* C.B. offer to 100,000 women, —especially governesses who find the eyes of the world turned to pry into their secret troubles? They complain, —and how justly,— that they are made objects of speculation and pity to their employers, and even to their pupils, who read "Jane Eyre" and "Villette." The more I think of it, the more it pains me; and certainly not the less on account of the wonderful power and (in some sense) beauty of the book. —C.B.and her poor sisters seem to be quite unlike all other women,—whether novelists or dumb,— in their notion of love,—both as to kind and degree. Currer is now in better health and spirits than for years (though still far from well) and yet her last book is more morbid than "Shirley", and seems to have wholly lost the healthiness of "Jane Eyre." I am more sorry than I can say. I hope some woman will arise who, with power like, or equal to, C.B's, will bring us up to high art again, and not help to sink us into the subjective slough as she is doing.[16]

After Harriet's biting review of *Villette* in the *Daily News,* Charlotte did not want to go back to The Knoll to stay a second time, as Harriet urged her to do, and the two former friends were not to meet again. Charlotte died two years later, in March 1855, less than ten months after her marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls. In the obituary notice she wrote for the *Daily News,* Harriet spoke of Charlotte's heroines who "love too readily," but added that, "they do their duty through everything. . . however morbid in passion." Harriet was yet to learn what alarmingly perceptive comments her young protégé had made about *her.*

Soon after Charlotte's death, extravagant statements about the Brontë sisters began to be published, and in order to refute these stories Charlotte's husband and her father appealed to another novelist friend of Charlotte's, Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, to write an

[16] "HM to FW," pp. 202-03.

accurate account of Charlotte's life. Mrs. Gaskell's loyalty to the memory of Charlotte, and her scrupulous honesty in the use of materials she was given to work from—including many letters written by Charlotte—proved to be a far more difficult task than she had anticipated. For example, she felt compelled to tell the truth about Charlotte's ill-treatment at the school for clergymen's daughters which served as the model for the notorious school in *Jane Eyre.* This account of Charlotte's early experience brought an outraged protest from the descendants of the former head of the school whom Charlotte had portrayed as the sadistic Mr. Brocklehurst. And Mrs. Gaskell was at first unable to explain the traumatic effect on Charlotte of her two years at the Pensionnat Heger. In *Villette* Mme. Heger becomes Mme. Beck, who is suspicious and jealous of Lucy Snowe. Lucy Snowe was obviously modelled on Charlotte herself, and in order to explain Charlotte's change of attitude towards a woman who had originally been kind to her and helped her, Mrs. Gaskell simply said that Charlotte was offended by Mme. Heger's strict Roman Catholicism. Harriet, on the other hand, saw Charlotte's behavior as ungrateful, and there was undoubtedly an identification of Charlotte's treatment of the Hegers with Charlotte's reaction to herself. Harriet apparently did not divine the real reason for Charlotte's estrangement from Mme. Heger, her infatuation with M. Heger. Mrs. Gaskell, who had gone to Brussels in 1856 in search of materials for her biography of Charlotte, almost certainly did understand what had happened. In her book, she moves back the date of Branwell's breakdown to account for Charlotte's period of depression a year after her return from the Hegers', when M. Heger firmly broke off their correspondence. Mrs. Gaskell had been refused admittance at the Pensionnat Heger by Mme. Heger, who must have read the pirated French translation of *Villette* of 1855, but she was welcomed by M. Heger, who showed her letters written to him by Charlotte as evidence of the strict teacher-pupil relationship between himself and Charlotte.

As soon as she had finished *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, in the spring of 1857, Mrs. Gaskell left to visit friends in Rome. The difficulty of giving a true portrait of her friend while not offending others had been an emotional drain, and she asked her husband not to forward business letters to her. As has already been seen, Mrs. Gaskell's fears of a reaction to her book were well-founded, but she could hardly have anticipated the whole extent of Harriet's objections. The first and second editions of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* were published in March and April 1857, and Harriet reportedly sent Mrs. Gaskell "pages and pages" of corrections to the

parts of the book which described Charlotte's relations with herself. On 4 May 1857 Harriet writes to Fanny Wedgwood's eldest daughter:

> About "Currer Bell," what I say is no secret: indeed we wish it to be as widely known as possible. *Mrs.* Gaskell is not home yet, —or just arriving. I sent to *Mr.* G. the long letter I wrote to her about the book; and he reported it to her, but kept the sheet, as she was to return so soon, and he feared its being lost, in the doubt whether she was going to Venice or not. He at once and spontaneously undertakes that, in the next edition, justice should be done to me in the only point in which I have to remonstrate *with Mrs. G.* It has clearly slipped her memory (*you* remember, no doubt, C.B.'s letter about smiting the cheek,—"the tears may spring, but never mind! there is the other &c") that C.B. sent me the strongest possible adjuration to *tell her the worst I thought of that particular book,*—"Villette," which was announced as on its way. But for this, I should not have written a word of criticism. *Mr.* Atkinson says *Mrs* G. ought also to have given the terms of the criticism. They were [apparently a quotation from the letter Harriet wrote to Charlotte about *Villette*] "In plain terms I do not like the love,—either the kind or the degree of it; and it seems to disclose something of what your early reviewers had in view in those criticisms which you begged me to explain to you". Now,—she knowing what I felt of the passion part of her novels, and having adjured me as she did, should not certainly have taken offence at this. (She only said she "could not come *at present:*" and *Mrs* G. should have told the whole of my ground of action, if any.) Would you like to see the "D. News" notice of Villette? Nothing *can* be more gentle. She evidently forgot it; Mess*rs* E. & Smith (publisher) promise to set it right. Unfortunately, *Mr* Smith's people accidently omitted to send me a copy, as intended; and I was thus rendered too late for the 2*d* edition,—for which *Mr* S. is heartily sorry. I have two now.—I have more to say, however, I grieve to say,—and no one *could* be more surprised than I am,—that there is scarcely a representation of C.B's that I am qualified to check that is true. From the absurd hours she makes me keep to the very serious hallucination about my being "deserted," "abandoned" by my friends &c,—even to her answering for my feelings in

circumstances which never existed,—all is more or less false. [In fact, Harriet herself had described her daily routine almost exactly as Charlotte pictured it—with a half hour's difference in time at one or two places, and she had been met by hostile reactions to her atheistic ideas in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development.*] Nothing ever passed about my being "despotic" (which you ask about.) [Harriet goes on to accuse Charlotte of misrepresenting the attempt to mesmerize her, and says that Charlotte urged her to publish Mr. Atkinson's atheistic letters.]

Moreover, C.B. told us, at Rich*d* M's [the cousin's home where Charlotte first met Harriet], that she had never been a governess, except for a short 3 months at Brussels, for a particular purpose, "O no;" she said; "the governess' life is not my own (in Jane Eyre.) I never was a governess,—except at Brussels for a few weeks." I dare say I have told 50 people this on her authority; and so have the Rich*d* Ms, I don't doubt. But, far worse than all those things is her treachery to the Hégers. I always abhorred the act of exposing them to ruin by her disclosures in "Villette"; and it was not difficult to understand the hatred with which she was regarded by the lady, (living at Brussels) from whom my nieces heard of the ruin of the school and of the Hégers: but I did not know before how they had received C.B. into their home and daily life, nor from that domestication, *how* foul a treachery M*me* H, even more than her husband, has to endure. M*rs* Gaskell seems to think all is done and settled when she *accounts for* the faults of C.B. and her sisters. None of us doubt the unfortunate character of her training, nor wonder at her being faulty,—but rather that she should be no worse: but it makes this difference,—that I, for one, should have evaded, instead of meeting her advances if I could have dreamed what the facts of the Héger story were, and so on. We can make every allowance for her, I am sure; but not the less are we obliged to wish that she had a little less piety and a good deal more common morality. While I saw and heard things when with her, which jarred on my feelings and disturbed my admiration of her, I never in the least distrusted her truthfulness: and I find it difficult *now* to admit a new impression,—with the facts before my eyes. But there is no sort of doubt about the case. —But O! what a beautiful book it is! M*rs* G's part is most charmingly done, I think,—allowance being made for sentiment now and then swamping conviction &c.. I think my letter must gratify her on the whole,—I admire the book,—the doing of it,—so much! If not, I shall make myself easy,—well knowing the lady, and having been consulted and concerned in it. —She came over on purpose, you know, to consult with me, and see and hear what I could give her. She covered us all with kisses and wept when she went away, and asked, as the greatest favour, that she might write occasionally, to tell me how she went on. She never wrote a line, nor even sent me a copy! . . . As far as I have yet heard, everybody finds it profoundly sad, extremely interesting, beautifully done,—but C.B's conduct to the Hégers quite insuperable, and no other faults at all surprising after *that*.[17]

This was not quite the end of Harriet's differences with Mrs. Gaskell and the deceased Charlotte Brontë. In August 1857, Mrs. Gaskell published a third, "corrected" edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in which she cut out passages which had most severely offended the people referred to, and added footnotes to some of Charlotte's statements about Harriet which contained denials by Harriet of Charlotte's facts. This, in turn, led to an acrimonious exchange of letters between Harriet and Charlotte's father and husband, who took issue with Harriet's complaint of Charlotte's untruthfulness.[18] There was no satisfactory conclusion to this exchange. And Harriet was to have the last word in the quarrel in public. In an article called "The Governess and Her Health," one of a series directed towards a popular audience and published in the magazine *Once a Week* in 1860, Harriet cautions prospective governesses that they must be tough, to deal with the adults they will work for, and that psychological deprivation is the worst of the many evils they can expect to endure. But she expresses her sympathy for governesses over the current portrayal of them in fiction, as by the Brontës, which she warns will make comfortable relations with their employers impossible.

What, finally, can be said in extenuation of Harriet's abrupt change of heart towards the novels of her young friend? Harriet Martineau was a radical reformer who followed utilitarian principles,

17 (To Snow) "HM to FW," pp. 250-54.

18 The Reverend Patrick Brontë to Harriet Martineau, 5 November 1857; Harriet Martineau to the Reverend Patrick Brontë, 5, 13 November 1857; Harriet Martineau to Arthur Bell Nicholls, [7 or 8]-15 November 1857; MS University of Birmingham.

and devoted much of her long career as a writer to the instruction and enlightenment of the masses—which she looked upon as a writer's duty. Charlotte, on the other hand, was dedicated to self-fulfilling artistic expression. Aside from a hornet's nest of psychological complications, it can be said simply that Harriet objected to Charlotte's interpretation of experience as a faulty one: *Villette* was too sad, and all of Charlotte's novels were faulty because they showed women living for only one passion—love. In a late preface to her novel *The Professor,* Charlotte partially states her organic fictional principles, that her hero should "work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs . . . [and that he should] drain throughout life a *mixed* and *moderate* cup of enjoyment" (italics mine). Thus she refused to write a happy ending to *Villette* to please her publisher (though she left the final tragedy ambivalent to satisfy her father), and to Harriet, who condemned the love interest in the book, she answered, "I know what love is as I understand it: and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then there is nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth, as I comprehend rectitude, nobleness, fidelity, truth and disinterestedness—Yours sincerely—to differ from you gives me keen pain."[19]

Harriet Martineau and others like her were the moral mentors of the Victorian age. Romantic artists like Charlotte Brontë, who cared about the moral judgment of contemporaries, were caught between the limitations of such a society and their own artistic impulses. It was not an age calculated to produce great works of art, and the determination—and to a degree—success of the great Victorian writers to maintain their artistic autonomy is all the more admirable for the milieu in which they found themselves. Sympathetic patronage could be more deadly than proscription, and the tiny and unsophisticated woman from the Yorkshire moors was one of its victims.

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[19] February 1853: Gérin, p. 522.