

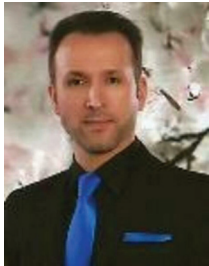
This book tries to find answers to the questions such as how Charlotte Brontë evaluated capitalism and feminism in her novel, *Shirley* (1849), whether she dealt with them in accordance to the characteristics of the 19th century Victorian Era or not, on which parameters she criticized capitalism and why she turned to feminism. As for the method the novel, *Shirley* is resolved on the basis of Marx's dialectic approach consisting of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.



Dr. Halit Alkan

# Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* A Dialectic Solution

Capitalist and feminist problematic



Halit Alkan completed his primary and secondary education in Germany. He got his BA at Ankara University, MA at Firat University and PhD at Ankara University, all in the field of English Language and Literature. He works at Mardin Artuklu University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature.



Dr. Halit Alkan



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\* This book is produced from the author's master's thesis titled *The Dialectic Solution of Capitalist and Feminist Problematic in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley* which was approved by Institute of Social Sciences at Firat University in 2011.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
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### CHAPTER I

#### 1. CAPITALISM AND FEMINISM AS A HISTORICAL CASE

1.1. The Industrial Revolution in England.....	12
1.1.1. The Causes of the Industrial Revolution.....	13
1.1.2. Industrial Changes.....	16
1.1.3. Social Changes.....	19
1.1.4. Capitalism and Class Conflict.....	28
1.2. The Awakening of Women, and Feminism as a Rising Value .....	31
1.2.1. The Emergence of Feminism .....	31
1.2.2. Feminism in England .....	33
1.2.3. Feminism in Literature.....	41

### CHAPTER II

#### 2. THE NOVEL *SHIRLEY* AS A DIALECTIC SOLUTION OF CAPITALIST AND FEMINIST PROBLEMATIC

2.1. Karl Marx's Dialectic Solution of the Problem Moved from the Reality of Life into the World of Fiction .....	46
2.2. An Extreme Type as a Representative of Bourgeois Capitalist Class: Robert ....	59
2.3. An Extreme Type as a Representative of Feminism: Shirley .....	66
2.4. As Representatives of Flat Characters: Caroline and Louis .....	72
2.4.1. Caroline.....	73
2.4.2. Louis .....	78
2.5. The Final Phase of the Dialectic: Synthesis and the Ideal End.....	80
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>92</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Era symbolized by the reign of Queen Victoria marks the height of the British Industrial Revolution and feminism.<sup>1</sup> The Industrial Revolution was very important because it brought forth changes in industry and caused major technological, socio-economic and cultural changes in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women did not have the right to vote and could not claim any properties. During the Industrial Revolution, however, women reacted against these socio-economic inequalities. The impact of the Industrial Revolution on people and the significant socio-economic and political changes in women's lives were reflected in the world of literature.

Barnard stated that works of prose, today known as novels, appeared in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> A novel can be described as a story about certain characters living in a certain society. The novel proper was born when people demanded stories about people similar to themselves in a society recognizably akin to their own.

According to Kettle, the term "novel" is a realistic prose fiction which is both complete in itself and of a certain length. The novel is not only more than the exploration of one particular but also more than an anecdote.<sup>3</sup> The English novel was created by authors of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The authors wrote the novel sometimes according to allegorical tradition of the moral fable and sometimes according to the non-moral approach of the picaresque tradition. The authors attempted to bring the two traditions together so that both realism and significance were achieved, and life and pattern were equated. As the industrial capitalists were in the ascendancy, the world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was less amicable to art of any kind than the 18<sup>th</sup> century world. The task of the novelists was to achieve realism through expressing the truth about life as it faced them. Becoming a rebel was necessary in order to cut through the complex structure of inhumanity and false feeling which ate into consciousness of the capitalist world.

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<sup>1</sup> Demirkapu, N. E., *The Themes of the Female Malady and the Female Creativity in the Fiction of Charlotte Brontë: Shirley and Villette*, (İstanbul Üniversitesi Sos.Bil.Ens.Yüksek Lisans Tezi), İstanbul, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Barnard, R., *A Short History of English Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Kettle, A., *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Hutchinson, London, 1976, p. 26.

## CHAPTER I

### 1. CAPITALISM AND FEMINISM AS A HISTORICAL CASE

#### 1.1. The Industrial Revolution in England

In a million years' occupation of this planet, the human race has only taken two important steps forward in the material field. Firstly, about ten thousand years ago agriculture was pioneered in the Middle East. Secondly, during the time of Queen Anne and beyond, Industrial Revolution had its origins deep in the history of Western Europe. Gras stated that between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there occurred but one great break in the evolutionary development in the whole recorded part of industrial history and that break is known as the Industrial Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

The phrase "Industrial Revolution" is known by people but its definition can not be made easily. However, it is defined in three different ways by historians. Firstly, between the later 18<sup>th</sup> century and the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians consider it to be the rapid growth of certain sectors of manufacturing industry especially iron and cotton. This definition is connected with the use of steam power and the growth of factories. Secondly, between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians consider it to be the structural shift in the economy. This definition is connected with the change from agriculture to mining and manufacturing. Finally, historians consider it to cause a break out in the entire economy. This definition is connected with the change from intermittently growth in national income into a continuous advance in national income. Therefore, the Industrial Revolution of England can be defined as economic growth.

The phrase "Industrial Revolution" was coined by French writers under the spell of their own political ferment during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx seized this phrase, and Arnold Toynbee used it as the title of his pioneer work. Thanks to Arnold Toynbee's work *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution of the*

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<sup>13</sup> Gras, N.S.B., *Industrial Evolution*, Oxford University Press, London, 1930, p. 90. Quoted by R. M. Hartwell, *The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth*, Methuen, London, 1972, pp. 50-1.

## CHAPTER II

### 2. THE NOVEL *SHIRLEY* AS A DIALECTIC SOLUTION OF CAPITALIST AND FEMINIST PROBLEMATIC

#### 2.1. Karl Marx's Dialectic Solution of the Problem Moved from the Reality of Life into the World of Fiction

During the Industrial Revolution, England experienced a shift of the way of life from the ownership of land to a modern urban economy which was based on trade and manufacture. According to Rogers, the inventions by Watt, by Arkwright and by Cartwright led to gain in labour in the long run.<sup>81</sup> However, profound suffering accompanied the process preceding the gain. The first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were considered to be the worst time in the whole history of English labour.

Peterson stated that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the era when men and women had separate spheres in the social hierarchy, and therefore, women were considered to be the angel in the house.<sup>82</sup> Women stayed at home and were busy with child-bearing, cleaning and cooking. However, women found the opportunity to work in factories when England became industrialised due to the Industrial Revolution. Women became aware of their rights and sought for freedom and equality in a male-dominated world.

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of England were very important in the aspects of feminism and capitalism which were the social reality of the periods. Capitalism improved depending on the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution brought forth technological changes in industry, and therefore, factory system replaced domestic system. The factory system required more capital, and thus, capitalism grew stronger which led to social classes. On the one hand, there were factory owners who turned out to be capitalists and wanted to get more profit from productions. On the other hand, there was the working class who worked for low wages and had to suffer

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<sup>81</sup> Rogers, T., *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1909, p. 485. Quoted by R. M. Hartwell, *The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth*, Methuen, London, 1972, p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> Peterson, M. J., "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89. No. 3. (Jun. 1984), p. 678.

## CONCLUSION

T. Eagleton states that the novel *Shirley* deals with binary oppositions such as bourgeois rationalism and romantic conservatism, masculine and feminine and rebellion and conformity.<sup>120</sup> There is the tension between romance and realism in the novel. While romance stands for the passionate self's free and eloquent expression, realism represents calculative realism and the analytic adequation of means to end in the name of worldly progress. The novel assumes its place within the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of radical conservatism, upbraiding rationalistic capitalism in the name of individualistic verve and fades chivalric virtue. There is a balance between romantic panache and realistic prudence.

When Brontë herself, the style of her upbringing, the sources affecting her and all the contents of the novel *Shirley* are taken into consideration, the following observations can be made in terms of the author's style, perception, thought, tradition, and attitude in the novel *Shirley*: Brontë is a romantic author in terms of tradition and style. However, she disguises herself in a realist character in terms of the themes and her dealing with these issues in this novel. The author was not indifferent to current issues of her period such as capitalism, feminism, employee-employer struggle, industrialization and mechanization. Thus, in *Shirley*, Brontë not only dealt with these issues but also struggled to bring a solution to them based on the approach of socialist realism. In this sense, her applying of Marx's dialectic is the best example of this realism. However, it can be easily said that the author's romantic side shows again itself in the ideal end which is the phase of the solution of the climax. At this point, the author has shown her inner idealistic-romantic intention and tendency through assuming realistic and romantic attitudes and getting the heroes to do "what should be" and not "what it is".

Singh expressed that in the real history of England in 1812, William Cartwright replaced the workers with the latest machinery for the dressing of woollen cloth in his mill. The unemployed, discontented and hungry proletariat organised in a

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<sup>120</sup> Eagleton, T., *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Macmillan, Hampshire, 1988, p. XIV.

group under the leadership of Ned Ludd.<sup>121</sup> The Luddites opposed with violence the introduction of the machinery into the mill because of the dreadful conditions of the factories, unemployment and starvation. Although the rioters outnumbered by hundreds those besieged in the mill, William Cartwright himself with some soldiers defeated them. Charlotte Brontë is born four years later after the riots in 1811 and 1812. Hanson stated that Brontë was fascinated by seeing deserted mills and gory battleground where desperate men fought and bled.<sup>122</sup> As Charlotte Brontë did not forget what she had seen and imagined, the pictures in her mind remained until 1849 when she brought them to life in her novel *Shirley*. At the beginning of the novel, as the author has promised its readers “something real, cool, and solid,” the novel *Shirley* gives us social and economic realities of that period.

In *Shirley*, there are social and private themes. The social theme is the Luddite rioting in 1811 and 1812, and the private theme is the two love stories at the centre of the book. Gregor writes that Charlotte Brontë displays a social portraiture such as Orders in Council, the Luddites and technological unemployment which occurred in 1811 and 1812.<sup>123</sup> In *Shirley*, it is told about the workers’ movement in England and the adverse effects of the Napoleonic Wars on it.<sup>124</sup>

In the novel *Shirley*, while Robert Moore represents the bourgeois capitalist class as the thesis of capitalism, the working class stands for the proletariat as antithesis of capitalism. Therefore, there is a conflict between capitalists and proletariat. Robert Moore who operates a mill is on the verge of bankruptcy because of the Orders in Council. In order to make more profit, he cuts the wages of workers and even wants to replace some workers with machinery. He is waiting for the machinery to arrive but he gets the news that the unemployed workers have smashed the machines because they accuse the machines of their unemployment. Robert who is only interested in his own profit takes this incident as a challenge. Twelve unemployed workers together with their leader named Barroclough come to Robert in

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<sup>121</sup> Singh, S.N., *Charlotte Brontë: A Thematic Study of Her Novels*, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1987, p. 82.

<sup>122</sup> Hanson, E.M. and L., *The Four Brontës: The Lives and Works of Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne Brontë*, Oxford University Press, London, 1950, p. 28

<sup>123</sup> Gregor, I., *The Brontës*, PHI, Hertfordshire, 1986, p. 101.

<sup>124</sup> Knapp, B.L., *The Brontës: Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte*, Frederick Ungar Book, New York, 1991, p. 164.

order to find a solution for their unemployment. They ask Robert to employ more workers instead of installing the machinery in the mill. When Robert refuses their offer, he is threatened by the workers.

The event about the riots attack on Robert's mill is derived from history of England. Due to the Industrial Revolution, the workmen were the first to suffer in an age of transition. Their suffering was augmented when the new capitalists, who made use of the great mechanical inventions of the times, were motivated by profit-making rather than public-welfare. Similarly, in the novel *Shirley*, Robert installs the mill with machines and causes unemployment for the poor working class. The Luddites join together and attack Robert Moore's mill in order to fight against the machines which threatened their livelihoods and their very lives. Robert defends his mill against the rioters. He is the embodiment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mercantile mind which is characterized by selfishness and self-centeredness. Although Robert is in love with his cousin Caroline Helstone, he makes a proposal of marriage to Shirley Keeldar because Caroline is penniless but Shirley is very rich. Robert wants to marry Shirley in order to continue his business with her money. Towards the end of the novel, Robert is shot by an unemployed weaver, and thus, he is humbled to backbone. After hearing this event, Caroline visits him and cures him with her love. With the repeal of the Orders in Council, Robert's business recovers. The balance between capitalists and proletariat is provided when Robert decides to help the unemployed workers.

The Victorian Era was the period when men considered themselves superior to women. Women were kept at home and considered to be the angel in the house. They were kept busy with child-bearing, child-rearing and house works. Women were considered to be the commodity of their husbands. Women did not have any rights over their property, their earnings and their children. The male-dominated society represents the thesis in terms of the status of women. Shirley Keeldar is a rich girl who is a landowner. She considers herself to be equal to men. Shirley who advocates feminism stands for the antithesis in the male-dominated society.

Shirley Keeldar bears a male name and is economically and socially independent. In the novel, when a curate calls Yorkshire a wretched place, Shirley

throws him out of her house. At the school feat, she makes Robert say goodbye to Caroline and herself. When Shirley is left in charge at the rectory, she gets a pair of pistol. When the Luddites pass by, she goes out to the garden. Furthermore, in order to warn Robert against the attack, Shirley brings Caroline over the fields. When they are too late, she organizes supplies for the wounded. When Shirley is bitten by the mad dog, she cauterises the wound with an iron and tells no one of her fears until Louis persuades her to tell it to him. When Shirley rejects the proposal of Sir Philip Nunnely, she has a painful dialogue with her relative Mr. Sympson. At the end, Shirley accepts the proposal by Louis and ceases to govern Fieldhead so that Louis can learn to rule.

Caroline is a typical character among many in a realistic picture of society. She does not know her mother, and after her father's death, she lives with her antifeminist uncle Mr. Helstone. She is a woman of meek and submissive nature and believes in constantly loving her lover Robert Moore who once loved her but seems to have forgotten her. Caroline wants to be a governess but her idea is refused by her uncle. When Caroline sees Shirley and Robert together walking and talking, she thinks that they will marry. Caroline gets paler and thinks that she will become an old maid. Thus, when she gets too ill, she is cured by Mrs. Pryor who reveals that she is her mother. Caroline's love remains unrequited till Robert is humbled to the backbone and needs her love which strengthens his injured person. Caroline gets a proposal from Robert when his trade recovers with the repeal of the Orders of Council.

Louis Moore is Robert Moore's brother. Louis is a teacher. According to Wilson, Louis's mildness, his preference for solitude and his love of animals underline his feminine disposition.<sup>125</sup> Louis was once the tutor of Shirley Keeldar but now he is the teacher of Shirley's cousin Henry Sympson. Louis represents the male domination. He is in love with Shirley but he is so proud that he does not reveal his love to her because of the difference between his poverty and her richness. Louis tells Shirley that he is Adam's son, and thus, men are superior to women and the power of

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<sup>125</sup> Wilson, F.A.C., "The Primrose Wreath: The Heroines of the Brontë Novels", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jun. 1974), p. 48.

creation is given to men. Louis's toughness of will and Shirley's acceptance of the restraints of the pupil-teacher relationship enable him to manage his pantheress. Shirley is the aggressive partner but her keenly felt insecurity and his stable self-sufficiency operate to preserve the balance. Louis's courtship to Shirley denies her the right to speak. Louis says that he will teach her his language and his principles. The love between Shirley and Louis is a battle characterized by the domination of Louis and the submission of Shirley. Louis attempts to win and possess Shirley. Thus, their relationship turns out to be that of master and slave. Louis says that he will tame her, teach her and practise his power over her. In this sense, while Shirley becomes Louis's lioness and leopardess, Louis becomes her captor. When Shirley accepts Louis's proposal of marriage, she becomes submissive, passive and slave. At the end of the novel, Robert Moore marries Caroline Helstone, and Shirley Keeldar gets married to Louis Moore. Shirley stands for those few women who exercise their individuality and keep their identity as wives and who desire to be ruled, governed and loved by their rigid husbands. Shirley and Louis make a revolutionary pair. Although the lovers Robert and Caroline are conventional, the very treatment is untraditional.

P. Bumelha expresses that in the novel *Shirley* there are polarised masculine and feminine worlds. There are also oppositions such as head versus heart, and realism versus rhapsody.<sup>126</sup> As for the relationship between public and private themes in *Shirley*, Robert's all-consuming desire to succeed in business and save his family's fortune and honour are the responsibilities which keep Robert from Caroline. At this point, Charlotte Brontë criticizes selfish individual, the man who substitutes materialistic for human values. With the repeal of the Orders in Council, the industrial conflict dissolves, and the workers are imagined enjoying Robert Moore's industrial utopia which is built on Louis Moore's benevolent estate. The workers are silenced by Robert's gift of tongues.

At the beginning of the novel, Robert does not care when the workers become unemployed due to the installation of machines in his mill. However, at the end, he is

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<sup>126</sup> Boumelha, P., *Key Women Writers: Charlotte Brontë*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1990, p. 82.

as anxious to double the value of his property as to bring advantage to the community. Shirley's refusal of Robert's proposal and his long illness in which Caroline appears at his bedside to comfort him helps along in his affection for Caroline. Caroline wins Robert in the end because she is a model of the Victorian maiden. The author points to a better society modelled on individual change and tries to connect the end of the war to an eradication of individual selfishness. The resolution of the class conflict can be achieved in the turbulent conditions of contemporary England.

To M. Wheeler, Charlotte Brontë expresses the characteristic romantic yearning for unity which for her can not be achieved within the constraints of a world shaped by men.<sup>127</sup> The novel *Shirley* has a double happy end involving the main characters and society, and the private and the public themes. There is a tension between a female independence of action and a feminine dependence in love relationships. The novel ends with unities through marriage. At the end, while Shirley is more feminine, Caroline is less timid.

S. Zlotnick states that the author's attempt to envision the liberation of women through industrial capitalism is subverted by patriarchal structure and expectations.<sup>128</sup> Despite her rejection of Sir Philip, Shirley gradually turns into a conventional object of desire in her relationship with Louis. Despite having the potential within herself, Shirley who is ignorant and reckless feels the need to be both mastered and checked by a man in order to secure her existence in society.

T. Dolin expresses that in accordance with conventional courtship romance, Shirley and Caroline win husbands in the end. However, they both convince themselves that the unmarried woman is somebody but the married one is nobody.<sup>129</sup> Marriages of Shirley and Caroline suggest the loss of feminine power and put women in men's shadow. They are put under male dominance and power which rob them of their voices, names and individualities. Women are rendered mute and abject through their own internalized subjection to male norms of femininity. Charlotte Brontë is

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<sup>127</sup> Wheeler, M., *English Fiction of the Victorian Period 1830-1890*, Longman, London, 1994, p. 63.

<sup>128</sup> Zlotnick, S., *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998, p. 88.

<sup>129</sup> Dolin, T., *Mistress of the House: Women of Property in the Victorian Novel*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1997, p. 18.

unable to change the literary conventions established by the male writers because she is imprisoned within the boundaries of society that prevents her from using her female creativity. Furthermore, it is the woman's fear of society that constitutes the biggest hindrance.

Charlotte Brontë does not attempt to change society radically. She hopes to make society more fair and more understanding towards women. She also hopes to make it easier for women to engage in serious work alongside men on the basis of equality with men. Class conflict seems tamed like Shirley for the present. However, just as Shirley is not turned thereby into a domestic cat but into a pantheress gnawing at her chain, the solution of class conflict is a sense of subduing by force rather than of voluntary subjection.

According to Ermarth, a unity in human experience is implied by the genial consensus of realistic narration because the same meanings are available to everybody who inhabits the same world.<sup>130</sup> Disagreement is only the result of accident of position. Therefore, realistic conventions confirm the uniformity at the base of human experience and the solidarity of human nature. As the individual point of view is derived from the same world, failure in communications can be overcome, problems can be solved and tragedies can be averted.

In the novel *Shirley*, the author shows that people can change, and this means that society's values can also change. Charlotte Brontë's greatest contribution to the Victorian thought is that love is the most important condition and consequence for a marriage; however, for a successful marriage both partners must be equal in all respects with the addition that the male has to be physically and intellectually superior to the female in order to protect and guide women's destiny. In *Shirley*, Brontë bravely tries to apply the romantic myth to the world of social realities. The marriages of the two heroines to the Moore brothers, the economic triumph of Robert Moore and the victory of Louis Moore over social prejudice are all the vindications of romantic standards.

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<sup>130</sup> Ermarth, E.D., *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983, p. 65.

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