

『教授』試論 — 語り手クリムズワスを考える —

杉村 藍

Retelling His Story: A Study on the Narrator William Crimsworth

Ai SUGIMURA

Introduction

The repeated rejection of Charlotte Brontë's first novel, *The Professor* (1857), suggests that it has various problems in comparison with her other novels, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853). Despite making several attempts, she failed to find a publisher for the novel during her lifetime, having been refused nine times in total.¹ Even after the huge success of her second novel, *Jane Eyre*, Brontë's achievements as an author and tenacious negotiations could not persuade her publisher, Smith, Elder, to accept the earlier work. It was finally released two years after her death, thanks to the interest in her life generated by the immensely popular *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), by her friend and fellow writer Elizabeth Gaskell. However, even Gaskell expressed that she considered it 'inferior to all her [Brontë's] published works—but I think it a very curious link in her literary history'.²

What makes *The Professor* 'inferior' to Brontë's other novels and prevented its acceptance after the author's death? Is it mere clumsiness inevitable to early creative efforts? Brontë herself denied this by claiming 'the pen which wrote it [*The Professor*] had been previously worn a good deal in a practice of some years'.³ By focusing on William Crimsworth's style of narration, this paper examines the reasons for *The Professor*'s repeated rejection.

I. Analysis by Charlotte Brontë

Shortly after the release of her third novel, *Shirley* (1849), Brontë wrote a 'Preface' to *The Professor*, still with a view to its publication.⁴ In it, she addresses why the book had been unable to find a publisher.

I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs—that he should never get a shilling he had not earned—that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station—that whatever small competency he might gain should be won by the sweat of his brow—that before he could find so much as an arbour to sit down in—he should master at least half the ascent of the hill of Difficulty—that he should not even marry a beautiful nor a rich wife, nor a lady of rank. . . .

In the sequel, however, I found that publishers, in general—scarcely approved this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical—something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a native taste for pathos—with sentiments more tender—elevated—unworldly. . . .⁵

The 'Preface' shows that Brontë attributed the rejection of her first novel to publishers' preferences for striking and exciting novels, rather than a story about a realistic and ordinary man.

In Britain of the 1840s, the romance of 'high life' was going out of fashion, while the stories of self-made men were coming into vogue. Heather Glen guesses that Brontë would have been familiar with this literary trend, as would publishers.⁶ If so, her speculation in the 'Preface' cannot explain the true reason for her failure in finding a publisher for *The Professor*. If she was aware of this trend, why would she have speculated as she did? Other texts may offer some more clues.

In her letters to publishers, Brontë seemed concerned with the publication format of novels, which at that time were commonly divided into three volumes, for which *The Professor* was too short. Instead, she contrived to bind her novel with her sisters', that is, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847). A letter to Henry Colburn, one of the day's most prominent publishers of fiction, testifies to her interest in publication format:

I request permission to send for your inspection the M.S. of a work of fiction in 3 vols. It consists of three tales, each occupying a volume and capable of being published together or separately, as thought most advisable. . . .

Should you consent to examine the work, would you, in your reply, state at what period after transmission of the M.S. to you, the authors may expect to receive your decision upon its merits—⁷

It is interesting that in this letter, Brontë discusses the style of publication, but not the nature or plot of the three novels. For her, the length of the manuscripts seems to be sufficient information on which to judge whether or not they qualify for examination. This could suggest that the primary issue was not the content of *The Professor* but its form, at least as she saw it at the time. She expresses a similar concern for format in her letters to other publishers as well.⁸

It is true that the short length was one reason for refusal, but not the only one.⁹ In the process of attempting to revise *The Professor*, Smith and Rosengarten presume that Brontë realised the difficulty of the endeavour and gave up. This is suggested by its unfinished opening fragment. Smith and Rosengarten write:

. . . no matter how she changed the opening, the bulk of the work would be essentially the same as that already decisively rejected by her publisher, even were she able to

spin it out to the three-volume length she had proposed for herself.¹⁰

If their supposition is true, Brontë herself seemed to be aware of the limits of her first novel. At the ninth rejection by her publisher, she despaired of the book once and for all, and never again tried to rewrite the manuscript to meet publishing trends.

II. Analysis by Contemporary Critics

Upon the appearance of *The Professor* as a posthumous novel, critics had similar reactions as Gaskell. Their main interest seems to have lain in tracing the literary roots of Brontë's works, and found no specific feature to the newly published work.

That the work before us will be read and discussed by all who have read the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* is certain enough, but the interest excited will be rather curious than deep, and the impression left on the reader one of pain and incompleteness. It is a mere study for *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley*, —certainly displaying effects of the same force, the same characteristic keenness of perception, the same rough, bold, coarse truthfulness of expression, the same compressed style...¹¹

The majority of contemporary critics read *The Professor* in relation to her later novels, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*, and viewed certain characters and incidents as prototypes of those in later works. In contrast to later protagonists and narrators, Crimsworth made little impression on their minds. One of them wrote, 'In the earlier tale the Professor tells the story; he is himself rather commonplace, and the interest is centred in... Mademoiselle [Frances] Henri'.¹²

For contemporary critics, familiar with Brontë's successful female narrators Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, whose passionate and agonised narration conveyed their emotion directly to readers' hearts, the flat male narrator, Crimsworth, appeared too simple and insipid, unable to garner a strong emotional response. More modern critics also found Crimsworth ineffective as a narrator: Glen argues that more recent, influential critics attribute the novel's 'flaws' to the difficulties Brontë found in writing in the voice of a male narrator.¹³

However, we should note that Brontë was accustomed to using male narrators, as Charles Wellesley (later Charles Townshend) is often the narrator in her enormous amount of juvenilia, and long served as her mouthpiece. This being the case, the use of a male narrator does not seem to fully explain why publishers did not accept *The Professor*.

III. Other Possible Reasons for Rejection

Other than its mode, style and the adoption of a male narrator, what forced the novel to be rejected? This question would not only have been relevant to Victorian British readers, but remains so for us modern readers seeking to understand the novel's characteristics. Its rejection does not necessarily indicate a mismatch between the novel and trends of the time, but could also suggest fundamental problems with the novel as a work of art. Among these

problems, I think the great influence of Crimsworth's narration on the work as a whole, considering his status as narrator and protagonist, is problematic. Below, we will discuss related reasons for which *The Professor* may have been rejected.

i) Crimsworth as a Self-Made Man

As shown by the 'Preface', Brontë aimed to depict a hero who 'work[s] his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs', an intention in line with the trends of 1840s Britain. Neville F. Newman, however, criticises Brontë's recognition of the working class, as it never goes beyond a general and cursory understanding.

It comes as something as a surprise, . . . to discover that her 'hero' William Crimsworth is an Eton-educated scholar steeped in the classics who chooses to make his living by teaching in a continental private school for girls. . . . Charlotte Brontë's assertion, then, blurs the nature of Crimsworth's efforts. The sweat which he is expected to expend is, in his case, metaphorical at best.¹⁴

As Newman points out, it is difficult to recognise Crimsworth as representative of the working class. He appears as a clerk at the counting-house of his brother's mill, but only for three months. Moreover, his task is to translate commercial letters from English to French and German, and vice versa. This is not the sort of physical or menial labour suggested in the 'Preface', but intellectual labour. Thus, what Brontë emphasises in the 'Preface' does not align with the image she actually depicts.

Furthermore, the principles imposed on him by the 'Preface' are often betrayed. While requiring that 'whatever small competency he might gain should be won by the sweat of his brow', the changes in his life are often brought upon by someone else, or by the 'sudden turns' Brontë claims to have forbidden him. For example, when he quits his job at his brother's mill, it is York Hunsden who 'interfere[s] so actively between me [Crimsworth] and Edward [his brother]' and it is to him that Crimsworth 'owed my welcome dismissal' (p. 47). In contrast to the declaration in the 'Preface', Crimsworth is satisfied with the results the former has brought about, without exerting any effort to change the situation at the counting-house himself:

A load was lifted off my heart, I felt light and liberated. I had got away from Bigben Close [where his brother's mill was located] without a breach of resolution; without injury to my self-respect: I had not forced Circumstances, Circumstances had freed me. . . (pp. 45-6)

His dismissal from the mill offers him the chance to travel to Belgium, the novel's primary setting. However, at this turning point in his life, Crimsworth ascribes his dismissal to 'Circumstances', and is relieved that he could avoid censure for failing in his original intention to become a tradesman. He just accepts the change and leaves for Brussels. Furthermore, it is not him, but Hunsden, who recommends where to go, and he even writes

Crimsworth a letter of introduction. When Crimsworth seeks employment after quitting Pelet's boys' school, the same process repeats itself, though this time, in place of Hunsden, it is the 'rich, respected, and influential' (p. 210) M. Vandenhuten who provides assistance. When he succeeds in being appointed English teacher at a private college, he expresses the sentiment that 'Fortune' threw a prize into his lap (p. 197). Again, this image differs greatly from what Brontë declares in the 'Preface'.

These inconsistencies between the 'Preface' and the novel may be the result of the time between their compositions, as well as between the repeated revisions. However, even taking these possibilities into consideration, it is difficult to bridge the gap between the intentions of the 'Preface' and what is actually written.

ii) Crimsworth as a Narrator

Another inconsistency can be found in Crimsworth's narration. As I mentioned above, Glen points out that some critics have ascribed the 'flaws' of Brontë's first major work to its narration, claiming she had difficulty relating experiences in a male voice. Henceforth, we will focus our examination on how Crimsworth's narration affects the narrative as a whole.

One difficulty with Crimsworth's narration is that he is often disingenuous. In the opening of the novel, while he describes his friend at Eton, he refrains from depicting himself, saying 'my own portrait I will not attempt to draw' (p. 39). His remark suggests that what should be told and what should not is a decision left solely to him. Accordingly, his tendency to withhold certain information is demonstrated not only by his narration, but also by certain episodes in his life. When discussing his mother's portrait with Hunsden, 'I [Crimsworth] agreed with him, but did not say so' (p. 58). His reluctance to share his opinion reveals that even though he feels, thinks, and knows something, he does not always convey these things to the other characters, to say nothing of us readers: what he narrates in the novel is not everything he has to tell.

Thus, he has the qualities of an 'unreliable' narrator. When he discovers that Zoraïde Reuter, to whom he is attracted, is secretly engaged to his employer M. Pelet, he insists as follows:

Of course her defection had cut me to the quick? That sting must have gone too deep for any Consolations of Philosophy to be available in curing its smart? Not at all. The night-fever over—I looked about for balm to that wound also, and found some nearer home than at Gilead. Reason was my physician; she began by proving that the prize I had missed was of little value—she admitted that, physically, Zoraïde might have suited me but affirmed that our souls were not in harmony and that discord must have resulted from the union of her mind with mine; she then insisted on the suppression of all repining and commanded me rather to rejoice that I had escaped a snare. Her medicament did me good... (p. 113)

The next morning, he tries to persuade readers to believe his success by reporting that Mlle Reuter's charming smile 'fell on my heart like light on stone' (p. 113). Preceding this

episode, when he teaches his first lesson at the girls' school, he likewise emphasises his self-restraint, insisting that 'Happily I felt in myself, complete power to manage my pupils without aid; the enchantment, the golden haze which had dazzled my perspicacity at first, had been a good deal dissipated' (p. 89). However, in both cases, it is highly doubtful whether a young, unsophisticated man like Crimsworth could overcome his romantic disappointments overnight, or remain composed in front of his young and beautiful students.

As in the case with Mlle Reuter, his involuntary confession betrays his intentions, despite his efforts to present himself as a man of reason. Although he is already attracted to Frances Henri, who was expelled from Mlle Reuter's school, he visits the directress who betrayed him and inquires about the former student's address, admitting that 'temptation penetrated to my senses' (p. 183) when Mlle Reuter invites him to sit down right next to her. Later, even after he has fallen in love with Frances and decided to marry her, news of the marriage of M. Pelet and Mlle Reuter incites him to predict that 'if I stayed [at Pelet's], the probability was that, in three months' time, a practical modern French novel would be in full process of concoction under the roof of the unsuspecting Pelet' (p. 214). The problem is that these affairs do not seem to fall under the 'reality' declared in the 'Preface'. On the contrary, they are inconveniences for his self-presentation as 'a sober, idealistic young man'¹⁵, or self-made man. In reality, he is in love with two women at the same time, though he would never admit it.

IV. Retelling His Story

As mentioned above, what Crimsworth attempts to tell the readers does not always agree with what he actually feels and does. This petty dishonesty is one of the reasons his unreliable narration is a crucial flaw for a novel ostensibly about a self-made man. What, then, is the reason for these discrepancies? In search of this reason, it might be useful to reflect on Crimsworth's background.

Although descended from an aristocratic family on his mother's side, he 'had no fortune and no expectation of any' (p. 6), because his mother had been disowned by her family upon her disparaging marriage to a manufacturer. Furthermore, following his education at Eton, he could not succeed as a clerk in his brother's mill. In contrast, his brother Edward has inherited their father's business and found prosperity as a tradesman and happy bridegroom, after marrying the beautiful daughter of a rich mill-owner. He also possesses a fine stature and handsome features—as an animal, Edward Crimsworth is finer than his younger brother William. Thus, Crimsworth finds himself in a defeated, inferior position socially, financially, and physically.

It is this sense of inferiority that compels him to create, or 'retell' his own story as a successful one. As Sally Shuttleworth argues, Crimsworth 'offers a self-justificatory narrative of his rise from the position of penniless outcast to that of country gentleman with independent means'.¹⁶ His narrative aims to depict his ascent through society, and in that sense, the story is different from a simple record of a self-made man. The history is narrated with the distinct purpose of representing himself as a man of success.

It is true that in the end he secures financial prosperity and comfortably establishes himself and his family in his native county. However, for Crimsworth, economic achievement is not enough to define his life as a success story. In terms of money, York Hunsden, Edward Crimsworth, and M. and Mme Pelet (née Mlle Reuter) are all wealthy. Hunsden, a local gentry, inherited his wealth, having made no effort to obtain it. In Edward's case, he once failed in business, but in the end, thanks to railway speculations, made a magnificent come back and became a rich man. At the end of the novel, M. and Mme Pelet are said to be doing very well financially. However, these financial achievements are separate from Edward's harshness and the Pelets' moral weaknesses. From these specimens, Crimsworth learns that affluence is not enough to prove his prominence over others: in order to present himself as superior, he needs another field in which he can surpass them.

As a result, he seems to emphasise—having been educated in Eton—his intelligence, diligence, and moralistic character. With these characteristics, he attempts to depict his own life achievements as having surpassed others'. As such, *The Professor* is an account told in accordance with the narrator's intentions to recreate his life of failure as that of a winner's.

He uses spying and observation as important methods with which to 'narrate' his story, as it pertains to other people. As Shuttleworth suggests, 'Possession of knowledge, in our narrator's eyes, reverses their material social relation'.¹⁷ By collecting information without notice from others, he can hold sway over them, since knowledge, for him, is power. This is why he often stations himself in positions where he can view his targets, while also avoiding being observed by others.

Just then I turned my face a little to the light; the approach of twilight, and my position in the window-seat, had, for the last ten minutes, prevented him [Hunsden] from studying my countenance; (p. 231)

A similar situation occurs when he takes Hunsden to Frances's apartment: Crimsworth occupies a position from where 'I could see them [Hunsden and Frances] both, and the room too, at a glance' (p. 234), and when he was invited to the table for supper, he pretends to 'be now absorbed in reading by moonlight' (p. 240), though in reality he concentrates on observing their conversation. His precautions to hide his feelings from others, together with his attempts to collect information on them, seem to reflect his motivations. As mentioned above, after choosing which information to gather and share, he reconstructs his own history, at the expense of others.

At the end of the novel, having obtained financial success, he returns to his native county with his obedient wife and their only son, Victor. Shuttleworth criticises his tone as 'smugly self-righteous',¹⁸ but the reality of the situation is not as calm as he wants readers to believe. As his story is not a simple account of a series of facts, but a creation that insists on his superiority, there are some contradictions in his narrative, as shown above. Reflecting these contradictions, various characters with whom Crimsworth has close relationships, such as Hunsden, Frances, and Victor, are depicted as having inexplicable tendencies:

She [Frances] sees, as I also see—a something in Victor's temper, a kind of electrical ardour and power, which emits, now and then, ominous sparks—Hunsden calls it his spirit and says it should not be curbed—I call it the leaven of the offending Adam and consider that it should be if not *whipped* out of him, at least soundly disciplined. . . . (p. 266)

The 'something' in Victor seems to indicate a character trait Crimsworth attempts to eliminate from the narrative, it being out of place in the picture he wants to paint. Terry Eagleton points out the presence of Crimsworth's mirror-image in Hunsden,¹⁹ but this is also true with his wife Frances and their son Victor. The contradictions brought about by the retelling of his life are reflected not only in his story, but also in those of his friend and family.

Conclusion

In this paper, the first-person narrator and protagonist William Crimsworth is brought into focus, and his narrative is regarded as a recreation of his personal history. By distorting the truth of his own life, as well as the lives of the other characters, Crimsworth represents himself as an intellectually and morally superior hero, in reaction against his inferior social status. Meanwhile, reflections of the inconvenient realities he tries to write out of his story seem to be concentrated in other characters, such as Hunsden, Frances, and Victor. His son's name, Victor, is especially symbolic when we recognise Crimsworth's intention to present himself as a man of success. But 'something' inexplicable hidden in his son seems to threaten his victory as a self-made man.

Charlotte Brontë herself investigated the reasons for which her ultimately posthumous novel was rejected by publishing companies, as have contemporary and modern critics. In addition to the problem of its length, the characteristics of the narrator can plausibly be understood as another reason publishers were reluctant to release the book. The self-serving narrator, after all, appears to be at odd with readers' desires for stories of 'self-made men'. Covering up the unpleasant realities of his life is a transaction that often causes inconsistencies in the narrative, and gives the reader the impression that he cannot be trusted. The repeated rejection of *The Professor* is thus, perhaps, a fitting symbol of the impression Crimsworth's retelling of his story had on readers.

Notes

- ¹ Letter to George Smith, 5 Feb. 1851: Smith, Margaret ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë. Volume Two 1848-1851* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 572.
- ² Letter to George Smith, 13 Aug. 1856: Chapple, J. A. V., and Arthur Pollard, eds., *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 403.
- ³ Brontë, Charlotte, *The Professor*, ed. by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 'Preface', p. 5. All quotations from the text of *The Professor* in this paper are cited from this edition.
- ⁴ Brontë, Charlotte, *The Professor*, ed. by Heather Glen, (Penguin Books, 2003), 'Introduction' p. xxiii.
- ⁵ Brontë, 'Preface', pp. 3-4.
- ⁶ Glen, Heather, "Calculated abruptness": *The Professor* in *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 33n1.
- ⁷ Letter to Henry Colburn, 4 July 1846: Smith, Margaret, ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë Volume One 1829-1847* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 481.
- ⁸ Smith and Rosengarten, 'Introduction', pp. xi-xii.
- ⁹ 'Biographical Notice' of 1850 recounts Smith, Elder's response as 'a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention', which *The Professor* was not long enough to satisfy. Brontë, Charlotte, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by David Daiches (Penguin Books, 1993), p. 32.
- ¹⁰ Smith and Rosengarten, 'Introduction', p. xx.
- ¹¹ An unsigned review of *The Professor*; *Athenaeum*, 13 June 1857 in Allott, Miriam, ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 344.
- ¹² Dallas, E. S., an unsigned review, *Blackwood's Magazine*, July 1857 in *The Critical Heritage*, p. 362.
- ¹³ Glen, p. 34.
- ¹⁴ Newman, Neville F., 'Workers, Gentlemen and Landowners: Identifying Social Class in *The Professor* and *Wuthering Heights*'. *Brontë Studies*. Vol. 38 No. 4, November 2013, p. 314.
- ¹⁵ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Sandra, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 1979), p. 321.
- ¹⁶ Shuttleworth, Sally, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 124.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ¹⁹ Eagleton, Terry, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, second edition (Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 38.

References

- Allott, Miriam, ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974)
- Brontë, Charlotte, *The Professor*, ed. by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)
- , *The Professor*, ed. by Heather Glen (Penguin Books, 2003)
- Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by David Daiches (Penguin Books, 1993)
- Chapple, J. A. V., and Arthur Pollard, eds., *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester University Press, 1966)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, second edition (Macmillan Press, 1988)
- Federico, Annette R., 'The Other Case: Gender and Narration in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*' in Eleanor McMees ed., *The Brontë Sisters Critical Assessments Volume IV* (Helm Information Ltd, 1996)
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Sandra, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 1979)
- Glen, Heather, "Calculated abruptness": *The Professor* in *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Herbert F. Tucker ed., *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999)
- Newman, Neville F. 'Workers, Gentlemen and Landowners: Identifying Social Class in *The Professor* and *Wuthering Heights*'. *Brontë Studies*. Vol. 38 No. 4, November 2013

Shuttleworth, Sally, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Smith, Margaret, ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë. Volume One: 1829-1847* (Oxford University Press, 1995)

—— ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë. Volume Two 1848-1851* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000)