

“Making Money out of the Dead”: Financial Aspects of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*

Arisa NAKAGOE

I. Introduction

Like many literary biographies in history, when Elizabeth Gaskell wrote *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) (hereafter abbreviated as *The Life*),¹ the representation of Charlotte Brontë as well as her family had been neatly manipulated and arranged, according to her own creed to “honour the woman as much as they [the world] have admired the writer” (*Letters* 345). The common consensus is that Gaskell’s intention was to portray Charlotte as an ideal Victorian woman within “the safety of womanliness” (Heilbrun 22). Deep down, as Felicia Bonaparte suggests, *The Life* is intertwined with Gaskell’s purpose to justify her own literary ambitions and to survive as a woman writer in the Victorian period (Bonaparte 232). Previous studies have looked at various aspects of this strategy, such as the partial fictionality of *The Life*, its status as displaced autobiography or vindication, and its dramatization of the friendship and rivalry between Charlotte and Gaskell.

On the other hand, less attention has been paid to the financial side of the making of this biography. It must be kept in mind that Gaskell was a professional writer and that earning money was an indispensable motive behind her works. This paper delves into Gaskell as both a biographer and a businesswoman. How did the mercenary side of her character influence the editorial decisions she made in the biography? What kind of choices did she make? And why did she want that for Charlotte and herself? The focus of this paper is on the way in which Gaskell manipulated and rearranged biographical facts and passed over some incidents in Charlotte’s life. As Linda H. Peterson notes, “Gaskell minimize[d] the professional aspects of Brontë’s career, exclude[d] financial details from Brontë’s letters to her publisher, and show[ed] her subject as much more interested in ideas than in profits” (68). This paper argues that such a minimization was because of

Gaskell's original motivation to portray Charlotte as an epitome of femininity, and that her intention to simultaneously conceal her own financial interest; earning money as a professional was commonly seen as "unwomanly" in the Victorian standard. However, at the same time, Gaskell did want to earn from selling this biography, and there were literary choices she made upon writing it in order to make it more marketable.

This paper firstly positions Gaskell both professionally and privately as a financial agent, or a keen investor in business since early adulthood. Secondly, this paper illuminates *The Life* in a commercial light, examining what makes it attractive in the literary market. Thirdly, the legal issues concerning *The Life* are discussed, which are arguably underpinned by Gaskell's fear of economic loss and injury to her professional career. Lastly, the question of whether the biography was a success or not is debated, both as a shorter-term financial investment and a long-selling literary classic.

II. Gaskell as a Financial Agent

This section studies Gaskell as a financial agent, who simultaneously sought to avoid the Victorian social stigma against women going out into the public sphere and earning money. In the literary world as well, some female writers like George Eliot and the Brontës themselves preferred to use male pseudonyms. However, it is not my intention to create a simple financial dichotomy between Victorian men and women. I want to scrutinize how Gaskell handled her own image when the society harbored ambivalent feelings toward Victorian woman thriving in the economic sphere. That is to say, Gaskell did not explicitly or publicly discuss her own financial matters (though she advocated improved conditions for the poor) but kept the matter to herself and close people only via personal letters. Consequently, in *The Life*, Gaskell decided to minimize reference to Charlotte's investment and not to include financial details during her career in the biography, in order to exempt Charlotte from being labelled "unwomanly" and also to save herself from the same accusations.

Firstly, although Gaskell is commonly regarded as a politically moderate, conservative and gentle lady, in fact her private letters reveal that she was an active participant in the investment market, which was allegedly constituent of the masculine public sphere

in the Victorian period. The fact that she invested 1,500 pounds in the St. Katharine Docks after the success of *Mary Barton* (1848) and that she continued to depend on the dividends until her death is not popularly known (Henry 85-86). She keenly wrote to Edward Holland that his proposal about the St. Katharine Docks Shares seemed “advantageous” and that 1,500 pounds would be invested for herself, not others (*Letters* 827). Indeed, Gaskell had been exposed to international trade and commercial networks of Unitarians since childhood. Gaskell’s uncles, Swinton Holland and Samuel Holland, were in banking business in London and Liverpool respectively. When she was young Gaskell herself occasionally spent time in important commercial and industrial cities like London, Liverpool and Newcastle with her family and friends involved in international business (Henry 94-97). Moreover, in both the Holland (Gaskell’s grandmother’s side) and the Stevenson (Gaskell’s mother’s side) families, women often managed money (Henry 97). So, Felicia Bonaparte’s argument that Gaskell is “not interested in the economic ends of things” (141) should be regarded as an overstatement. Gaskell’s criticism of capitalism found in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* (1854-1855) is in fact clear evidence of her own interest in economics, which could also be interpreted as a product of her self-reflection as a comparatively wealthy individual or even a capitalist.

In turn, it is essential to point out that Gaskell was not the only female financial agent in the Victorian era. Many other female writers too, like Maria Edgeworth and Hannah More, invested money they earned from their writings “as a supplement to their income,” and they also “depended on such investments to secure their financial independence” (Henry 32). However, many such agents preferred to remain anonymous or were neglected: “Victorian women were active investors and shareholders, ... contemporaries were well aware of this, and ... there was much comment about the phenomenon, most of it negative” (Robb 1). Indeed, the financial successes of Victorian women were not always praised. Victorian female investors “confronted a set of cultural prejudices against their participation in the market” (Henry 2-3). Gaskell took care to cope with these issues; the fact that Gaskell’s connection with St. Katharine Docks is not prevalently known suggests that Gaskell was good at controlling her own public image.

The Brontës themselves too invested in railways in the 1840s. In *The Life*, although

Gaskell mentions the failure of the Brontës' railway investment, she minimizes its significance and puts it in a context that does not highlight Charlotte's financial ambition but rather pictures her as a tragic heroine who obeyed her family's decision. In addition, Gaskell never mentions the amount of the investment and gives the reader the impression that it was only small. She quotes Charlotte's letter to Miss Wooler, her former teacher: "I thought you would wonder how we were getting on, when you heard of the railway panic, and you may be sure that I am very glad to be able to answer your kind inquiries by an assurance that our small capital is as yet undiminished" (*The Life* 218). Gaskell narrates later on that "[t]here was misfortune of another kind impending over her. There were some railway shares, which, so early as 1846, she [Charlotte] had told Miss Wooler she wished to sell, but had kept because she could not persuade her sisters to look upon the affair as she did, and so preferred running the risk of loss, to hurting Emily's feelings by acting in opposition to her opinion" (*The Life* 304). Gaskell therefore succeeds in implanting the image of Charlotte as a naïve and docile mind who puts her family members' feeling over economic loss.

Secondly, whereas Gaskell started off her writing career with *Mary Barton* to console herself after the death of her infant son, the nature of her literary career changed into something public and professional, which drove her to earn the profit she thought she deserved. Her letters give evidence of her negotiation skill with the publishers in regard to advances, income, and copyright. Furthermore, the voice in her private business letters is sharp and to the point, which strikes a contrast to the mild narration in her publications. The above characteristics hold true for her correspondence with George Smith about the publication of *The Life*.

In the final paragraphs of her letter to George Smith on 26 December 1856, Gaskell is trying to negotiate the amount of money she would like to receive for the biography. "And now to the money business," she begins straightforwardly — this is Gaskell's typical way of opening up a conversation about financial matters — "I must deal frankly with you, as I wish, the terms proposed for the Biography are below what I thought I might reasonably expect" (*Letters* 430). Compared to *North and South*, for which she received 600 pounds retaining the copyright, she says, the biography has consumed so

much of her time and energy, nearly the double the labor she would put into a novel. She also comments the biography would be likely to gain a wider class of readers and that the demand would be high. She mentions her travel costs to do her research and collect materials. Put in a nutshell, she is piling up reasons for a better offer from the publisher. Then, she concludes, "I have put these points before you, in order that you may judge whether I am unreasonable or not in expecting some advance on your present offer" (*Letters* 431). She consequently managed to receive 800 pounds for *The Life*. This incident, as a whole, is a revelation of her skillful persuasion and candidness when it comes to money matters.

III. Gaskell's Attention to Commercial Market

As stated in the previous section of this paper, Gaskell was a businesswoman to the core, and her acute awareness of the market was in operation while writing the biography, though not explicitly shown. Subsequently, *The Life* turned out so popular that in the month following its publication, Smith, Elder & Co. issued its second edition, which sold just as quickly until they had to recall unsold copies. The reasons for this are explored later in the following section of this paper. This section looks at some advertisements by Smith, Elder and Co. and the biography as physical books, and then investigates Gaskell's sense of balance that made *The Life* attractive to its readers and commercially successful.

First of all, *The Life* was something new in the literary market. The biography was a woman's writing of another woman, which was not common at the time, at least not with significant predecessors. Gaskell was aware of this, and she advertised the feminine quality of the biography as much as she could, even before the reader turned to page one. Gaskell used "Charlotte Brontë" for the title, rather than "Currer Bell," while reassuring the readers that she was the "AUTHOR OF 'JANE EYRE', 'SHIRLEY', 'VILLETTE,' &c" (*The Life* 1) on the title page. She also introduced herself as "AUTHOR OF 'MARY BARTON,' 'RUTH,' &c" (*The Life* 1). It is particularly noteworthy that the titles selected here are the names of strong female heroines, which creates the imagined community of female solidarity. On top of that, on the title page, Gaskell quotes from "AURORA LEIGH": "Oh my God,/Thou hast knowledge, only Thou, How dreary 'tis for women

to sit still/On winter nights by solitary fires/And hear the nations praising them far off.” This could be interpreted as both an emphasis on the femininity of the biographer, female strengths, and the exclusiveness of the information which she had obtained.

Smith, Elder & Co. put considerable effort into the advertisement as well. In their 1857 *A Catalogue of New and Standard Works, Published by Smith, Elder and Co.*, the first book listed there was indeed *The Life*. The explanation reads, “MRS. GASKELL’S MEMOIRS OF CURRER BELL ... with a Portrait of Miss Brontë and a View of Haworth Church and Parsonage” (Smith 2). The two inserted pictures are selling points; the former reveals the face of the author who originally wished to remain unknown from the world, and the latter strongly connects the Brontë sisters with the exoticized place, evoking the sense of tourism, which is another form of consumption: “There had been a trickle of tourists ever since the publication of Shirley and the identification of ‘Currer Bell’; in the wake of Mrs Gaskell’s powerful and emotive descriptions of the place, this now became a flood” (Barker, *The Brontës* 810). Also, on the same catalogue, the novels by the Brontë sisters are advertized in the section, “Uniform Edition of the Works of Currer Bell” (Smith 10), as if to increase marketing synergy. Indeed, “[t]he dramatic effect of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was ... felt on the sales of the Brontës’ novels” (Barker, *The Brontës* 810).

The contents of Gaskell’s writing had to be sellable too, and the major commercial or reader-oriented decisions she made were vividness of characterization and use of anecdotes, which were sometimes exaggerated. Jennifer Uglow reveals that “[a]t the end of the bound manuscript of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* are two loose sheets of quotations, perhaps copied by Elizabeth to guide her thoughts” (406). These quotations are from the *Quarterly Review* of 1856: “Get as many anecdotes as possible, if you love your reader and want to be read, get anecdotes!” (qtd. in Uglow 406). It is commonly argued that Gaskell sensationalized Patrick Brontë’s eccentricity, such as in the episode in which he fired pistols and scared his wife (*The Life* 42). She also included gossip-like stories about Branwell’s affair with Mrs. Robinson and revealing things too personal like the fact that Charlotte’s undergarment was children’s size (*The Life* 356).

The above editorial decisions then connect to and intertwine with another point.

It is Gaskell's sense of balance in her writing of *The Life*. She surely engaged herself in commercially appealing side stories, but she fulfilled her non-mercenary mission too. The mission was the celebration of Charlotte as a model Victorian woman. Sometimes, stories were not only added but also subtracted. For instance, Gaskell chose to remain silent about Charlotte's unrequited love for Monsieur Héger, and blamed her return from Belgium, not her broken heart for Branwell and Patrick's declining health. This is why Gaskell failed to write about the romance between Charlotte and Héger; she prioritized the protection of her friend's reputation over an episode that could be another source of juicy gossip. In turn, not being too sensationalist was another key to Gaskell's success. If a biography were too full of tabloid dramas, it would not be accepted seriously, and Gaskell's own reputation as an acclaimed author would consequently suffer from it.

In order to make the biography readable, Gaskell often created easy-to-follow stereotypes for characters. For an insight into smaller details of *The Life*, the most prominent examples studied here are the characterizations of Anne and Emily in contrast to Charlotte. Out of the three talented sisters, Gaskell had to focus on and commend Charlotte. Throughout *The Life*, Gaskell constantly arranged her interviews, letters, and other materials to highlight the differences between Emily's violent and selfish nature, Anne's immaturity and fragility, and Charlotte's sensible, domestic, and mature qualities.

The first memorable anecdote in *The Life* about the sisters comes from their father, Patrick Brontë. Although it is a recollection of a conversation with them when very young, this serves well to outline the characteristics of the three sisters from Gaskell's point of view, which holds throughout the biography.

I [Patrick Brontë] began with the youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, "Age and experience." I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell), what I had best to do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, "Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason, whip him." ... I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, 'The Bible.' And what was the next best; she answered, "The Book of Nature." I then asked the next what was the best mode of education

for a woman; she answered, "That which would make her rule her house well." (*The Life* 47)

While what Anne wanted underlines both her immaturity and modesty, Emily's words, especially "whip him," signify her ferocity and her strength over a male who is even older than her. Such eccentricity may remind the reader of the previous anecdote about her father. However, despite such a family environment, Charlotte's Christian values and high morality are foregrounded as an embodiment of the Victorian "Angel in the House." On the whole, Gaskell uses this anecdote to show that Charlotte is the most admirable of the three girls. The paragraph structure is effective too; Charlotte comes after Emily, which emphasizes the drastic difference between Charlotte's domestic quality and Emily's wildness.

Gaskell's description of Charlotte's relationship with her sisters appears after the above anecdote in Gaskell's perspective: "Charlotte's deep thoughtful spirit appears to have felt almost painfully the tender responsibility which rested upon her with reference to her remaining sisters.... Emily and Anne were simply companions and playmates, while Charlotte was motherly friend and guardian to both; and this loving assumption of duties beyond her years, made her feel considerably older than she really was" (*The Life* 62). The keywords here are "responsibility" and "duty," common Victorian words in the discourse of feminine domestic obligation, which helps emphasize the image of Charlotte as a good "mother" to the younger ones. Gaskell ties Emily and Anne to Charlotte who feels "painfully" about them, creating the sense of self-sacrifice while her sisters are given an aura of innocent playfulness. What is significant here is not only the content but also its arrangement. Gaskell makes the story told by the father, followed by her explanation to provide the reader with a vivid first impression and then her interpretation. As a result of such readability, Gaskell succeeds in thoroughly guiding and convincing the reader to accept her view on Charlotte.

IV. Gaskell's Management of Legal Issues

Writing a biography that could damage the reputation of actual people is

commercially interesting but legally risky. This section studies the letters between Gaskell and her editor George Smith and the influence of the correspondence on the biography, especially the careful tactic they together schemed in regard to the three persons who Gaskell wanted to defame.² The first one was Newby, the second one was Lady Eastlake, and the last one was Mrs. Robinson (Lady Scott). Gaskell tried to stay within the law though. However, this circumspection could be interpreted as Gaskell's tactics to evade potential fines and other financial loss. Again, Gaskell was a careful businesswoman, who did not want to injure her career as a professional writer, and at the same time, editorial decisions were sometimes made so that they would benefit Gaskell's original intention of portraying Charlotte's ideal womanhood or Gaskell's own self-portrayal as a mild character.

Firstly, Gaskell wished to warn other people not to trust Newby: "*Do* let me abuse Mr Newby as much as I dare, *within the law*" (*Letters* 432). Newby's problem enraged Gaskell so much, partly by the fact that her friend had been cheated and perhaps also because Gaskell projected herself onto Charlotte as a professional writer; Newby was someone who damaged Charlotte's business. Back in the 1850s, when there were many doubts and rumors about the true identities of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, Newby advertized to his American house that *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* were written by the same author that wrote *Jane Eyre* so that Anne's new novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) would sell well in America where *Jane Eyre* had won a great reputation. George Smith was upset to hear about it and wrote a letter to Currer Bell to check if Currer, Ellis and Acton were three separate authors and if his author was not publishing with Newby. Of course, the sisters were shocked, and the only remedy that Charlotte could think of was to confront George Smith by going to London and reveal their true identity.

About Newby, however, Gaskell complied in the end with Smith's decision to take out what the publisher would rather not include in *The Life* so that they would be on the safe side legally and business-wise. It can be safely observed that Smith and Gaskell underwent cautious discussions about the matter with a special attention to the law. In one letter Gaskell writes: "I *think* you [Smith] said that when this part was formally submitted to you, you would see that I steered clear within the laws.... Had I better consult some of

my lawyer friends, as to what words I may use. [O]r *will* you undertake to take out what you wd rather not have in" (*Letters* 428-29). Smith's opinion seems to have been decisive, and consequently Gaskell never directly mentioned the name of Newby in *The Life*, did not write about his bad intentions (she merely wrote that Newby made a simple mistake about the identity of the author "to the best of his belief" [*The Life* 268]), and the whole drama of the sisters deciding whether they should reveal their identity is minimized, though the story could have been another sensational episode to be featured.

In *The Life*, Gaskell swiftly summarizes the sisters' action: "With rapid decision, they resolved that Charlotte and Anne should start, for London, that very day, in order to prove their separate identity to Messrs. Smith and Elder.... The two sisters ... were whirled up by the night train to London" (*The Life* 268). The "two sisters" mentioned here are Charlotte and Anne; Gaskell deliberately did not explain why Emily did not join them or what happened afterwards. Initially, Charlotte did not intend to reveal information about Emily who had been keen to keep her anonymity. In London, however, Ellis Bell's real name slipped out of her lips, which she later confessed to Emily. Of course, this infuriated Emily. So, Charlotte had to write a letter to London, saying that "I committed a grand error in betraying his identity" (*Wise* 2: 241). This was written more than three weeks after their visit to London, which indicates how long Emily's anger continued (Gérin 233). Such confirmation of Charlotte's failure would destroy the myth of the friendly sisterhood. Gaskell dexterously avoided that.

Secondly, as for Lady Eastlake, who criticized *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review*, Gaskell was enthusiastically ready to attack her as well. It can be assumed that Smith as an editor intervened to some extent, and that Gaskell changed her mind for her own reasons. In the completed biography, Gaskell ended up writing only a paragraph on the unfavorable article by Lady Eastlake, to which she gives no importance. She does not bring out her name either. Gaskell writes, "Every one has a right to form his own conclusion respecting the merits and demerits of a book. I complain not of the judgment which the reviewer passes on *Jane Eyre*" (*The Life* 281). In turn, this serves to highlight Gaskell's own tolerance toward any negative criticism of her own literary works. Not libeling Lady Eastlake, Gaskell chose to advertise her own self-restraint.

Thirdly, the problem of Lady Scott is of utmost importance because, despite Smith and Gaskell's efforts to avoid legal offenses, they were sued by the lady and had to publish a revised third version of the biography. Prior to the first publication, in a letter to Smith, Gaskell writes aggressively; "[i]t is possible that it would be wiser not to 'indicate so clearly' (I was not aware that I had done so,) the lady concerned in Branwell's misdoing. I will see how this can be altered" (*Letters* 428). Then she asks Smith where exactly in the text he is talking about. It is clear that Smith was careful about any reference to Lady Scott in the biography, and Gaskell's manuscript had to go through several changes before publication. Although Gaskell did not explicitly mention her name in the book, it was easy for the public at the time to guess who Gaskell was referring to. Lady Scott, labeled a "wicked woman" (*The Life* 205), felt ashamed and angry, perhaps all the more so for Gaskell's sensationalization of the incident.

Ironically, however, the legal fuss with Lady Scott triggered more attention to be paid to *The Life* by the public, which resulted in another wave of commercial popularity. On 26 May 1857, all unsold copies of the biography were recalled after the legal threat announced by Lady Scott's solicitors, who demanded a public apology and revision. As Uglow claims, "The Scott-Gaskell battle was the choicest gossip of the month, and the buzz spread far and wide" (427). After summer, Gaskell published the third edition of the biography. In the newer version, she withdrew the episode of Lady Scott. Although Gaskell kept Branwell's addictions to drugs and alcohol in *The Life*, she never clarified what she meant by his "cruel, shameful suffering" (*The Life* [Oxford UP] 226) that led him to such self-destructive habits.

Throughout the process of revision as well, Smith acted as Gaskell's helper. For example, Gaskell wrote to him on 5 June 1857, "How had omissions better be made ...? And how had I better send you the corrections ...?" (*Letters* 451). One would not go so far as to say that Smith is a co-author of *The Life*, but the letters are evidences of his intervention, which cannot be ignored in the study of the biography, especially if one looks at issues that Gaskell felt strongly about, or issues that necessitated discretion. Yet, despite some occasional turbulence, Gaskell as a literary businesswoman cooperated well with her business partner, Smith, and overall managed to create a profitable product;

even the scandal with Lady Scott worked as a commercial trigger.

V. Long-Term Sales of Gaskell's Works

It is often argued that although the biography had many flaws in withholding the full truth, it posed many questions and contributed much to future studies of the Brontës and Gaskell herself as well. As mentioned before, Gaskell's keen interest in commercial side of the biography and her non-commercial commemoration of her friend were balanced by her acute sense as a businesswoman, and this section maintains that *The Life* therefore succeeded as a literary work that became a classic; looking at this phenomenon from a different angle, it could also be said that the biography turned out to be a long-selling merchandise. I will discuss the overall picture of contemporary praises and criticisms toward *The Life*, the influence it had on other biographers, and examples of its long-standing impact on current studies about them.

Firstly, the reactions toward *The Life* consisted of both positive and negative opinions, but the former prevailed. John Blackwood, in his letter to G. H. Lewes, criticized "execrable taste in the book ... I detest this bookmaking out of the remains of the dead" (qtd. in Haight 2: 322-23) or the business of "making money out of the dead" (qtd. in Haight 2: 330). Critics with negative opinions thus reckoned the biography to be a disrespectful gold-digger's attempt to excavate Charlotte's past, which should be kept in peace. On the other hand, George Eliot defended Gaskell from critics like Blackwood and claimed that both she and her partner Lewes thought that *The Life* was "admirable." By publishing *The Life*, Gaskell could celebrate Charlotte as a great authoress, and at the same time, she could prove her own genius (Peterson 69). The *Athenaeum* ("[W]e do not recollect a life of a woman by a woman so well executed" [qtd. in Easson 375]), the *Saturday Review* ("[H]er [Gaskell's] genius was wholly creative" [qtd. in Easson 378]), and the *Spectator* ("[I]t is impossible to read through Mrs. Gaskell's two volumes without a strong conviction that Charlotte Brontë was a woman as extraordinary by her characters as by her genius" [qtd. in Easson 379]) all gave opinions in favor of *The Life*.

Secondly, the influence of *The Life* on other biographers is uncalculatable at least in two ways in regard to female biographers dealing with women subjects. In other

words, Gaskell opened up a new corner in the literary market and a new model. The former refers to the fact that she became a source of motivation for other female writers and nurtured the next generations. Mary Cholmondeley, author of *Under One Roof: A Family Record* (1918), said she was encouraged by *The Life* discovering women writers from past generations in her aspiring days (Peterson 71). As for Charlotte Riddell's autobiographical fiction *A Struggle for Fame* (1883), the episodes are modelled on some chapters of *The Life*, but at the same time, Riddell was driven to explore beyond Gaskell's limitations on "two parallel currents" of the woman and the author (Peterson 71-72). The latter means that Gaskell established the method of dual portrayal of female subjects in biographies. As Juliette Atkinson claims, Gaskell spread the influential idea of "almost oxymoronic construct of the simultaneously eminent and obscure woman" (Atkinson 150). Atkinson gives a few examples of such self-fashioning; Anne Gilchrist, biographer of Mary Lamb, whom she pictures as both silent and opinionated, and Margaret Oliphant, who, in her autobiography, labelled herself both popular and obscure (Atkinson 154).

Thirdly, while so many studies on Charlotte, the main subject and Gaskell, the biographer, are indebted to *The Life* to this day, criticism of other Brontë sisters remains under the inescapable influence of the biography as well. For biographies on other Brontës, *The Life* became a key source of information. Here, the two cases of Emily Brontë's biographies will be discussed as a typical example. One is Winifred Gérin's *Emily Brontë: A Biography* (1971) and the other is Katherine Frank's *Emily Brontë: A Chainless Soul* (1992). Whereas the former pays faithful respect to *The Life*, the latter contrastingly challenges it in a subtle way. Gérin even used phrases by Gaskell in *The Life* for the title of her chapters. On the other hand, Frank is persistent in defying *The Life*, although she does not explicitly announce it. For instance, Frank begins her biography thus, "[w]e are so accustomed to thinking of the Brontë story as a Yorkshire saga, one permeated by 'The Spirit of the Moor', that we tend to forget that it actually began somewhere else" (20). This is an antithesis to the exoticized Haworth myth established by Gaskell, whose biography begins with the Haworth scenery and whose second volume attaches a vivid sketch of the bleak landscape. Frank continues to reveal that the Brontës originated

in Ireland, that their name used to be Brunty and that Patrick decided to appropriate to himself the noble sounding version of the last name to hide his lowly background. This information, however, does not appear in *The Life*. It is natural because there is no reason why Gaskell would reveal such details when she wanted to flatter her subject. Indeed, “books about the Brontës still find themselves standing within its shadow, often simultaneously using it as a source and offering resistance to the story it tells” (Jay ix). Thus, *The Life* continues to be the most monumental biography in the field that is sold, bought, read, and discussed in the field.

VI. Conclusion

Although many previous studies have neglected the commercial aspect of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, commercial success and risk-hedging were crucial to Gaskell as a professional writer, who was also a great investor in her private life. However, it was important for her to conceal that side of her character, because at the time, such mercenary considerations were widely regarded as inappropriate for women. Thus, she hid financial aspects of Charlotte’s career in the biography she wrote, forming a loose parallel between herself and Charlotte in terms of supposed lack of commercial interest. Despite its partial faults and inaccuracies, the biography was supposedly a success as a financial investment and a literary endeavor, both in a short-span and in the long run, for it was indebted to Gaskell’s sharp sense of balance of sensationalism and earnestness in her writing.

In conclusion, it was the silenced or marginalized parts about money in *The Life* that revealed the multi-layered complexity of Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, their relationship, and the way in which the biographer chose to present her subject and herself to the public as female writers in the Victorian economy. Also, this produces to a new set of questions about gender, life-writing, and money-making. For example, oppression of women is a much debated topic in the Victorian era, men were also expected to conform to their gender role to some extent. How did the myth of masculinity shape biographies and autobiographies in terms of their financial aspects? In a biography about a male figure, do the reader find the male biographer’s self-projection and self-consciousness

in relation to money matters? Then, what happens when a man writes about a woman, or vice versa? And how have these things change over time? These inquiries, of course, require deeper investigations.

Notes

- 1 When not specified, the page numbers of *The Life* in this paper refer to the Penguin edition, which is based on the first edition text of the biography published by Smith, Elder & Co. The Oxford edition is sometimes used in this paper, and this edition is based on the third edition text of *The Life*.
- 2 Marnie Jones concludes that Gaskell made alterations at Smith's request to delete the slightly romantic nuance between Charlotte and Smith upon their first encounter to avoid unwanted gossip (285).

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(Master's Student, The University of Tokyo)