



Shirley: Unabridged edition (Vintage Editions)

Charlotte Brontë

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Shirley is an 1849 social novel with an embedded Victorian romantic drama by the English novelist Charlotte Brontë. It was Brontë's second published novel after *Jane Eyre*. The novel is set in Yorkshire in the period 1811–12, during the industrial depression resulting from the Napoleonic Wars. The novel is set against a backdrop of the Luddite uprisings in the Yorkshire textile industry. The novel's popularity led to Shirley's becoming a woman's name. Before the publication of the novel, Shirley was an uncommon - but distinctly male - name and would have been an unusual name for a woman. Today it is regarded as a distinctly female name and an uncommon male name. While Brontë was writing *Shirley*, three of her siblings died. Her brother Branwell died in September 1848, and her sister Emily fell ill and died in December. Brontë resumed writing, but then her only remaining sibling, her sister Anne, became ill and died in May 1849. Robert Moore is a mill owner noted for apparent ruthlessness toward his employees - more than any other mill owner in town. He has laid off many of them, apparently indifferent to their resulting poverty. But in fact he has no choice, since the mill is deep in debt. Robert is very close to Caroline Helstone, who comes to his house to learn French from his sister, Hortense. Caroline worships Robert and he likes her too. Caroline meets Shirley, a landowner, an independent heiress whose parents are dead and who lives with Mrs. Pryor, an old governess. Robert's brother, Louis, works as a tutor for Shirley's uncle and is infatuated by her. Shirley is lively, cheerful, full of ideas about how to use her money and how to help people. Caroline and Shirley soon become very close friends. When Shirley refuses the baronet's offer of marriage, her uncle is enraged and has a fight with her. He then decides to leave and this means that Louis will have to leave too, which emboldens him enough to make his declaration – he proposes to Shirley, despite the difference in their relative situations.

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