

BOOKS BY THE BRONTËS

WORK IN PROGRESS

- This will eventually contain a complete list of their writings – novels, poems and letters.
- There will be a short description of each.

NOVELS

PATRICK BRONTË

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

JANE EYRE

Jane Eyre is written in the first person and traces her development from a child of 10 to a woman in her mid to late twenties. She's an orphan, of course. So many books about children in Victorian times were written about orphans.

When the book opens she is living with her Aunt Reed and her family. She is made to feel an outsider, and John, the son, is particular hateful towards her. He teases her one day and provokes her into throwing a book at him. Of course he tells on her and she is locked up in the Red Room, the very room in which her uncle had died.

Mrs Reed decides to send her away to Lowood charity school which was administered by Reverend Brocklehurst. The school is based on Cowan Bridge School where Charlotte, and some of her sisters attended and where her two older sisters, Maria and Elisabeth, died. There were some issues with the food at that school but nothing like the intolerable conditions that Charlotte described at Lowood. When *Jane Eyre* was published there was a scandal because it was widely recognised that she had based it on Cowan Bridge. The son of Carus Wilson. Who administer Cowan Bridge, was scathing in about what she implied about the real school. The school is still running to this day, though it moved to a healthier location, and on its website boasts that this was the school that Charlotte Brontë attended.

At Lowood Jane befriends Helen Burns (fashioned after Emily). Helen is a very religious girl, but manages to always be in trouble. She dies during a cholera pandemic that swept through the school. Conditions improve, and Jane eventually becomes a teacher there. But she seeks employment as a governess and leaves to go to Thornfield Hall to be governess to Adele, a ward of Mr Rochester. Rochester appears to be a bachelor who is rarely at Thornfield.

When Rochester does eventually come home, he and Jane strike up a deep friendship. He would constantly tease Jane, but she would give as good as she got! Despite their difference in station, and in their ages, they seemed to be on the same wave-length.

Eventually Rochester proposes to her – one of the most unusual proposals in all of literature. At first she thinks he's joking, as he often does, but it sinks in that he means it, despite having not long ago suggested that she might have to look elsewhere for employment. The marriage day arrives, and there is the famous reply to the standard question "does anyone know of any lawful impediment ...?" "Yes," says Mr Mason, running into church, "he has a wife living at Thornfield Hall."

Jane had suspected that there was some mystery associated with the upper floor – noises and even a strange fire where she had to rescue Rochester from his burning bed. But she had thought that these had to do with the somewhat disreputable servant Grace Poole. But now she

was told that Grace Poole was employed to look after Bertha Mason, Rochester's first and current wife who had gone mad. She was the proverbial 'mad woman in the attic'.

Jane gets ready to run away, but Rochester implores her to stay and to become his mistress. She is tempted to do so, because she is deeply in love with him, but her moral compass points to the right path. She runs off with little money and has to resort to begging from house to house.

Eventually she collapses onto the doorstep of St John Rivers and his two sisters. They take her in and they get on really well together. Of course, as luck would have it, they were cousins that she knew nothing about. More luck, she had an uncle in the west Indies that she didn't know about, who left her an inheritance!

St John sets her up in a village school and, after some months, proposes to her. Noy out of love, but because he was determined to become a missionary and he needed a help-mate. She turns him down and gets a premonition that something terrible has happened to Rochester. She returns to Thornfield Hall, to find it burnt to the ground. Bertha Mason had escaped, set fire to the house and jumped to her death. Rochester had tried to stop her jumping and was badly injured. He was still alive, but almost blind. She goes off to Ferndean, his other house, and arranges to replace the maid in bringing him his supper. This allows her to tease him, until she is ready to reveal that she is his Jane. And so, we hope, they live happily ever after.

THE PROFESSOR

SHIRLEY

VILLETTE

BRANWELL BRONTË

EMILY BRONTË

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

This is a very structured novel. Mr Héger once said of Emily that she had the mind of a man, which was his way of saying that she had a very logical mind. Her mind was not the 'off-with-the-fairies' variety, as is often claimed, but a very ordered and structured one. The novel comes in two, somewhat parallel, parts – with the two Cathy's, mother and daughter, as their queens. But, in some ways, the novel is not about the people but about the two houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Forget the moors, nearly all the action takes place in or around these two houses.

In fact the novel is very architectural, with many more architectural reference than in any other novel I know, with doors and windows, and mullions, locks, hasps and staples. One wonders whether she listed all the possible uses for a window and managed to include every one of them. (I counted twelve in the novel.) The chronology is tightly constructed, but it's like a logic puzzle with clues scattered throughout from which several people have been inspired to reconstruct the whole time-line of the novel.

There are also many layers of narration, like Russian dolls. The events are narrated by Lockwood, who is only a minor character. Most of the events had taken place before he came onto the scene. So, most of the action is told by Nelly Dean, the servant, to Lockwood. But certain events were not witnessed by Nelly first-hand, She hears these parts of the story from someone else, relays them to Lockwood who passes them on to us.

At the beginning of story, but not the beginning of the book, Mr Earnshaw lives with his family in Wuthering Heights – his wife and his children Hindley and Catherine. He goes off one day to Liverpool and returns with a gypsy-like urchin who he has found in the streets. He calls him Heathcliff, after his eldest son who died as an infant, and includes him in the family. Cathy gets on well with Heathcliff, but Hindley resents him and ill-treats him.

When the parents die some years later, Hindley takes over the farm and kicks Heathcliff out of the house but keeps him as a farm-labourer. Hindley returns with a wife, Frances, and they have a son, Hareton. Frances dies and Hindley raises Hareton as a demon.

One day, Cathy and Heathcliff visit Thrushcross Grange to spy on its inhabitants. That house is grand and genteel in contrast to the wild and primitive Wuthering Heights. The dogs are set on them and Cathy is injured, so she's taken in and nursed for many weeks. When she returns to Wuthering Heights she's become a little lady and finds Heathcliff dirty and unsociable.

Some years later Heathcliff runs away and Cathy marries Edgar Linton, from the Grange. Three years later Heathcliff returns to find his childhood sweetheart married. The years of exile have turned him into a man, and a prosperous one at that. He decides to marry Isabella, Edgar's sister, not out of love but to spite Cathy.

Cathy dies soon after a daughter, also Cathy, is born. Isabella runs away to London. Where she gives birth to Linton, a sickly child. Hindley dies and Heathcliff raises Hareton in a manner that shocked the parson! When Frances dies, Heathcliff takes Linton to Wuthering Heights, having taken possession of it through the gambling debts that Hindley acquired from playing cards with Heathcliff.

Young Cathy, who had met her cousin briefly, discovers that he is living with Heathcliff only four miles away at Wuthering Heights. She sneaks out and visits him on many occasions until Nelly Dean gets wind of it and tells her father. Edgar dies and Heathcliff forces Cathy to Linton, so that he can gain control of Thrushcross Grange. Linton dies, (Like Hamlet, nearly everyone dies!) So, as Heathcliff's daughter-in-law, Cathy lives at Wuthering Heights with him, and with Hareton. Thrushcross Grange becomes empty and is leased to Lockwood for a year, which is only when he enters the story in chapter 1.

After some months Lockwood goes away and returns at the end of his lease. While he's been away Cathy, who at first thought Hareton a boor, becomes friends with him and teaches him to read. Heathcliff dies, of course, and as the story ends the sun at last comes out, after the years of tempest, and Cathy and Hareton look forward to their approaching marriage.

I've left out a few good bits such as Lockwood, when he was forced to stay the night at Wuthering Heights because of the weather, has a vision of Cathy senior trying to get into his window. And Joseph, the old religious servant at Wuthering Heights, who adds nothing to the plot, adds a lot of colour with his heavy, almost unintelligible, Yorkshire dialect. CC

ANNE BRONTË

AGNES GREY

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL

POEMS BY THE BRONTËS

The author's name is that of the editor.

CHITHAM, Edward: The Poems Of Anne Brontë: A New Text And Commentary

Published in 1979. ISBN: 0-670-87212-1

120 pages of poems plus 90 pages of commentary and appendices.

WINNIFRITH, Tom: The Poems Of Patrick Brontë

Published in 1983. ISBN: 0-631-12553-1

180 pages of poems previously published in the Shakespeare Head edition.

20 pages of other published poems.

60 pages of poems from Branwell's 1837 notebook. These are mostly part of the Angrian story. Like his father, and his sisters, the dominant theme of his poetry is death and separation, such as the following extract:

We leave our bodies in the Tomb
Like dust to moulder and decay.

WINNIFRITH, Tom: The Poems Of Charlotte Brontë

Published in 1984. ISBN: 0-631-12563-9.

80 pages of poems published in her lifetime.

180 pages of poems published after her death in the Shakespeare Head edition.

80 pages of other poems, plus a list of 60 other poems not included in this edition.

Most have a funeral flavour, but although this fragment combines the themes of death and loss at least there is the positive thought that Emily, who died a few days before this was written, is spared the pain of life.

Then since thou art spared such pain
We will not wish thee here again.

LETTERS BY THE BRONTËS

Juliet Barker: The Brontës: A Life In Letters

First published in 1997 by Penguin. Available in paperback. Published by the Folio Society in 2006, with many illustrations.

This consists of selected letters by members of the Brontë family. It begins with a letter by Patrick Brontë to Reverend John Buckworth in 1821, where he talks of his wife's illness. It ends with a letter, also by Patrick Brontë, written in 1855 where he thanks George Smith for his condolences over the death of Charlotte.

Muriel Spark: The Brontë Letters

Published in 1954. The first letter in this collection was written by Maria Branwell to Patrick in 1812. This is followed by the famous 'Dear Saucy Pat' letter, again from Maria to her Pat. The last letter is from Arthur Bell Nicholls to Ellen Nussey, written to tell her of Charlotte's death.

Dudley Green: The Letters Of The Reverend Patrick Brontë

This selection begins with Patrick's letter to the Bishop of London, offering himself as a candidate for Holy Orders. It ends with a letter of reference to 'whom it may concern' suggesting that Joseph Holmes would make an excellent railway policeman. There are numerous appendices which include some letters written to PB, including the one by Mary Burder where she tartly turns down his offer of marriage after Maria died.