

The Brontë The Underer

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The Journal of the
Australian Brontë
Association



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The Brontë Th(under)er

The Australian Brontë Association has two types of publication. The *Newsletter* appears twice a year, generally in June and December, and contains ephemera, film and book reviews and news of topical interest. Longer items, including the text of talks given at our meetings, appear at the end of each year in this journal-type publication, *The Brontë Thunderer*.

The reasons for the name of the journal are as follows. For a start it clearly contains the name 'Brontë', so readers will not be left in any doubt as to the main theme of the publication. Secondly, the name *Thunderer* would have been well known to the Brontës as a nickname for the respected newspaper *The Times* of London.

Then the Greek word for 'thunder' is βροντη, or Bronte. So in Greece Charlotte might be known as 'Charlotte Thunder'. How she came by this name is interesting, since her father was born Patrick Prunty, or Brunty.

The town in Sicily, near the volcano Mount Etna, was named 'Bronte', no doubt because of the thunderous noise given out by the volcano during an eruption. Then, because Nelson won an important victory assisting King Ferdinand the Fourth to regain the throne of Naples, he received the title 'Duke of Bronte'. Lady Hamilton used to call him 'Lord Thunder'.

Patrick Prunty, or Brunty, was a young Irishman attending Cambridge University and, having a high regard for Nelson, he adapted the spelling of his name in the university register to Bronte. To add further distinction he experimented with various accents for the 'e' before finally settling on 'Brontë'.

The final reference in the name is the fact that the word 'thunderer' contains the word 'under', reflecting the fact that this journal represents the Brontë followers 'down under'.

President – Dr Christopher Cooper

*Cover: Rosedale Moor, Yorkshire National Park.
Do you know of a better image for the Brontës' publication? Tell us!!*

Portraiture and the Art of Branwell Brontë

Adrienne Bradney Smith

Adapted from a talk given to the ABA , May 2010

Sir,

Having an earnest desire to enter as a Probationary Student at the Royal Academy but not being possessed of information as to the means of obtaining my desire, I presume to request from you as Secretary to the Institution an answer to the questions –

Where am I to present my drawing?

At what time-?

And especially

Can I do it in August or September

Patrick Branwell Brontë

c. July 1835¹

Dear Ellen,

We are all about to divide, break up, separate, Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a Governess. This last determination I formed myself, ... knowing ... that Papa would have enough to do with his limited income should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy and Emily at Roe Head...

Charlotte Brontë

July 2nd 1835²



*Branwell Brontë,
Self portrait, 1840*

Haworth nr Bradford
Novr 16th, 1835

Mr. Robinson
Ivy Cottage, Little Woodhouse
Leeds

Dear Sir,

After repeated delays, for which I am ashamed to apologise I have at length nearly completed my picture, and shall be ready to appear with it before your bar of judgement on Monday next the 23d of this Month ...

And my Father likewise... has resolved upon my receiving a course of lessons during the ensuing Winter, in addition to those you have already given me – but upon this subject it may be most proper to speak when I see you Sir; which time is looked forward to with no little fear and doubting by – if he dare aspire to the title

Your Obedient Pupil

P B Brontë

November 16th, 1835³

Dear Sir,

As my Son, has previously express'd all I had to say, I would only observe in addition – That I am pleased with the progress he has made, under your tuition, and so fully impressed with the idea, that he should go to the Metropolis under the most favourable circumstances, that I have finally made up my mind, that, by your permission, he shall have at least another course of lessons from you, during the season of Winter, and shall improve himself in Anatomy, which is the grammar of painting... and consequently defer his journey to London, till next Summer – When, God willing – I intend he shall go... My son joins with me, in very respectful regards to You, and Mrs Robinson, and your little Family – I remain, Dear Sir,

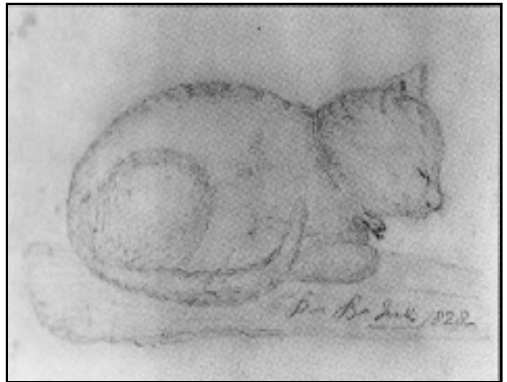
Yours, very respectfully, and truly,

P. Brontë⁴

These letters would imply that if Branwell Brontë did indeed go to London to seek admittance into the Royal Academy School, it would not have been until at least May or June of 1836, not in 1835 as many biographies have stated.⁵

But rather than speculate on the very real possibility that Branwell never visited architecture, I would like to focus on his early associations with art and his brief career in Bradford as a portrait artist and then proffer some reasons for abandoning this venture. If during this talk Branwell's likeable but essentially flawed personality conjures up the likes of the brilliant Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, it is important to remember that Branwell was not a genius and had it not been for his famous sisters and for the undeniable burden his unsettled life had placed upon them, he would be remembered today only by a name on a gravestone in a small Yorkshire cemetery.

As with his sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, Branwell's exceptional literary and artistic gifts manifested themselves at an early age. Branwell in particular was prolific at sketching and used to decorate almost every piece of paper he touched with pen and ink drawings. His 'Battell Book', dated March 12, 1829 but composed when he was nine contains five sketches in pencil and watercolour of soldiers, battle scenes and a castle. Patrick Brontë, recognising his children's drawing ability, engaged local artists to give them instruction. Two Keighley artists, Thomas Plummer and John Bradley were most likely their first teachers. William Dearden, Keighley school master and friend of the Brontë family, mentioned seeing the Brontë children often in the studio of John Bradley, an enthusiastic amateur artist and founder member of the Keighley Institute.⁶ This was probably during the two year period from 1828.



*Branwell's 'Sleeping Cat' – Brontë
Parsonage Museum*

Under Bradley's guidance, the children would have copied a variety of prints and pictures from books and magazines of well-known works as copying in those days was considered an essential part of early training. Thomas Bewick's intricate engravings of barnyard owls and rustic scenes in his books *A History of British Birds* and *A General History of Quadrupeds* would have provided the children with many delightful subjects to copy. Eleven-year old Branwell, possibly inspired by Bewick, cleverly captured the gentle rhythmic purring of the parsonage's cat in a pencil sketch, his earliest extant picture⁷ indicative that

even from an early age he had a more imaginative and adventurous approach to art than Charlotte, whose enormous output of drawings and paintings was often copied from prints. In a letter to Patrick dated 23 September, 1829, when the children were staying with a Mr. Fenell in Cross-Stone, Charlotte wrote:

Branwell has taken two sketches from nature, & Emily Anne and myself have likewise each of us drawn a piece from some views of the lake which Mr. Fenell brought with him from Westmorland.⁸

All the Brontë siblings, however, copied prints, particularly those by John Martin whose sensational spiritual landscapes inspired their writings as well as providing them with stimulating subjects to copy. Patrick apparently owned at least three, possibly five framed engravings of Martin's works, suggesting such dramatic scenes may have fired the imagination of the whole family. Branwell's magnum opus during the period of Bradley's instruction was probably his masterly copy of John Martin's *Queen Esther*.

Another much-loved print was an engraving by William Woollett of Benjamin West's heroic portrayal of 'The Death of General Wolfe' which apparently hung on the wall of Branwell's bedroom.⁹ Regarded as a radical painting when first exhibited in 1770, West's painting depicts the figures in contemporary dress rather than in the classical tradition.

Through art periodicals, magazines and journals, Branwell as a young boy would have been very familiar with the tradition of English portraiture established by Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney but it is hardly surprising that John Martin's paintings stirred his imagination and vividly appealed to his sense of manliness and heroism in a way that conventional portraiture probably never did.

By 1833, Branwell, aged 16 and the only son of the family, was forced to make serious decisions about his career. With his knowledge of classical languages and his phenomenal translating ability it would appear that after a university education, he was destined for the church. Whether the life of a clergyman, exemplified by his father, failed to appeal or whether Patrick's financial situation was the reason, Branwell, instead of attending university, decided to become an artist, although he was equally passionate about poetry and music. (He played both the organ and flute and was a devotee of English church music.) Ellen Nussey in her *Reminiscences* mentioned that

Branwell studied regularly with his father, and used to paint in oils,

which was regarded as study for what might be eventually his profession. All the household entertained the idea of his becoming an artist, and hoped he would be a distinguished one...¹⁰

Inspiration for this decision no doubt came from the exhibition of the Royal Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, held annually in Leeds since 1808. The Society must have catered for a wide range of abilities as both Sir Thomas Lawrence and J. M. W. Turner exhibited paintings in 1828. The amateur artist John Bradley, the Brontë's childhood teacher, was a regular exhibitor, and in 1834 two of Charlotte Brontë's own artworks, exquisitely drawn pencil copies of engravings of Bolton Abbey and Kirkstall Abbey were submitted for display. Charlotte at this stage was seriously considering a career in art herself. Also exhibiting were two people who were later to become very important to Branwell, the sculptor Joseph Bentley Leyland, Branwell's close friend and confidant from 1838 to Branwell's death ten years later and the Leeds-based portrait artist William Robinson, the recipient of Patrick and Branwell's letters of November 1835.

Patrick subsequently engaged William Robinson to instruct Branwell at the Parsonage for two guineas a lesson, and then in the winter of 1835-36 Branwell began a course of lessons with Robinson in Leeds.

William Robinson was born in Leeds in 1799 and studied portraiture at the Royal Academy school in London under Sir Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy from 1820 to his death in 1830, whose style he learnt to imitate. Patrick Brontë was aiming high with such an illustrious connection and one can only wonder in



Self portrait by William Robinson

the light of subsequent events if the money had not been better spent sending Branwell to university. Robinson's sitters included the Duke of Wellington and the Duke of York which would have impressed Patrick who was probably harbouring hopes of similar success for his son. Their hopes would have been severely tempered had they known Robinson was to die just five years later leaving 'his widow and six children totally unprovided for'.¹¹

Branwell's famous *Gun Group* portrait and *The Brontë Sisters* (also known as *The Pillar Portrait*) probably date from his first lessons with Robinson in 1834. Only a fragment of Emily remains of the *Gun Group* portrait which is now in



Branwell's 'Gun Group' portrait – ? 1834

the National Portrait Gallery although a Daguerreotype photograph c.1851 of the original work was discovered in 1989.¹² Arthur Bell Nicholls, Charlotte's husband, apparently considered the images of Charlotte, Branwell and Anne poor likenesses and destroyed all but the hauntingly beautiful image of Emily. Both paintings were found on top of a wardrobe upon Nicholls' death in 1914.

The Brontë Sisters was originally an oil painting of the four Brontë siblings but Branwell painted himself out before completing the picture, probably because of the difficulty of creating an effective composition with four people. William Gilpin's concept of the picturesque was familiar to all the Brontës and certainly influenced their landscapes. Perfect balance in composition, according to Gilpin, was a group of three, not four.

Elizabeth Gaskell's rather derogatory observation that *The Brontë Sisters* was a 'rough, common-looking oil-painting...little better than a sign-painting as to manipulation; but the likenesses were, I should think, admirable'¹³ was a little cruel, considering it was an early attempt at portraiture by an immature, seventeen-year old art student. What Branwell learnt from Robinson, apparent in this painting, was the technique of first making an under-drawing in pencil on to the canvas.

Branwell's portrait of his friend, John Brown, the Haworth stone-mason and sexton of Patrick's church, is also undated but considering Brown lived in Haworth, it could have been painted on Branwell's weekend trips home while studying with Robinson in Leeds in the summer of 1836. Indeed it is tempting to think that this portrait may have been part of his portfolio to present to the Royal Academy on some future occasion. The improvement in overall technique and draughtsmanship is considerable when compared with his earlier portraits and reflects Robinson's influence. This was deliberate as art students were expected to copy their teachers' works. In fact a critique of Robinson's paintings in the *Leeds Intelligensia* of 10 July, 1835 described Robinson's portraits of children as

Very expressive but somewhat hard features...there is an absence of the imaginative which we are sure the artist can supply if he pleases. We would point to the work of Reynolds.¹⁴

Perhaps a similar comment could apply to some of Branwell's portraits.

How ever improbable it may be that Branwell's letter to the Royal Academy went beyond the draft stage, it is even less likely that he made any other serious attempts to gain admission to the Royal Academy school, for Robinson no doubt would have realised that Branwell's portfolio did not, and probably never would, meet the Royal Academy's stringent admission requirements of ten works of art including examples 'from the skeleton' and 'from the antique'.¹⁵ How long he continued lessons with



Emily Brontë (scrap), by Branwell.

Robinson in Leeds is not known but on February 1 1836 Branwell was admitted to the Masonic Lodge in Haworth and according to the Minutes, attended every meeting. The years 1836 to mid 1838, therefore, present somewhat of a mystery. Branwell was without a profession and without a means of supporting either himself or his family and to his bitter disappointment, all attempts to have his literary works published by *Blackwood's Magazine* were unsuccessful.

Patrick Brontë to John Driver, Esquire, of Liverpool.

Haworth – near
Bradford, Yorkshire,

Feby.23d. 1838.

Dear Sir,

You are aware, that I have been looking out, during some time, in order to procure a respectable situation, for my Son Branwell. As yet, however, I have not succeeded, according to my wishes, or his. I once thought that he might get into the Mercantile line – but there seem to be many and great difficulties in reference to this. I then, turned my thoughts to a University Education, but this would require great expense, and four or five years from hence, ere he could, in a pecuniary way, do Any thing for himself. . . I am now, of the opinion, that it might be, the most prudent of all plans. . . to endeavour to procure for him, a Situation as Clerk, in a Bank. . . I think it would be to his advantage to go farther from home, And to see a little more of the World. . . On these grounds I have taken the liberty of applying to You, as the most likely of any Gentleman. . . Trusting, that you will kindly excuse, this trouble, with our joint regards, to You and Your Brother, I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours, very respectfully,

And truly,

P. Brontë¹⁶

This letter clearly indicates that Patrick was looking for alternative careers for Branwell, preferably as a bank clerk rather than a portrait artist in Bradford. A probable reason for his caution can be detected in Branwell's 1835 letter to William Robinson: his noticeable lack of self-discipline. 'After repeated delays, for which I am ashamed to apologise I have at length nearly completed my picture . . .' Branwell wrote. It would appear that even in these early days Branwell was having difficulty following a strict, training routine. In fact, despite lessons from Robinson, Branwell never fully mastered the technique of mixing and applying pigments and making subtle gradations of light and shade.¹⁷ Also, his portfolio lacked examples of careful, disciplined studies of anatomy, 'the grammar of painting' as Patrick so rightly said, and of classical sculpture which usually meant drawings of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum. Why Branwell did not avail himself of opportunities to study anatomy and copy plaster casts of classical sculptures during this time was perhaps due to a growing self-doubt in his artistic ability combined with a long-standing, ever increasing tendency towards self indulgence and his propensity for wild mood swings. This instability ultimately overcame him so that on his deathbed, the 31- year-old Branwell was to say so tragically to the same John Brown whose portrait he had painted over ten years earlier, 'In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good'.¹⁸

But to return to happier days. It was the summer of 1838 when the decision was made for Branwell to become a portrait painter in Bradford, despite significant gaps in his technical training. Bradford was chosen because it was the home of Patrick's friend and relative by marriage, the Reverend William Morgan, who arranged Branwell's lodgings with the Kirby family there. Both Morgan and the Vicar of Bradford, Henry Heap were amongst Branwell's earliest sitters but neither portrait has survived.

Bradford in the late 1830s was a thriving industrial town dependent on the wool industry, with enough wealthy families convinced of their own importance to ensure a demand for portraiture if not for art generally. The George Hotel in Market Street was a well-known, convivial meeting place for the artists, writers and musicians of Bradford. Branwell, with his exuberant wit and gift of repartée, was a popular member of a lively group of about 20 brilliant men, including the poet, Richard Story; Hartley Coleridge, son of Samuel Coleridge; Richard Waller, the portrait artist, plus several very successful artists/engravers including Joseph Clayton Bentley, William Overend Geller, John and Charles Cousen, and many more. Two members of the group became Branwell's closest friends, the artist John Hunter Thompson who had also studied under William Robinson, and the brilliant sculptor, Joseph Bentley Leyland.

Another member of the group was William Dearden, the Keighley schoolmaster who knew Branwell as a child. It was this staunch group of drinking companions who rallied to try and salvage Branwell's reputation after the publication in 1857 of Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* which they thought highlighted Charlotte's virtue and unfairly exaggerated Branwell's alcohol and drug problems. Dearden was the first to make the erroneous suggestion that *Wuthering Heights* was at least partly the work of Branwell Brontë when his article *Who wrote Wuthering Heights?* appeared in the Halifax Guardian on 15 June, 1867. The controversy this article sparked continues to this day. Francis Leyland, younger brother of Branwell's closest friend, Joseph Bentley Leyland, wrote a two-volume biography in 1886: *The Brontë Family with special reference to Patrick Branwell Brontë* which could be renamed *The Brontë Family and in defence of Patrick Branwell Brontë*. Branwell's friendship with Joseph Leyland probably led to more harm than good as they both became incurable alcoholics. Branwell's death in 1848 was followed just three years later by that of Joseph Leyland, in debt and in the Manor Goal, Halifax, aged only thirty-nine.

Branwell painted about eleven portraits during his year in Bradford which ended in May, 1839. His most successful works were of the Kirby family and their niece, Margaret Hartley. The portrait of Mrs Kirby is almost a caricature but was probably an accurate rendition of a toothless, querulous old lady who later plagued Branwell with supposedly unrealistic demands that he finish varnishing her paintings. Branwell must have enjoyed the company of the young Margaret Hartley, however, and his portrait of her is surely his greatest achievement, despite her unnaturally long arms. In 1893 Margaret Hartley recalled that Branwell ‘was a very steady young gentleman, his conduct was exemplary, and we liked him very much...Whilst lodging with us he painted my portrait and those of my uncle and aunt, and all three were accounted good likenesses.’¹⁹

Dear Ellen,

...Branwell, who used to enliven us, is to leave us in a few days to enter the situation of a private tutor in Ulverston. How he will like or settle remains yet to be seen; at present he is full of hope and resolution.

I, who know his variable nature, and his strong turn for active life, dare not be too sanguine. We are as busy as possible preparing for his departure, and shirt-making and collar-stitching fully occupy our time...²⁰

Charlotte Brontë

28th December, 1839

‘His variable nature, and his strong turn for active life’ was Charlotte’s euphemistic way of describing Branwell’s violent mood swings and his increasingly reckless life style which invariably resulted in his inability to pursue any career with long-term success. He simply lacked the stamina to live up to the unrealistic expectations of his family and in the last three years allowed his life to descend into alcoholism and drug addiction. But he was also the product of poor decision-making – something for which Patrick must also share the blame – and a total ignorance of what the demands of a professional artist would entail. His natural reticence at seeking commissions in the face of stiff competition from older, more established artists, for example, meant that at best he could only demand the lowest prices, and this was quite apart from the perhaps not unwarranted criticism that his degree of talent as a portrait artist was rather limited.

But the main reason for his failure to succeed as a professional artist was his inability to diversify, perhaps because of an unwillingness to compromise, in a provincial environment which demanded a variety of skills. Had he ventured

into the area of engraving, which would have well suited his talents and where there was always a ready market, he would have had far more monetary success as exemplified by several of his artist friends at the George Hotel, notably William Overend Geller and John and Charles Cousen who were already engaged in this lucrative field. Nor did he consider becoming a sign painter or house painter, occupations which would have ensured him of at least an adequate income. Not even his Royal Academy-trained teacher, William Robinson whose death occurred only a few months after Branwell



Early daguerreotype portrait studio 1842 - complete with numbered people and objects to place them in the tightly organised context.

left Bradford was able to sustain an adequate livelihood in Yorkshire on portraiture alone.

In her book *Branwell Brontë: a Biography* Winifred Gérin suggests another reason:

The dramatic introduction of the Daguerreotype, so soon to supplant it [portraiture] as a means of procuring a likeness, would kill the profession stone dead at its highest levels.²¹

Juliet Barker developed this idea even further when she wrote:

Branwell was competing against not only long-established artists but also a new and much cheaper form of portraiture, the Daguerreotype photograph.²²



Branwell Brontë, The Old Hall, Thorp Green, where he tutored 1843-1845

These comments prompted my investigation into the history of the Daguerreotype process which began with the first successful picture produced by Niépce in 1827. The following year Louis Daguerre was to reduce the exposure time from 8 hours to half an hour but it was not until January 1839, that the French government bought the Daguerreotype patent. On 19 August, 1839 it was announced to an astonished world that a Daguerreotype image 'requires no knowledge of drawing.'²³ The first public

demonstration in London of the process took place the following month on 11 September. The excessively long exposure made sitting extremely uncomfortable, so it was not surprising that most early Daguerreotype subjects were static such as buildings and landscapes. The early 1840s, however, saw rapid technical improvements and by the mid 1850s, exposure time had been reduced, and the price of a Daguerreotype portrait had fallen from one guinea to just 1s.6d. Meanwhile William Henry Fox Talbot was experimenting with another type of photography, the calotype which was eventually to supplant the Daguerreotype and become the prototype of modern photography as it used negatives and allowed copies to be made.

Richard Beard opened the first Daguerreotype portrait studio in Regent Street in March 1841 and was the sole patentee in England and Wales until 1853. Until then, prospective British photographers had to purchase a licence from Beard for a considerable sum. By 1855 there were 66 photographic establishments in England and his figure had almost doubled by 1857.

Some early photographers were itinerant, including Edward Holland who practised for a short period in Yorkshire in 1843. Many photographers were women. The most famous were Eliza Constable who had a studio in Brighton, and Lady Frances Elizabeth Jocelyn, a train-bearer at Queen Victoria's wedding, whose studio was near Hastings. Her most famous work was the 1858 photo of a family group on the steps of Lord Palmerson's house.

Doubtless the Daguerreotype photograph had an impact on portrait artists from the early 1840s onwards, but Branwell had abandoned his career early in 1839, about the same time the French government purchased the patent. He had already returned to Hawarth several months before the process was made public and a year before Richard Beard established the first Daguerreotype studio²⁴ in England. In 1855 when the Bradford-born photographer, William Barret established photographic studios in York and Durham followed by William Chatterton in Bradford a year later, Branwell Brontë had been dead over seven years. To say, therefore, that the advent of the Daguerreotype process was a reason for Branwell's abandonment of his career in portraiture is in any event premature.

Branwell's tutorship with the Postlethwaites of Ulverston was followed by a position as a railway clerk at Sowerby Bridge and Luddenden Foot until March, 1842 and then in 1843 by his disastrous appointment as tutor at Thorp Green with the Robinson family which ended abruptly in July, 1845. It

would appear that he abandoned painting in oils altogether upon leaving Bradford but continued to make pencil sketches of people and landscapes, at least until 1844. His pen and ink drawings of his last three years, however, as he descended into a state of mental anguish, reflect his gradual obsession with death. Patrick Branwell Brontë died of tuberculosis on 24 September 1848, followed shortly after by Emily and Anne.

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- 1 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Viking, London 1997) p.32
- 2 Ibid. p.31 3 Ibid. p.33 4 Ibid. p.33-4
- 5 Both F.A. Leyland in *The Brontës with particular reference to Patrick Branwell Brontë* and Winifred Gérin in *Branwell Brontë: A Biography* mention that Branwell's London visit would have taken place in the autumn of 1835. The Royal Academy was closed in September.
- 6 Heather Glen (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (CUP 2002) p.22
- 7 According to Alexander and Sellars *The art of the Brontës*, the sketch is 192mm x 243 mm.
- 8 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Viking, London 1997) p.16
- 9 Winifred Gérin. *Branwell Brontë: A Biography* (Hutchinson & Co. 19720 p.25
- 10 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Viking, London 1997) p.26
- 11 The Obituary Notice in the Leeds Mercury, 1st September, 1839 concluded with *We are sorry to add that he has left a widow and six children totally unprovided for.*
- 12 Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars. *The Art of the Brontës* (Cambridge University Press 1995) p.309
- 13 J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (ed.) *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester University Press, 1966) p. 249
- 14 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1994) p.878, Note 46
- 15 Juliet Barker. (1994) p.881. Note 8
- 16 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Viking, London 1997) pp.57-58
- 17 Francis Leyland mentioned this in his 1886 biography *The Brontë Family with special reference to Branwell Brontë*. The reference is from Winifred Gérin. *Branwell Brontë: A Biography* (Hutchinson & Co, London, 1972) p.81
- 18 Juliet Barker. (1997) p.208, taken from Francis Leyland's 1886 biography *The Brontë Family: with special reference to Patrick Branwell Brontë* (Hurst and Balckett, London.
- 19 Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars. *The Art of the Brontës* (CUP 1995) p.331
- 20 Winifred Gérin (1972) p.161
- 21 Ibid. p.140
- 22 Juliet Barker. *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Viking, London 1997) p.58
- 23 See *Sussex Photo History , The Daguerreotype Process* for a fascinating explanation for the history of this process. www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/dagprocess.htm
- 24 Ibid. Two advertisements appeared in October, 1839 in Liverpool. *The Liverpool Mercury*, Friday, 25 October 1839, Vol. XXIX, No.1485 and *Liverpool Chronicle*, Saturday, 26 October 1839, No.717 advertising an 'Exhibition Taken from Nature' by Louis Daguerre 'with a view of Paris from the Quai de la Megisserie.'

Charlotte Brontë and Christianity¹

Christine Alexander

Adapted from a talk given to the ABA on 24th July 2010

There is an apocryphal story told about Charlotte Brontë as a child. An early biographer² says that at six years old, fired by the descriptions of the celestial city in John Bunyan's famous book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, she set off for Bradford in Yorkshire, England—some twelve miles away from the moorland village of Haworth where she lived—in the hope of reaching her dream city. She barely reached the outskirts of the village before an anxious servant rescued her and brought her home; but the incident is significant. Bunyan's story is about the journey of Christian, an everyman, carrying his sinful burden through the trials of life as he sets off for the Promised Land, the heavenly kingdom. This narrative of Christian pilgrimage caught hold of Charlotte Brontë's imagination as a young child and remained with her as a creative inspiration and, I think, a guiding hope throughout her life.



Haworth Church

There are many approaches I could take to the topic of Charlotte Brontë's Christianity and many questions we could ask about the nature of her belief. I have chosen to focus on the image of pilgrimage, since it became such an important aspect of her creativity and thought, and provides, I think, a clue to her attitude to Christianity and her strong hold on life. Her letters suggest that she saw her own life as one of pilgrimage—more frequently through 'the valley of the shadow of death' than beside 'quiet pastures'.³ Her early writings or juvenilia make frequent references to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and to Biblical motifs of journey through the wilderness; and the narratives of her mature works are structured as personal pilgrimages, in particular her most famous novel *Jane Eyre*. It is not always good critical practice to interpret works of art as indicative of the beliefs of the writer: the narrators of Brontë's novels are not synonymous with the author, but we know from the views in Brontë's letters that they are often very close and there is no doubt that her novels encompass her religious experiences and reveal her own search for Truth and meaning in life.

I'm going to begin by providing a brief religious background to what is often seen as Charlotte Brontë's unorthodox Christianity: a map of England at the time with its conflicting creeds and the nature of home influences on the young Charlotte Brontë. I'm then going to sketch her journey through the vale of tears, as she saw it, focussing particularly on her religious crisis at school. And finally, I am going to look at the way the image of pilgrimage informs her writing, especially *Jane Eyre*, which is suggestively subtitled 'An autobiography'.

The Brontës lived at a time when religion was central to the ordering of social and moral life in England. Charlotte was born in 1816 and died at the age of 38 in 1855, the eldest of the four surviving Bronte children (the others were Branwell, Emily and Anne—all writers and Emily and Anne also famous novelists).

This was a lively time for Christianity in England: the established Anglican Church was beset on all sides by a variety of dissenter churches, from the intellectual and prosperous Congregationalists and Unitarians (the faith of Charlotte Brontë's friend and biographer Elizabeth Gaskell) to the often working-class Baptists or Methodists. By mid-century dissenters represented roughly half the church-going population in England; and to them was added a growing number of Roman Catholics, some converts but most arriving from Ireland because of the great famine. There was also a growing number

of free thinkers as a result of scientific scepticism and more rigorous historical scholarship of the Bible. But the main controversy followed by the Brontës was that triggered by the Oxford Movement, led by Edward Pusey and John Henry Newman (before he moved to Roman Catholicism). They challenged the moderates in the Anglican Church—those known as the Broad Church, who were prepared to accommodate to changing views. The Broad Church leaders were people like Dr Thomas Arnold (of Rugby School) and F.D. Maurice whom Charlotte and her sister Anne admired immensely. The Broad Church was opposed to extremes: opposed to the conservatism of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement that wanted a return to the secure source of authority in Church tradition, and to the conservatism of the less moderate evangelicals and the dissenter sects who insisted on a literal belief in every word of the Bible. Charlotte and her siblings made good use of both these extremes in their writings. In her juvenilia there are savage satirical portraits of Methodism, repeated in Emily Brontë's portrait of Joseph, the Calvinist servant in *Wuthering Heights*; and at the other extreme are the light-hearted satirical portraits of the clerics in the opening chapter (called "Levitical") of Charlotte's novel *Shirley* – where even her future husband, the curate Arthur Bell Nicholls, comes in for criticism for his sympathy for the rituals of Tractarianism, the High-Anglican Oxford Movement.

Charlotte Brontë's stance in relation to these issues and to F.D. Maurice in particular, gives us some solid evidence for her mature religious position. I say mature because her position was not stable: Charlotte journeyed (as we will see) from early fears that extreme Calvinism might be true, towards universalism—the belief that hell is purgative and therefore only temporary and that ultimately all free moral creatures will share in the grace of salvation. She refused to believe that the condemnation of sinners to everlasting torment was compatible with Christ's teaching. This is why, soon after *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, a reviewer in the High Church *Guardian* (1 Dec. 1847) deplored Helen Burns's heretical belief that the human spirit would rise 'through gradations of glory'. Helen is sure that God would 'never destroy what he created' (ch. 9). Brontë wrote to her old teacher Margaret Wooler on 14 February 1850, saying confidently, 'I am sorry the Clergy do not like the doctrine of Universal Salvation; I think it a great pity for their sakes, but surely they are not so unreasonable as to expect me to deny or suppress what I believe the truth!'²⁴

I think this strong sense of personal faith is the key to Charlotte's religious stance. Certainly this was encouraged by her upbringing and by her clerical

father, despite his more orthodox beliefs. The Revd Patrick Brontë was basically what we might now call a liberal evangelical, firmly rooted in the Church of England, a man of integrity, social conscience and a strongly held Christian faith.⁵ It was this faith that Charlotte Brontë clung to—often by only a slender thread—throughout the trials and tribulations of her life.

Her first trial came with the death of her mother when she was only five years old. Her mother's sister, the unmarried Elizabeth Branwell from Cornwall, came to live with the family and took over the practical and religious management of the Brontë household. Early biographers often accuse the Aunt of instilling in her nephew and nieces a fear of Calvinist predestination, which most of them struggled with in their teenage years and which is satirised in their later novels; but critics now believe that these Calvinist beliefs were probably the result of the evangelical teachings of people like the Revd Carus Wilson at the Anglican Clergy Daughters' school at Cowan Bridge, the first school Charlotte attended and the model for the notorious Lowood school in *Jane Eyre*.



A present-day image of Cowan School, attended by Maria, Elizabeth, Anne, Emily and Charlotte.

Wilson regarded the school as a 'nursery for heaven' and although he was not intentionally cruel, many pupils fell ill because of his strict regime and so-

called godly deprivations. Charlotte's two eldest sisters died as a result of the poor treatment and the disease associated with the school. The traumatic experience left her as the eldest of the surviving children, expected to assume the leadership role her talented sister Maria had fulfilled so well. She was also affected by Wilson's books for children and his monthly magazine *The Child's Friend*, which had widespread publication throughout Britain. Their detrimental psychological effect on children like the Brontës should not be underestimated. They included dire warnings of eternal damnation for children struck down by God, without time for repentance and as punishment for their sins. This was supposed to encourage good behaviour. Wilson regarded a good child's death—like that of Charlotte's sisters and of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*—, however painful, as something to thank God for, and a means of encouraging other children to 'seek the Lord' and find salvation. He is brilliantly satirised in *Jane Eyre* as the Revd Brocklehurst, one of the many clergy that Charlotte Brontë sees as a whited sepulchre, a travesty of true Christianity.

At the age of 15, Charlotte went to Roe Head boarding school in Mirfield for a year and a half, and then returned as a teacher three years later. There she again encountered Anglican clergymen who held similar Calvinist beliefs. Both she and her sister Anne became depressed, largely as a result of brooding on such beliefs, worrying during their adolescent years about their unworthiness and the resulting eternal damnation. Fortunately they also met clergymen of other persuasions: they were strongly influenced (in Anne's case we might say 'saved') by the Moravians, especially the Revd James La Trobe who visited the school and comforted Anne with his more humane message of the saving grace of Christ. The Moravians were a small protestant denomination from Europe that was well established in the Manchester area and who preached the doctrine of Universal salvation.

This was a formative time for Charlotte. She was now nineteen and although her employer Miss Wooler was kind, Charlotte was impatient, passionate and constitutionally unsuited to teaching the uninterested daughters of the local woollen manufacturers. Her mind was elsewhere, as it had been throughout her childhood: focussed on her 'silent, unseen land of thought'²⁶—the imaginary kingdoms of Glass Town and Angria that were the creative inspiration for her early writing. Her many stories, poems and plays (more in quantity than all her novels combined) centred first on the Duke of Wellington and then on his eldest son Arthur Wellesley, the Marquis of Duro,

Duke of Zamorna and finally King of Angria. The early Glass Town, as its name suggests, was relatively fanciful, based on biblical imagery from the Book of Revelation with its celestial city of light and precious stones. But by the age of 19, she had become considerably more realistic, engaged with examining human relationships and especially the love affairs of her Byronic hero Zamorna and the many beautiful women who worshipped him. She was able to conjure up visions of her imaginary world, to see her characters in her 'mind's eye' and then write about them. This creative life became solace and security for her, but it also led to a fixation on Zamorna and his affairs. In fact Charlotte became obsessive about her own creation and, like the later Jane Eyre, worried that she had made an idol of her 'mental King'. She increasingly saw her beloved Glass Town and Angria, her 'bright darling dream', as sinful, referring to it now as 'the infernal world' and 'the world below'.⁷

But she could not confess this sin to anyone. She could not relinquish her secret imaginary world, since it was this dream world that sustained her through what she called 'the wretched bondage', her life as a teacher at Roe Head. This meant that she began to live in two conflicting worlds, so that the intrusion of the one upon the other had the force of physical pain. She records in her Roe Head journal: 'All this day I have been in a dream, half miserable and half ecstatic: miserable because I could not follow it out uninterruptedly; ecstatic because it shewed almost in the vivid light of reality the ongoings of the infernal world'.⁸ When her Angrian dream is interrupted by some unsuspecting pupil she writes angrily: 'But just then a Dolt came up with a lesson, I thought I should have vomited.' The disjunction between the dismal real world and her creative life was extreme. She despised her pupils and she wished that she had 'the lofty faith' of St Stephen who in his martyrdom was able to bless his foes.⁹ She found some relief in writing confessional letters to her pious friend Ellen Nussey that tell only half the story of her religious melancholia at this time. She writes—

If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel Society as it is, wretchedly insipid you would pity and I dare say despise me. But Ellen I know the treasures of the *Bible* I love and adore them. I can *see* the Well of Life in all its clearness and brightness; but when I stoop down to drink of the pure waters they fly from my lips as if I were Tantalus.¹⁰

She feels divorced from Christ's saving grace. She agonizes over whether her supplication to Christ is motivated by a contrite heart or merely by her inward

agony. In her poetry she yearns for her childhood dreams of heaven when she was blindly pious, unconscious of evil; now sinful terrors plague her mind, spectral visions foretell her death and the church tower bears down on her spirit like an awful giant. She is afraid to pray. She speaks of the ‘ghastly power’ and ‘grinding tyranny’ of her thoughts, fed in infancy by Wilson’s extreme books ‘of ghostly and spectral dread’. This is the ‘dreadful doom’ of Hypochondria, Charlotte’s word for her intense depression that she translated so vividly into the experience of Lucy Snowe in her last novel *Villette*. In the novel, Lucy feels ‘torn, racked and oppressed in mind ... galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable sense of despair about the future’ (ch. 15). Only Charlotte’s departure from teaching and her return home to where she was free to write about her Angrian world could resolve for now her intense conflict between duty and creativity.

But Charlotte Brontë still had to earn a living: she tried governessing with disastrous results and became increasingly frustrated with the enclosed conventional life she was expected to live as a woman. Her ambition was first to be a painter but women were barred from the Academy schools and what little money the Brontës had was to be spent on her brother’s artistic career, since he was expected to provide for his sisters. She then focussed on writing and wrote to the poet laureate Robert Southey for advice. His advice is famous (or infamous): ‘Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life:



Hall Green Baptist Church Haworth

& it ought not to be'.¹¹ Southey expressed the conventional Victorian censure against women writers, an opinion which could only increase Charlotte's frustration at the limits put on women's capacity to earn a living and to make a mark in the world. Ambition in a woman was frowned on and publication was conventionally seen as egotistical. Yet she was grateful for Southey's acknowledgment of her talents and her reply carefully notes that he did not actually forbid her to write so long as she did not neglect her 'real duties'.

So she wrote on and the result, as you know, was four famous novels: *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*. But literary success did not mean that she escaped further disappointments in life—far from it. Plans for a school of her own (run with her sisters) failed, and further education in Brussels where she went to improve her languages and teach, resulted again in loneliness and deep depression. She felt isolated as a Protestant foreigner in a Roman Catholic country and the hero-worship she had for her teacher Constantin Heger, a devout married man, developed into an obsession. Her mental torture became so great that when wandering the streets and finding herself in the Catholic cathedral of Sainte Gudule, vehement Protestant though she was, she had an overwhelming need to make confession—a situation she later used to powerful effect in *Villette*. On her return home Charlotte kept the shameful torment of unrequited love for a married man a secret from her family; but it manifested itself in the headaches and 'sickliness' she suffered throughout the rest of her life whenever she was under stress. Again her writing provided consolation and she had her first taste of literary celebrity with her novel *Jane Eyre*. But the literary acclaim she had so long sought soon paled beside a further onslaught of family tragedy. Within a month of starting her novel *Shirley*, her three siblings died in rapid succession from tuberculosis: first Branwell, then Emily and finally Anne within only eight months of each other.

Charlotte was now left desolate. She had lost not only her brother and two beloved sisters but the main support for her literary endeavours, since the three sisters had always discussed their plots, style and characters together. She turned again to her writing and persevered, grateful that she had an occupation and the courage to pursue it. The novel *Shirley* (1849) celebrates the need for activity in women's lives and their right to self-respecting work.

In *Jane Eyre* there is a pervasive image of life as a pilgrimage towards that country 'from whose bourn No traveller returns'. Hers is the journey of a passionate young woman who—like her author—seeks self-respect and independence, who must endure the degradation of being a governess, who

must combat the temptation to live with a married man she recognises as her soul mate, and who must resist the equally strong temptation to fulfil her duty to God by being a missionary in India. Her duty she finally believes lies elsewhere, to fulfil her destiny as a woman. She believes she has as much a duty to herself as a creature of God with particular talents, as to others. In her hour of greatest need, when she is tempted to become the lover of Rochester, Jane's personal fortitude and self-reliance is sustained by her Christian principles: 'I will keep the law given by God ... Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour: stringent are they; inviolate they shall be' (ch. 27). As mistress she could play the part of Rochester's wife and fool society; but she knows she can only maintain her self-respect and personal integrity when her conscience is clear before God.

Charlotte Brontë's unconventional upbringing and her religious training had bred in her a tenacious commitment to this kind of personal truth. *Jane Eyre* expresses her rebellion against social convention and against what she terms 'the warped system of things' (preface to *Jane Eyre*). It is difficult for us to judge now just how radical this novel was when it first appeared. But we can get a good idea from contemporary reviews, like the influential review by Elizabeth Rigby who condemned *Jane Eyre* as 'pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition' and, if by a woman, the work of an immoral one who has 'long forfeited the society of her own sex' (*The Quarterly*, December 1848). Many readers were shocked by Jane Eyre's plea for the equality of all before God and for spiritual affinity in marriage. And when the author was discovered to be a clergyman's daughter there was more scandal. Even Charlotte Brontë's own godmother would never speak to her again. Charlotte replied in her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, reminding her critics of 'certain simple truths':

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is no religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns... appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ.

In the last year of her life Charlotte Brontë achieved a personal happiness that had for so long escaped her, when she married Arthur Bell Nicholls (1819-1906), her father's curate for seven years. It was not the passionate romance

she had longed for and imagined in her writings, but her letters demonstrate genuine happiness during the all-too brief period of her married life. In less than a year after the wedding, at the age of 38, she died of complications in the early stages of pregnancy.

Her first biographer Elizabeth Gaskell, a deeply Christian woman herself, who had known Charlotte in the last years of her life, marvelled at her quiet survival of a life of trial and tribulation: ‘the wonder to me is how she can have kept heart and power alive in her life of desolation’.¹² Gaskell portrayed her subject as a long-suffering daughter whose tragic life had been directed by duty and stoicism. I believe that Charlotte Brontë’s heroic survival of such a tough pilgrimage through life was the result of her strong religious faith, however unorthodox. I think we can say, in conclusion, that her personal commitment to ‘the world-redeeming creed of Christ’ meant that she believed that Christ would never finally abandon a creature he had made in his own image, that she would eventually find justice in the next world if not in this world, and that meanwhile it was her duty to exercise her strong creative encouragement of her fellow human beings.

Notes:

1 This talk was first delivered at St John’s Church, Canberra, in October 2008.

2 T. Wemyss Reid, *Charlotte Brontë: A Monograph* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), pp. 24-6.

3 Psalm 23: often quoted by Charlotte Brontë, e.g. *Jane Eyre*, ch. 37.

4 *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a selection of letters by family and friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 343.

5 He was ordained an Anglican priest in 1807 and, after several curacies, was appointed Perpetual Curate of Haworth in 1820.

6 Christine Alexander, “Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head”, *Norton Critical Edition: Charlotte Brontë, ‘Jane Eyre’*, 3rd edition. ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York and London: 2001, p. 407.

7 Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 142, 144.

8 Alexander, “Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head”, p. 403.

9 Alexander, *Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 141.

10 Smith (ed), *Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, vol. 1, p. 144. As punishment for offending the gods, Tantalus was plunged into a river up to his chin and tortured with insatiable thirst. Whenever he tried to drink, the river receded; and so he was continually “tantalized” and continually disappointed.

11 Smith (ed), *Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, vol. 1, pp. 166-8.

12 Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple & Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966), pp. 10-12.

The Plot & Characters of

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

by Anne Brontë

1820-1849



by **Christopher Cooper** - A gift to members of the Australian Brontë Association from the President, Christmas 2000.

The illustrations are from the Folio Society edition of the novel.

PLOT

PART I: Narration by Gilbert Markham in a letter to his friend.

CHAP 1: THE NEW TENANT

Gilbert learns from his family that Wildfell Hall has a tenant — a young widow. She is observed closely, especially by Gilbert, when she attends church.



CHAP 2: GILBERT MEETS MRS GRAHAM AND HER YOUNG SON

While out hunting Gilbert finds himself in the vicinity of Wildfell Hall and rescues a little boy from a fall. Gilbert meets Mrs Graham, the boy's mother. Not having seen

the rescue she is at first hostile.

CHAP 3: ON BRINGING UP CHILDREN

Mrs Graham visits Gilbert's family with young Arthur and an animated discussion takes place on the extent to which children should be shielded from temptation.

CHAP 4: GOSSIP

At a small party some of Gilbert's neighbours discuss Mrs Graham and her ideas on children.



CHAP 5: THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

Gilbert and his sister Rose visit Mrs Graham and see her studio. She paints for a dealer in London.

CHAP 6: GILBERT'S GROWING INTEREST IN MRS GRAHAM

Gilbert comes upon Mrs Graham painting by a brook and talks to her. In his eyes she is beginning to eclipse Eliza, who has been something of a sweetheart. Though Helen Graham is somewhat cold towards him he prefers her depth to Eliza's shallowness.

CHAP 7: THE EXCURSION TO THE SEA

Gilbert accompanies his brother and sister and Eliza on a visit to Wildfell Hall and they propose a walk to the coast for a picnic when the weather is warmer. Somewhat reluctantly Helen Graham agrees to accompany them. The outing takes place and at one stage Helen goes off from the party to a nearby cliff to paint, and this gives Gilbert an opportunity to spend some time with her alone.

CHAP 8: THE GIFT OF *MARMION*

As a surprise Gilbert offers a copy of *Marmion* to Helen. She has expressed interest in it and he has bought it specially. But she doesn't want to accept it unless he allows her to pay for it. She relents but makes it clear that he is not to presume anything by it and that their friendship must continue as it is.

CHAP 9: MALICIOUS GOSSIP

Gilbert hears of damaging reports about Mrs Graham's respectability and insinuations involving Mr Lawrence her landlord.

CHAP 10: GILBERT BEGINS TO DISLIKE LAWRENCE

Gilbert visits Helen to show his support. On leaving he meets Mr Lawrence on his way to visit her, 'as her landlord', but Gilbert suspects other motives and heated words are exchanged.

CHAP 11: THE MUCH-TALKED-ABOUT WOMAN

Many of Gilbert's neighbours, including his sister and Rev Millward, warn him against continuing his friendship with Mrs Graham because of her doubtful respectability.

CHAP 12: HELEN'S SPECIAL VISITOR

Gilbert is deeply unhappy because: (1) everyone unjustly accuses Helen of having doubtful morals; (2) judging by her behaviour with Lawrence, they might be right.



CHAP 13: THE ATTACK ON THE ROAD

Gilbert sets off on business and comes upon Lawrence on the road. In jealous anger he strikes him with his whip and Lawrence falls off his horse with a bloody head. Gilbert leaves but, prompted by conscience, returns to offer help. This is spurned so Gilbert continues on his way. On his return he is relieved to see that Lawrence has gone. He arrives home to reports of Lawrence being thrown from his horse. Lawrence, not wanting to involve Helen, chooses to remain silent as to the real facts.

PART II: Helen's Diary

CHAP 16: HELEN REJECTS BOARHAM

Helen rejects Mr Boarham's proposal of marriage.

CHAP 17: THE WARNING

At a dinner party Huntingdon rescues Helen from the unwelcome attentions of Mr Wilmot. Later her aunt warns her against him, but she defends him.

CHAP 18: THE COURTSHIP

Huntingdon, Wilmot and Boarham spend some days with Helen's uncle and Helen gets to know Huntingdon better.

CHAP 19: HUNTINGDON'S PROPOSAL

Huntingdon proposes. Helen tells him he must ask her uncle and aunt.

CHAP 20: HELEN ACCEPTS

Helen's uncle, despite some misgivings, considers the match a sound investment and gives his consent. He writes to Helen's father.

CHAP 21: CONSENT

Helen's father gives his consent but Annabella thinks she is making a mistake.

CHAP 22: LOWBOROUGH'S FORTUNES

Arthur tells Helen of Lowborough's financial ruin through gambling and of the plan to remedy it by marrying Annabella. He concedes that both the ruin and the plan owed a lot to his influence over his friend. However when Annabella confides to Arthur that she was only marrying Lowborough for his title and ancient seat, he chooses not to warn his friend and so the engagement takes place.

CHAP 23: TOO RELIGIOUS?

Helen has now married Arthur and they are living at Grassdale Manor. She loves him but is becoming more and more aware of his faults. Meanwhile Arthur is afraid that Helen is too serious about her religion. She says that she cannot love him more than God allows and would be happier if he, Arthur, loved her a little less and loved God more. The discussion ends with Arthur declaring that it is better to enjoy today's dinner than to hope for a feast tomorrow.

CHAP 24: THE QUARREL

Arthur becomes very irritable, with the quiet of country life, with the weather, and with Helen and declares his intention to go to London. She doesn't want to go but agrees to accompany him.

CHAP 25: THE SEPARATION

After a month in London Arthur insists on Helen returning while he remains for 'a couple more weeks to attend to business'. She does return and becomes increasingly upset as repeatedly he postpones his return. He finally comes home, much dissipated, after nearly two months of separation. As the hunting season approaches he plans to invite some of his friends to Grassdale.

CHAP 26: COQUETRY

The party arrive. Lady Lowborough flirts with Arthur and he doesn't discourage her. Although Helen regards it as perfectly innocent it nevertheless

annoys her, though she determines not to notice.

CHAP 27: HELEN UPBRAIDS ARTHUR

Eventually Helen challenges Arthur over his conduct towards Annabella and for having consumed too much wine. His expressions of remorse are undisguisedly theatrical. However he does restrain himself during the next few days.

CHAP 28: LITTLE ARTHUR IS BORN

Helen and Arthur now have a son and this, to some extent, compensates her for the fact that there is now little sympathy or communication between them. He goes to London for months and writes little and infrequently.

CHAP 29: WALTER HAS NEWS OF ARTHUR



Walter has come to Grassdale from London to stay with his mother and he gives Helen news of her husband's dissipation there. He wonders that he can neglect such a wonderful wife and son.

CHAP 30: SOME IMPROVEMENT IN ARTHUR

Arthur returns, sick and weary. At first there are arguments over his conduct, especially his fondness for wine. Helen's patient watchfulness and Walter's encouragement help to some extent.

CHAP 31: INTOXICATED

Arthur goes hunting in Scotland for several months. After his return he invites his friends to Grassdale. Here we witness a typical evening of various degrees of intoxication among the men: Lowborough not at all, Hargrave slightly, but Hattersley, Grimsby and Huntingdon severely.

CHAP 32: IN CONFIDENCE

Millicent confides to Helen that while she still loves her husband she would like Esther to be more cautious in choosing a husband. Hattersley tells Helen that Millicent bothers him by being too yielding. Hargrave wants to get Helen

alone to confide something of importance.

CHAP 33: THE WRONG WOMAN IN THE SHRUBBERY

Walking in the garden after dinner Helen comes across Arthur. Thinking her to be Annabella he reacts warmly to her embraces but, discovering his mistake, he recoils in confusion and anxiously tries to hurry her inside. Hargrave engages Helen in a chess game while Arthur rendezvous with Annabella. But Helen, becoming suspicious, spies on them. Later that night she confronts Arthur with her discovery.

CHAP 34: HELEN CONFRONTS ANNABELLA

Helen confronts Annabella but promises her that not to tell Lowborough to spare him the pain, provided she leaves the house with no further misconduct.

CHAP 35: HARGRAVE OFFERS HIS PROTECTION

Hargrave, alluding to the fact that her marriage is over in all but outward appearances, declares his love for her and offers her his protection. Helen refuses both with great passion.

CHAP 36: HARGRAVE CONTINUES HIS ATTENTIONS

Arthur goes away on another hunting trip and Hargrave becomes a frequent visitor.

CHAP 37: HARGRAVE PROFESSES LOVE FOR HELEN

Hargrave makes another declaration of his love, which Helen rebuffs as strongly as ever. He goes away to Paris.

CHAP 38: LOWBOROUGH DISCOVERS ANNABELLA'S TREACHERY

On a subsequent visit Lowborough discovers the truth about Arthur and Annabella. He takes it very badly and upbraids Helen for not telling him.

CHAP 39: ENCOUNTER WITH HARGRAVE

Helen tells Hargrave of her plan to escape from her husband but rejects his offer to assist. Words become heated and when the other gentlemen enter they see Helen's flushed countenance. Hints of something improper are made

but Helen denies them strongly, even hauling Hargrave back to admit that she was innocent.

CHAP 40: THE PLOT UNCOVERED

Huntingdon discovers Helen's diary, confiscates her keys and destroys her painting equipment.

CHAP 41: LAWRENCE'S VISIT

While Arthur is away Lawrence stays for a fortnight. While he is indignant about Arthur's treatment of her and offers to help her if she runs away, he urges her to find ways of coping with her situation.

CHAP 42: HATTERSLEY REFORMS

Helen talks to Hattersley about Millicent. He thinks she meekly accepts his dissipated life-style because she doesn't mind but when Helen shows him some of Millicent's letters to her he realises otherwise and is horrified. He vows to turn over a new leaf.

CHAP 43: THE GOVERNESS

Arthur hires a governess but Helen suspects that she was intended to become her replacement. This provides the catalyst to flee.

CHAP 44: ESCAPE

Helen, little Arthur and Rachel make their escape and, after a day's journey, arrive at Wildfell Hall.

PART III: Continuation of Gilbert's Narrative

CHAP 45: RECONCILED

Having read the diary Gilbert hurries to Helen. She tells him that she has decided that it is best for them not to see each other again. They may communicate by letter, as friends, but not for six months. Gilbert, now knowing that Lawrence is Helen's brother, visits him and apologises for his attack. Lawrence accepts this apology and invites him to visit from time to time.

CHAP 46: GILBERT'S ADVICE TO LAWRENCE

Gilbert hears of Helen through her brother. Meanwhile Lawrence has been seeing quite a bit of Jane Wilson and Gilbert knows that Jane has set her eyes on him, but he warns Lawrence against her, partly for her cold-hearted

ambitious shallow-minded character and partly because (not knowing that Helen was his sister and fearing her as a rival) she hates Helen.

While not

admitting it to Gilbert, Lawrence does subsequently heed the advice.



CHAP 47: HELEN GOES BACK TO HUNTINGDON

Hearing from Eliza that Helen has gone back to her husband Gilbert rushes off to Lawrence. Yes, she has returned to Grassdale — but the reason is that Arthur is seriously ill. Lawrence has a letter from her which Gilbert insists on seeing.

Letter 1: Arthur is gravely ill but is ungrateful to Helen for her patient care, claiming that she acts solely for her heavenly reward and that she hopes her charity will 'heap coals of fire on his head'.

Lawrence agrees to show Gilbert all future letters from Helen.

CHAP 48: THE IRRITABLE PATIENT

Letter 2: Arthur has improved, but with the improvement comes increasing irritability. Esther refuses to marry according to her parents' wishes and suffers for it. Sanctioned by Helen's permission Gilbert tells the true facts of Helen's history to Rose and their mother. Rose will tell Eliza and so the whole village will see Helen in a more favourable light.

Postscript on Eliza Millward: She marries a tradesman.

Postscript on Jane Wilson: Being unable to find a husband good enough, she becomes a cold-hearted supercilious, censorious old maid.



CHAP 49: DEATH COMES TO HUNTINGDON

Letter 3: Through his obstinacy Arthur suffers a relapse and becomes very difficult to manage and Helen puts young Arthur into Esther's care. Though Huntingdon's life is at risk he is careless that his soul is also in peril.

Letter 4: Arthur's health continues to deteriorate. The Hattersleys visit. Arthur reports a sudden absence of pain, which Helen interprets as a sign that the end is near.

Letter 5: Arthur has gone and Helen describes his last moments.

CHAP 50: FREE AT LAST

Gilbert cannot but be pleased at the news of Helen's release from a tyrannical marriage, partly for her sake but partly because it improves his own prospects.

Postscript on Lord and Lady Lowborough: She elopes to the continent with a "gallant". They split up; she gets into debt and dies wretchedly. He divorces her and remarries — a lady who is unremarkable in beauty and status, but sensible and good.

Postscript on Grimsby: He continues his moral decline and dies in a drunken brawl.

Postscript on Hattersley: He moves to the country, gives up his friends of ill repute, breeds horses and becomes respectable.

CHAP 51: THE WRONG BRIDE

Eliza tells Gilbert that Helen is shortly to marry Walter Hargrave. Distressed, Gilbert goes to Lawrence for confirmation but finds him gone to Grassdale. Gilbert hurries there by coach in the vain hope of being able to stop the

wedding. He arrives too late but discovers that Eliza had got it a little wrong — the groom was Lawrence himself and the bride was Esther Hargrave! Helen is not present so Gilbert hurries off in a gig to see her.



CHAP 52: THE WOMAN OF PROPERTY

Helen is not at Grassdale Manor but has been living at Staningley with her aunt. On their way there the driver tells Gilbert that Helen has inherited her uncle's property and fortune. Gilbert decides that as she is now a lady of considerable property he can no longer entertain the thoughts of a marriage with her. He decides, therefore to return home without seeing her.

CHAP 53: THE PROPOSAL

At this point Helen, her aunt and young Arthur come by in a handsome coach. Both she, and especially Arthur, insist on Gilbert coming into the house. One thing leads to another and, following a delightfully touching scene involving a twice-given rose, he finds himself being encouraged to propose and being accepted. After an agreed separation of some months he returns to woo her (and her aunt). They marry and live at Staningley with young Arthur and Mrs Maxwell. Gilbert gives his farm at Linden-Car to Fergus and his new bride. Rose marries Halford, the recipient of Gilbert's letters that comprise the entire novel.

Characters

Helen Lawrence/Huntingdon/Graham/Markham: She has raven black hair in long, glossy ringlets. Her complexion is clear and pale. She has long black eye-lashes and her brows are expressive and well defined. Her forehead is lofty and intellectual and her nose is perfect aquiline. She has a slight hollow about the cheeks and eyes. Her lips, though finely formed, were thin and firmly compressed.

Before marriage she was gay and outgoing with a lot of spirit, but her marriage very quickly made her introspective and sober and robbed her of her sense of humour. She has a strong sense of duty and is rather too confident in her ability to control others to walk the straight path. Having abandoned all hope of reforming her husband she conducts an overly string regime with her son to prevent his wandering astray. She has serious intellectual tastes (literature and painting) and despises gossip and other female pursuits.

Losing her mother early in life she lives with her aunt and uncle, the Maxwell's, and has very little to do with either her father or her older brother, Frederick. After a brief time in the gay world of society with its parties and balls she marries Arthur Huntingdon.

They have a son, young Arthur, but the marriage is a disaster due to her Huntingdon's intemperance and his dissipated friends. With Frederick's help she runs away with little Arthur and becomes the tenant of Wildfell Hall, a property belonging to her brother. Here she is known as a widow, Mrs Graham (taking her mother's maiden name), who supports herself by her painting.

She and Gilbert Markham become very good friends but, although Gilbert hints that he would like to be more than just friends, Helen resists. Some time later, news of her husband's illness drives her back to look after him but Huntingdon dies. After several incidents of misunderstanding she marries Gilbert.

Frederick Lawrence: Frederick is Helen's (somewhat older) brother. He allows Helen the use of his property Wildfell Hall to hide from her husband. Once the family home this secluded house came into his possession but 15 years ago he moved to a more comfortable house in the next parish. His neighbours do not know that the mysterious tenant is his sister and noticing

that his visits were rather more frequent than is usual for a landlord, imagine some sort of clandestine romance.

Gilbert Markham becomes jealous of him and at one stage he knocks Lawrence off his horse. But when Helen returns to her husband at Grassdale Manor Gilbert discovers that Lawrence is her brother and mutual interest in Helen's welfare brings them, somewhat uneasily, together. Lawrence goes away unexpectedly and Gilbert, having heard rumours of an impending Hargraves-Lawrence wedding, believes that he has gone to his sister's wedding. However it is Frederick's own, as he marries Esther Hargraves.

Mr & Mrs (Peggy) Maxwell: Helen's uncle and maternal aunt

Arthur Huntingdon: Arthur is the somewhat wild, but interesting suitor to Helen who becomes her husband. He is the son of a late friend of Mr Maxwell. He has laughing blue eyes, but is prone to every vice that is common to youth and lacks principles.

Helen is conscious of his somewhat dissolute nature but believes that she can lead him into the paths of righteousness. However she is no match for his circle of friends who encourage his intemperance, both in the narrow sense of his taking more wine than is good for him, and in the wider sense.

It is not so much the fact that living with him has become intolerable for herself, but the fact that she fears that he will lead young Arthur down a similar path, that brings her to secretly run away. But later she dutifully returns when she hears that he is gravely ill and nurses him patiently till he dies. He is ungrateful and unrepentant to the last.

Master Arthur Huntingdon: Arthur is Helen and Arthur's son and is about 5 years old when they come to Wildfell Hall. Although very attached to his mother he shows signs of being adversely influenced by "devil Daddy". In an attempt to protect him from a love of strong drink, Helen forces young Arthur to drink small amounts when he is sick, as a "medicine". At Wildfell Hall she is fiercely protective of him and believes that by sheltering him from temptation she can best avoid him becoming like his father.

Mr Wilmot: A friend of the Maxwells, considered a possible catch for Helen.

Annabella Wilmot/Lowborough: Mr Wilmot's niece. She is a fine dashing girl of about 25. Greatly admired by the gentlemen she is considered too much of a flirt to marry. However she does marry — Lord Lowborough.

Mrs Hargraves: She is Mr Wilmot's sister-in-law.

Walter Hargraves: He is Mr Wilmot's nephew. Although he is one of Huntingdon's friends he is somewhat critical of Arthur's behaviour towards his wife and encourages Helen to leave him. His advice is not altogether altruistic however, because he has hopes of taking Huntingdon's place when the time comes.

Esther Hargraves: Walter's sister. The Hargraves - Lawrence that Gilbert fears was between Walter and Helen is in fact between Esther and Frederick.

Milicent Hargraves/Hattersley: Walter's other sister. She marries Ralph Hattersley.

Gilbert Markham: Gilbert is the hero and despite the fact that he hates cats he is a likeable sort of chap. He manages the family farm. He is used to getting things done when it comes to practical matters about the farm but is somewhat of a ditherer when it comes to affairs of the heart.

Though the unofficial beau of Eliza Millward he takes an increasingly strong interest in the widow at Wildfell Hall and appreciates her superior depth of character and intellect. He defends her when rumours start to circulate about secret liaisons with Lawrence and the suspicion that her husband still lives. He engages in a violent jealous quarrel with Lawrence and is devastated when she returns to nurse her sick husband.

After discovering that she has inherited not only her husband's fortune but her uncle's as well he is drawn to visit her but is shy about actually making contact with one who is now so financially superior. Fate brings them together and a delightfully amusing scene involving a Christmas rose in and out of a window, Gilbert is torn between the love he feels and the fear that she will now consider herself so much above him. His diffidence is so great that Helen has to practically get down on her knees and propose to herself on his behalf! The proposal does succeed and they marry, though whether there are the right ingredients for a successful marriage is left to the reader's imagination.

Mrs Markham: Mrs Markham is Gilbert's mother who is mostly occupied by knitting and discussing the local news. She considers the needs of the men of the house, especially Gilbert, take precedence over those of her daughter. Meal times are dictated by Gilbert's comings and goings and she insists that the best parts of the meal be kept for him.

Rose: Rose is Gilbert's sister. She was aged 19 in October 1827 at the time of Helen taking up residence in the neighbourhood. She is smart and pretty and has a tidy, though dumpy, figure. She has little merry brown eyes set in a round face above bright blooming cheeks and framed by glossy, clustering curls. She marries Gilbert's friend Halford.

Fergus: Fergus is Gilbert's younger brother who loves hunting. After Gilbert marries Helen he gives the farm to Fergus.

Halford J: Halford is the mysterious friend to whom Gilbert writes the whole story. At the end Gilbert alludes to the fact that Halford has married Rose. Despite being a frequent visitor Halford appears to need to get all the family history by letter instead of in person.

Rev Michael Millward: The Reverend Michael is a tall, ponderous elderly man who wears a shovel hat and carries a stout walking stick. He has a large, square, massive-featured face. He has powerful limbs and wears knee-breeches and gaiters or black silk stockings. He is a man of fixed principles and strong prejudices. He is famous for his fixed habits and intolerance of those who do not agree with him.

He is exceedingly careful of his health, keeping early hours, and being most particular about warm dry clothes. He has good lungs and a powerful voice and, like Patrick Brontë, is said to swallow a raw egg before preaching a sermon. He is very particular about what he eats and drinks. He despises tea but likes malt liquors, bacon and eggs, ham and hung beef.

He has been the vicar at Linden-Car for many years. Although Helen lived at Wildfell Hall as a girl and her maid Rachel was then her nurse, the vicar fails to recognise them on their return to their former home. Perhaps his sight or his memory is in decline. (Certainly his health is and towards the end of the book he dies.)

Mary Millward/Wilson: Mary is Michael Millward's elder daughter. She is several years older, several inches taller and has a larger and coarser build than her sister Eliza. As befits a plain girl she is quiet and sensible. She is the family drudge and patiently nursed her mother through her last long tedious illness. While Eliza does embroidery, Mary is mending stockings. Not surprisingly she is trusted and valued by her father. Loved? The author did not say. But she was loved by all the cats, dogs, children and poor people in the neighbourhood. Hopefully human love came to her when she marries

Richard Wilson.

Eliza Millward: Michael Millward's younger daughter and a good friend of Rose Markham. She is an amusing little thing, a very engaging little creature. Her figure is slight and plump and she has a small face, nearly as round as Rose's. Her complexion is similar to Rose's but is less decidedly blooming. Her nose is *retrousse* and her features are generally irregular. She is perhaps more charming than pretty.

She has long, narrow eyes with black or very dark brown irids. Her expression is ever changing — wicked and bewitching. She has a gentle, childish voice with a light tread as soft as a cat — and the manners of a playful kitten.

It is no wonder that she bewitched Gilbert, until he came under the spell of a deeper charm.

Sarah: She is the Millwards' maid.

Mr Wilson: Mrs Wilson is the widow of a substantial farmer, a narrow-minded tattling old gossip.

Jane: Jane is Mrs Wilson's daughter. She is a young lady of some talents and more ambition. She has a boarding school education with acquired elegance of manners and has managed to lose her provincial accent. She is about 26 years old and is tall and slender. Her complexion is fair and brilliant. She has a small head with a long neck and a long chin. Her hair is neither chestnut nor auburn, but a most decided, bright, light red. Her eyes are clear hazel, quick and penetrating but devoid of poetry or feeling. She scornfully repulsed or rejected suitors in her own rank but had designs on Frederick Lawrence.

Robert Wilson: One of Mrs Wilson's 2 sons, he was a rough, countrified farmer.

Richard (Dick): Another of Mrs Wilson's 2 sons. He is a retiring, studious young man who was studying the classics with the vicar's help. He enters the church and succeeds Reverend Millward after that gentleman's death. However the Millward family connection with the parish continues with Richard marrying the vicar's useful daughter, Mary.

Mr Leighton: He is the preacher at the Staningley church.

Mr Oldfield, Mr Boreham, Mr Wilmot: These are some of unsuccessful Helen's suitors.

Lord Lowborough, Ralph Hattersley and Mr Grimsby: Along with Walter Hargraves, these are some of Arthur's friends. Lowborough dissipated his fortune in gambling and other vices but may find redemption through his marriage to Millicent Hargraves. Grimsby has a sinister cast in his countenance with a mixture of lurking ferocity and fulsome insincerity.

Rachel: She is Helen's maid. She has been with her for many years. She recalls the early days at Wildfell Hall when Helen was a girl. She was her maid at Grassdale Manor and ran away with her to Wildfell Hall.

Benson, John, Mrs Greaves and Alice Myers: Benson, as the name suggests, was the butler at Grassdale Manor. John was a servant and Mrs Greaves the housekeeper. Shortly before Helen's flight from Grassdale Alice Myers was hired as a governess to young Arthur. Perhaps attended to the needs of his father more than the son. She disappears when he falls ill and when Helen comes to him his clouded brain thinks it is Alice who has returned.

Jacob: Jacob was a man who was nearby when Eliza thought Gilbert was going to faint.

Animals:

Black Bess, Grey Tom, Nimrod: Huntingdon's horses.

Dash: Mr Huntingdon's favourite cocker spaniel.

Ruby: Helen's horse.

Sancho: Gilbert's black and white setter.

Writers & Artists

Sir Walter Scott (*"Marmion"*)

Shakespeare (*"Macbeth"*)

Vandyke

Historical Characters

Humphrey Davy: inventor of mining lamp.

Mahomet: the prophet.

Sir Herbert, Valentine: famous lovers.

Biblical Characters

Absalom, Adam, David, Eli, Jesus, Peter, Solomon.

Figures Of Speech

George: by ...

Lord Harry: by the ...

Hebe: a very ...

Miss Nancy: make a ... of him

Cupid: ...'s arrows

Caroline: generic term for sweetheart

Places

Linden-Car: This wooded valley, with its corn-fields and meadow lands, is the home of the Markhams. It is 2 miles from Wildfell Hall.

Linden-hope: This is the nearby village where Richard Wilson became vicar.

Wildfell Hall: This was the birthplace of Helen and later her refuge as the tenant of her brother. It is 2 miles from Linden-Car and 4 miles from the sea. It is near the top of a hill. It is described as a superannuated Elizabethan mansion of dark, grey stone. It is picturesque but dull and gloomy. It has thick stone mullions and little latticed panes. It is surrounded by Scotch firs, half blighted by the storms. Behind lie a few desolate fields leading up to a heath-clad summit. In front there is a garden, abandoned for many years. It is enclosed by stone walls and is entered by an iron gate with balls of grey granite surmounting the gate-posts.

Woodford: The home of Frederick Lawrence.

Ryecote Farm: The home of the Wilsons.

Staningley Hall: This is home of the Maxwells, later inherited by Helen.

Grassdale Manor: This is the home of Helen and Arthur Huntingdon. Years later, when young Arthur grew up and was married he took it over.

Fernley Manor, Cumberland: name given by Helen to her painting of Wildfell Hall

Real Places

England, London, Cambridge, Dover, Scotland, France, Paris, Italy, Rome, Berlin, Atlantic

Music and the Brontës

Michael Links

Adapted from a talk given to the ABA on 24th July 2010

Music in the 19th century was heavily influenced by the socio-political environment. In the middle of the 18th century, Europe began to move toward a new style of architecture, literature, and the arts in a movement generally known as Classicism. This sought to emulate the ideals of classical antiquity and especially those of classical Greece. The remarkable development of ideas in ‘natural philosophy’ had established itself in the public consciousness with Newton’s physics. This taste for structural clarity worked its way into the world of music, moving away from the layered polyphony of the Baroque period, towards a style where a melody over a subordinate harmony was preferred. This meant that the playing of chords, even if they interrupted the melodic smoothness of a single part, became a much more prevalent feature of music. This, in turn, made the tonal structure of works more audible.

The new style was also pushed forward by changes in the economic order and in social structure. As the 18th century progressed, the nobility became the primary patrons of instrumental music, and there was a rise in the public taste for comic opera. This led to changes in the way music was performed, the most crucial of which was the move to standard instrumental groups and the reduction in the importance of the harmonic fill beneath the music, often played by several instruments.

Musician/Composer/Performers such as Paganini, Liszt and Chopin were the pop stars of their day. They were enormously popular. Paganini, having started playing without formal instruction at age of five, was suspected of being in league with the devil. Superstitious patrons would cross themselves when he looked at them. Liszt was wowing audiences on stage at age of nine. As an adult, he had such a heavy touch that often one or two pianos would break down under his touch.

The poorer classes were to be found enjoying music in taverns and music halls. The middle to upper classes were entertained at expensive concerts and in their homes at private functions. Society demanded that eligible young



Above: Bach
Below: Handel



ladies be proficient in sewing, singing and playing an instrument. The piano was favoured, but the violin was considered ‘unladylike’. Branwell played the flute and this was undoubtedly also acceptable for ladies. It is interesting that as the demand for musical education increased, concern was expressed that young people were neglecting reading and other pastimes. In our own time, video games and television are blamed for a lack of interest and skill in reading, arts and outdoor pursuits.

The music of Bach and Handel, still popular even today, comes from the Baroque period. It was a highly structured polyphonic form of music, themes weaving in and out of treble and bass, one theme calling and answering another. Much of this music was written for the pipe organ, such as Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier*, comprising 24 preludes and fugues. His *Tocatta and Fugue in D* is probably the best known and is a challenge for aspiring organists. There are passages which require as much dexterity in the feet as in the fingers.

Handel’s best loved work is his choral piece *The Messiah*. At this time, Bach and Handel’s music was a must for churches and an essential part of a musician’s education, although by the time of the Brontës’ birth, the Classical period had arrived.

Classical music has a lighter, clearer texture than music and is less complex. It is mainly homophonic — melody above chordal accompaniment. Variety and contrast within a piece became more pronounced than before. It was assisted by the invention of the piano by Cristofori around 1700. The piano’s improvement over the harpsichord is implicit in its name ‘PianoForte’ meaning ‘Soft/Loud’. In a harpsichord, the strings are plucked. In a piano the strings are struck with a soft hammer and then damped. This allows the pianist to easily alter the volume.

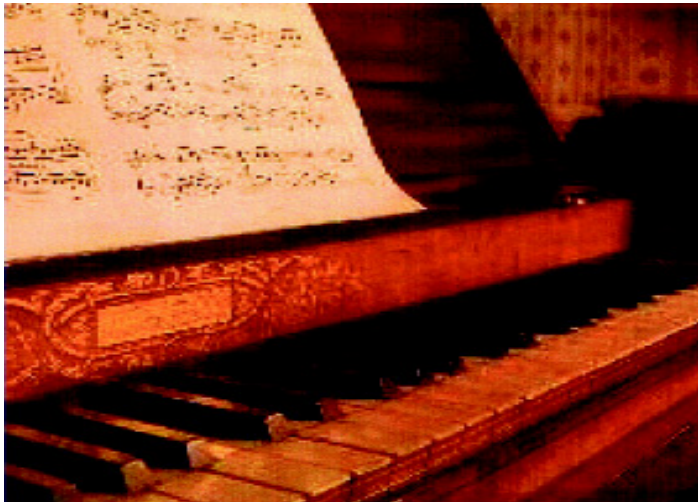
The possession of a piano, harpsichord, violin and various wind instruments plus the human voice for singing allowed for concerts at home for entertainment. Instrumental and vocal music became a popular pastime. The possession of a piano was a status symbol in middle class households.

Emily began studying the piano at Haworth in 1833 or 1834 and she soon played, in the words of Ellen Nussey, ‘with precision and brilliancy’. In 1842 she studied piano at the Heger pensionnat in Brussels and even gave piano lessons to some of the younger students there. After returning to Haworth, she acquired a new piano. At this time, in the words of Ellen Nussey, ‘the ability with which [Emily] took up music was amazing, the style, the touch, and the expression was that of a Professor absorbed heart and soul in her theme.’ While Emily did not compile a list of tunes she had a collection of music books.

Anne played piano and sang. Her playing may not have been as brilliant as Emily’s, though they played duets. She did compile a songbook of hymns and popular tunes. She also wrote several hymns and some of her poems have been set to music. A composer, Jack Hartley Rhodes set five of Anne’s poems and one of Charlotte’s to music.

Branwell learnt the flute when he was 14 and compiled a list of tunes that are recorded in his flute book, including *Blue Bonnets Over the Border*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *Jock o’ Hazeldean*, *Oh! No – We Never Mention Her*, *(Home) Sweet Home*, *The Campbells Are Comin’*, *Ye Banks and Braes o’ Bonny Doon*. He also played the organ.

Charlotte did not play an instrument. Apparently she was too short sighted to see the music. However her interest and love of music are well known. Some of her poems were later set to music.



The Brontë piano

Charlotte's poor sight prevented her from taking up a musical instrument. Her devotion to music is not in doubt, though; while in Brussels she is known to have attended at least one concert.

Anne's Agnes Grey and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*



A quartet - at home

In *Agnes Grey*, before her departure to be a governess,

Agnes bade farewell to her pet fantails and kittens and 'had played my last tune on the old familiar piano, and sung my last song to papa'. There was no music requested of her at Wellwood house. After her dismissal for incompetence, she enjoyed family life at home and amused her father 'with singing his favourite songs.' She put an advertisement in a newspaper and stated her qualifications as 'Music, singing, drawing, French, Latin and German'. She then went to Horton Lodge to teach Rosalie, Matilda, John and Charles. Matilda had the best master and 'devoted much time to music and singing'. She did not learn any lessons satisfactorily, but 'strummed through the piano for only 30 minutes' practice'...or 'vengefully thumped the piano for an hour'.

Agnes taught music to Matilda and Rosalie, who liked to learn. Learning the piano was regarded as an accomplishment by their parents. For Agnes it was a means to earn a living as well as providing her with comfort and pleasure.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, music is used for amusement, diversion and pastime. 'Fergus sat opposite, ... now whistling sotto voce to himself a snatch of a favourite air...'. 'Mr Boarham ... was walking up and down the drawing room, humming snatches of tunes...'. Lowborough and Arthur's cronies tormented Helen with their 'mad toast, and ... wild songs'.

Since the piano was a sign of social status for the upper middle class families, it was installed in almost all the households of the main characters of the novel. Helen had secured one even in her secluded life. 'I have a second hand piano, and a tolerably well-stocked book-case in my parlour.'

Music is also used to comfort. Helen comforts Arthur by singing to him. ‘He (Arthur) says he is glad to be home again.....He lies on the sofa nearly all day long; and I play and sing to him for hours together.’

Music is requested most when it is used for the amusement of a company of people. Here is a typical home party.

‘We wound up the evening with dancing – our worthy pastor thinking it no scandal to be present on the occasion, though one of the village musicians was engaged to direct our evolutions with his violin... With a single set of quadrilles, and several country dances, we carried it on to a pretty late hour, ..’

Music was also used, in those days, to win a man’s heart.

‘Now, Miss Wilmot, won’t you give us some music tonight?’ said he, ‘Do now! I know you will, when I tell you that I have been hungering and thirsting all day, for the sound of your voice. Come! The piano is vacant.’ ... ‘Meantime, she (Annabella) exultantly seated herself at the piano, and favoured him with two of his favourite songs, in such a superior style that eve I soon lost my anger in admiration, ...’

Anne’s usage of music in her two novels shows how music was appreciated and exploited among middle class families. There were no CDs or radios. Music could only be enjoyed when performed live, either in the home, if someone could play and/or sing, or at concerts.

Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, after being severely punished by her aunt, Jane is soothed by Bessie, a servant. She sings her a song about gypsies which she heard many times before but it was a very sad song. She also sings about a ‘poor orphan child’. Later in the novel, Mrs Fairfax, in a conversation with Jane, describes past family concerts:

‘She (Miss Ingram) was one of the ladies who sang: a gentleman accompanied her on the piano. She and Mr Rochester sang a duet.’

‘Mr Rochester? I was not aware he could sing.’

‘Oh! He has a fine bass voice, and an excellent taste for music.’

Villette

Villette was written after a series of family tragedies – the death of Aunt Branwell at 65 in 1842, Branwell at 31 in Sept 1848, Emily at 30 in Dec 1848

and Anne at 29 in 1849. It also followed her unrequited love for Constantin Heger in Brussels during her stays in 1842 and 1843.

One winter night, Lucy (Snowe) was invited to a concert by Dr John and his mother. It was followed by a lottery and to crown all, the King and Queen were to be present.

Charlotte attended a concert on 10th December 1843 at Salle de la Grande Harmonie which the Belgian King Leopold I and Queen Louise also attended. The drawing of a lottery took place for the benefit of charity. Art imitates life. There are other concerts in the book that mirror the actual concerts that Charlotte herself attended in Brussels.

Having been well acquainted with the music of those days, Charlotte made the most of several pieces which amplified the effect that each scene created.

Winifred Gérin wrote

The importance of tracing her true experiences, as opposed to fictional ones integrated into her novel, lies in their influence on her creative powers ... All her perceptions, as though under the influence of a drug, were heightened to their fullest capacity by the struggle going on in her soul.

The Professor

In *The Professor* music is not often referred to. There is a piano in M'selle Reuter's room. Pierre-Jean Beranger (1780-1857) is the only musician's name mentioned in the novel. His speciality was liberal and republican songs, so M. Pelet is assumed to support the republic government, though in the novel, political issues are scarcely discussed. There is a reference to a nightingale singing in chapter 25, when William and Frances are on their way back to Daisy Lane.

Shirley

In *Shirley* music was often played or sung at family gatherings. 'What has Mr Sweeting, besides his curacy?' ... 'What has Sweeting? Why. David has his harp, or flute, which comes to the same thing. He has a sort of pinchbeck watch; ditto, ring: ditto, eye-glass; that's what he has.'

This suggests that Rev Sweeting can entertain at family gatherings with a flute.

This is an advantage, as live music was all that could be enjoyed, without recordings as we have now. Recall that Branwell learned the flute from November 1831 to January 1832 when he was 14 and he left a handwritten music book for the flute.

One afternoon, when Caroline was in low spirits in the Rectory... three Misses Sykes came to pay a visit... At last tea is over, and music follows ... Caroline arranges the music and Mr Sweeting asks Harriet to play the piano. He played the flute and the other curates sneer at him in envy.

the inharmonious rattle of the piano keys, the squeaking and gasping notes of the flute, the laughter and mirth of her uncle, and Hannah, and Mary, she could not tell whence originating, for she heard nothing comic or gleeful in their discourse;'

Here music is used to demonstrate the tactics in manoeuvring between man and woman. The inharmonious noises produce discomfort for the one who does not agree with the others concerning what music should be.

Hortense Moore played the guitar and sang.

Hortense, when she was not teaching, or scolding, or cooking, was far from ill-humoured; it was her custom to relax towards evening, and to be kind to her young English kinswoman. There was a means, too, of rendering her delightful, by inducing her to take her guitar and sing and play; she then became quite good-natured; and as she played with skill, and had a well toned voice, it was not disagreeable to listen to her;

Here, a lady's playing the guitar and singing to a happy family circle is described as popular entertainment. Hortense also played and sang for her brother Robert. Caroline listened with naïve interest and wished she could play and sing like her. At home, music has the power to console as well as to encourage the singer and the listeners.

One evening, Shirley and Caroline were alone in the oak-parlour. 'Snatches of sweet ballads, haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza'.

Robert Moore comes in and notices that Caroline looks pale and haggard. He says to her 'Separation is then quite to estrange us, is it?' and at once adds '...Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days o' lang syne?'

This song by Robert Burns (1759-96) is quoted twice later. It seems to have been one of the most favoured songs among the Brontës. It is also quoted in

Villette. Both Anne and Branwell included it in their books.

Just after Mrs Pryor finishes her whole-hearted singing of the pathetic hymn, starting from *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*, Caroline asks her to sing a Scottish song, Robert Burns' *Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon*. This is another favourite that was included in the books. It seems that Charlotte expected the reader to be acquainted with the words. They must have known that this was a song of resentment of a girl against her lover who deserted her. There are also a number of Hymns and outdoor songs in *Shirley*.

Wuthering Heights

In *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy came home on Christmas Day after a five-week stay at the Lintons. Heathcliff was excluded from the gathering, just as Jane had been at the Reeds.

'In the evening we had a dance ... and our pleasure was increased by the arrival of the Gimmerton Band, mustering fifteen strong; a trumpet, a trombone, clarinets, bassoons, French Horns, and a Bass Viol besides singers. They go the rounds of all the respectable houses and receive contributions every Christmas, and we esteemed it a first-rate treat to hear them.

After the usual carols had been sung, we set them to songs and glees. Mrs Earnshaw loved the music, and so they gave us plenty.

Catherine loved it too; but she said it sounded sweetest at the top of the steps, ... She ... mounted ... to the garret where Heathcliffe was confined;'

Branwell described a similar orchestra. Both he and Emily must have enjoyed similar bands, or attended performances of orchestras in Haworth and Keighley.

Nellie sang to Hareton as she rocked him on her knee.

It was far in the night, and the bairnies grat,
The mither beneath the mools heard that,

These two lines are taken from an old Danish ballad of pre-Christian beliefs.

Catherine Linton sang to Linton Heathcliff.

Sit on the settle and let me lean on your knee – That's as Mamma used to do, whole afternoons together-Sit quite still, and don't talk, but you may sing a song if you can sing, or you may say a nice long interesting

ballad-one of those you promised to teach me, or a story-I'd rather have a ballad though.

Catherine repeated the longest she could remember. The employment pleased both mightily.'

There are four examples of Catherine's singing. She sings for the purpose of consoling and soothing the sullen Linton.

The Brontë siblings

Emily began studying the piano at Haworth in 1833 or 1834 and she soon played, in the words of Ellen Nussey, 'with precision and brilliancy.' In 1842 she studied piano at the Heger Pensionnat in Brussels and even gave piano lessons to some of the younger students there. After returning to Haworth, she acquired a new piano. At this time, in the words of Ellen Nussey, 'the ability with which [Emily] took up music was amazing, the style, the touch, and the expression was that of a Professor absorbed heart and soul in her theme'. Her playing seems to have been particularly important to her father.

As Winifred Gérin wrote,

Emily's playing on the little upright in his study became so intimate a language between these two silent people that when she was dead he could not bear its presence there, and had it carried upstairs out of sight.

The music she studied and played after returning from Brussels is impressive. Not only did she acquire a new piano (with two pedals and a range of 5½ octaves), she also acquired *The Musical Library*, an 8-volume/ musical anthology published in 1844. The music included is of a consistently high quality; the composers most often represented in the instrumental volumes being Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. She gravitated particularly to the piano transcriptions from Beethoven's symphonies. She also marked for special attention works by Handel, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and Clementi.



Beethoven

There is no record of the concerts she may have attended while in Brussels. That Emily

would have attended concerts there seems quite likely given the talent and interest she had shown for music in the provincial isolation of Haworth.

Beethoven's pre-eminent position is easily demonstrated by the symphony concerts presented by the Conservatoire in 1842. The first concert of the year began with Beethoven's Second Symphony and concluded with his *Egmont* Overture. The second concert began with the *Leonore* Overture and concluded with the *Eroica* Symphony. Included in the same programme was a Fantasia by Servais entitled *Homage à Beethoven*. The third concert of the spring season concluded with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

In addition to the Conservatoire concert, there were regular symphony concerts at the Salles or the Societe Philharmonique and of the Societe Royale de la Grande-Harmonie, a series of eight violin concerts by the sisters Milanollo, numerous piano recitals and chamber music concerts, plus opera at the Theatre Royale (*Norma*, *Lucia de Lammermoor*, *The Barber of Seville*). In the summer there were outdoor concerts in the park that the Brontë sisters apparently could hear from their dormitory.

On July 26 1842 a gala concert was held to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Belgium's independence and of the accession of King Leopold the First to the throne. By all contemporary accounts it was the most celebrated musical event in the history of Brussels. The programme opened with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and closed with Mendelssohn's oratorio, *The Conversion of St. Paul*. One of the many works in between was Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasy*, with Liszt himself, then the world's greatest pianist, at the keyboard. In September and October the person and the music of Hector Berlioz arrived in Brussels for the first time. Berlioz conducted two gala concerts, mostly of his own work. Berlioz and his music were a hot topic of dialogue in the newspapers, which throughout the time of Emily Brontë's stay were occupied mostly in connection with Beethoven, with the issue of the expression of non-musical ideas through the medium of music.

There can be little doubt that her musical experience not only in Brussels but following her return to Haworth intensified her experience of great art and the better prepared her to produce it herself. In addition, her assimilation of Beethoven's music in particular, may well have actually influenced the creation of *Wuthering Heights*.

To celebrate the return of the piano to the Haworth Parsonage, after extensive repairs, a concert was held in the Parsonage on Friday 4th June

2010. The pianist was Maya Irgalina and the soprano was Kitty McDonald. The programme included works that the Brontës were known to have loved. There was a sonata by Clementi, a couple of waltzes by Beethoven and Handel's *Harmonious Blacksmith*.⁷ Kitty McDonald sang *Banks and Braes O' Bonnie Doon*, *The Old Oak Tree (Woodman spare that Tree)* and *My Mother bids me bind my Hair* by Haydn.

[During the talk we were entertained by Marion Millard who played some of Branwell's flute favourites and Marloesje Valkenburg sang *Woodman spare that Tree* and *My Mother bids me bind my Hair*, accompanied by Michael Links.]

References

Anne Brontë's Song Book and Branwell Brontë's Flute Book. Second Annotated Edition. ISBN 978-4-8419-3136-5 Price: ¥8,000. This volume contains all the printed music scores revised by Professor Higuchi with careful editorial comments both on music and words and analyses on Anne's and Branwell's music.

The Brontës' World of Music: Music in the Seven Novels by the Three Brontë Sisters. Second Edition. ISBN 978-4-8419-3137-2 Price: ¥8,000 This volume treats the relationship between the novels and music: what music is referred to and how music is treated in the Brontë novels. Most of the musical scores are presented and the probable sources of pieces that cannot be identified are suggested and discussed. Then, the technique how each musical piece ingeniously contributes to enhance the novel is surveyed. At the same time, the fact that some novels feature the same songs as found in Anne Brontë's Song Book or Branwell Brontë's Flute Book shows how similar the tastes of the Brontë family members were. Besides, from social viewpoints, the readers will also be guided to a certain representative Victorian trend of music in Britain, since all the pieces reflect the musical atmosphere of an educated family in the mid 19th century Yorkshire.

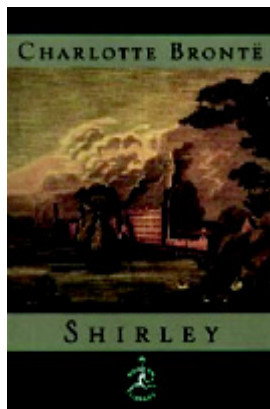
Emily Bronte and Beethoven by Robert K. Wallace. The University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia 30602 ISBN-13: 978-0-8203-3295-6. ISBN-10: 0-8203-3295-X. In this book Wallace continues to work from the perspective he developed in *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music*.

Something Real Lies Before You

Graham Harman

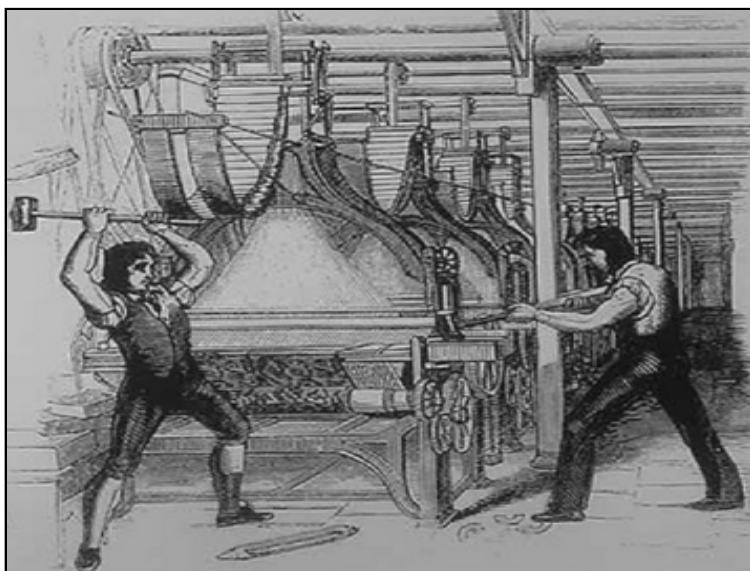
Adapted from a talk to the ABA September 18, 2010

I'll begin by asking who's read *Shirley* in the last year or two? I can assure you that you would not be the only Brontë associate who hasn't. I mentioned to a fellow member a few months ago that I had chosen *Shirley* to speak about at this meeting, and was told, with a look of horror, that this particular novel was, 'turgid and unreadable'. That response to the book is very far from unique. 'The standard critical view since 1849,' according to the editor of my Penguin Classics edition 'has always been that it represents an ill-considered misdirecting of its author's talents'.



The other immediate response that I've elicited when I said that I was going to talk about *Shirley*, typified by very kind offers from Christopher Cooper, was, 'Oh! That's the one about the Luddites! I have lots of information about the Luddites that I can give you'.

Let me declare, right up front, that this is not a talk about Luddites. Although I will invest 60 seconds in a synopsis. ...



...The time is 1812, the place is Yorkshire.

Robert Gerard Moore is a mill owner trying to upgrade his machinery but forestalled by the Luddites (- Damn -) and legislation associated with the Napoleonic wars.

Catherine Helstone is a dispossessed 18-year old who comes to his house to learn French from his sister and falls in love (that's with him, not his sister).

Shirley Keeldar is an orphaned heiress who turns up and takes over the estate of Fieldhead and looks like making off with Robert.

Other denizens are Mrs Pryor, Shirley's governess; and Robert's brother Louis who works as a tutor for Shirley's uncle.

Robert tries to marry Shirley for her money to save his mill and is rejected.

Legislation changes, Robert's fortunes improve and he marries Caroline; Shirley marries Louis after exhausting every other possibility first; Mrs Pryor turns out to be Caroline's long lost mamma; and Currer Bell turns out to be either Charlotte Bronte or Shirley's next-door neighbour.

What I **am** going to focus on, is the question of what, exactly is 'real' in the novel, and what is fictional. I present, for example, this image of Oakwell Hall, the real Fieldhead of the novel.



Fieldhead in fiction – Oakwell Hall in reality



A picture of the sea by Rene Magritte, including a picture of a picture of a sea.

Here we have a picture of a sea juxtaposed with a view out the window of the real sea. Or, rather, it is a picture of the sea by Rene Magritte, and also included in the subject matter of that picture, a picture of a picture of a sea.

As we'll see, Shirley is quite a bit worse than that. I want to explore the slippery relationships between fiction; reality; fiction about reality; and fiction about fiction. Coming back to Oakwell Hall, and also the fact that Caroline Helstone was based on Anne Bronte, we could additionally say that we're looking at realities which are about fiction.

I was initially interested in the relationships between the author, the characters, and the reading audience – although I was rapidly to discover that there were quite a lot of entities which might reasonably be regarded as constituting the 'authors' of *Shirley*; more than one audience; and a bewilderingly large and disconcerting set of interactions between a whole menagerie of fictional characters, both upwards to their author and downwards, if you like, to the reader.

What piqued my interest in *Shirley* was the bald statement in the middle of page 1 that 'something real lies before you'.

Here's the passage of interest, to set the scene:

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. It shall be cold lentils, and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs – and no roast lamb.

I looked up 'real' in a dictionary and three-volume works of **fiction** were not included amongst the list of examples.

Nevertheless, my habits of literalness are deep-seated; and I did try to accommodate, rather than heed, the warning signs for as long as I could. Title pages for me are labels; I expect what's inside the tin to correspond to what's on the label; and here was the original title page: a picture of the sea by Rene Magritte, and a picture of a picture of a sea. Picking up on 'Tale', I assumed I was being invited by the book into an imaginary reality, in much the same way that a painting operates.

Reading the first few lines of the novel, I was actually feeling more conservatively relaxed than in *Jane Eyre*, when the first person Author abruptly jumped out at me and declared: 'Reader, I married him'.

Here's the first line:

Of late years, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England: they lie very thick on the hills; every parish has one or more of them; they are young enough to be very active, and ought to be doing a great deal of good'.

This is Jane Austen stuff – a not wildly dissimilar opening to 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.

Jane Eyre was a success before *Shirley* was published; I personally had read *Jane Eyre* before I read *Shirley*; we are told on the title page that this is by Currer Bell the author of *Jane Eyre*.

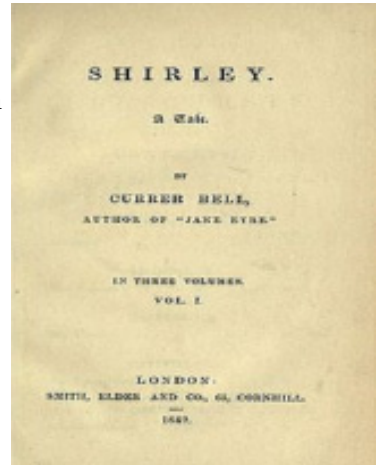
But given all this background, I did have both experience and expectations when picking up *Shirley*. The experience was of a somewhat romantic journey, with Byronic heroes and exotic foreign wives in the attic. I also know, from general experience of authors and of artists in general, that a second work is often both more prosaic, and also something of a let-down after the first. Indeed, going back to my opening remarks referencing a fellow member who thought it was unreadable, and our brief survey, this 'let-down' aspect goes some way to explaining that.

'Something cool lies before you' we are told in the opening, the novel *Shirley*. And partly, that effect is a reflection of how novelists and artists develop.

They start off simply, and the sheer power of inspiration creates a convincing masterpiece. Then, no doubt, with a sense of vertigo at the rapidity of their ascent, they outthink themselves, they overcomplicate things, and they become more earnest.

Shirley is an analytical book, indeed it is analytical of *text*. There's a nice line in Chapter 36 where Shirley says: 'A beautiful sentence! Let us take it to pieces!' (And just to complete that story of simplistic starts and complicated middles – in later life we often get a very high quality integration of the initial fervour, and the subsequent youthful over-engineering, resulting in an assured mature simplicity. Not that the Brontës really lived that long.)

I was still trying to keep on the straight and narrow. By the time I'd gotten



even a few chapters into the novel, I was beginning to suspect that the something real that ‘lies before me’ on page one was lying in the mendacious sense of the word ‘lies’ – but for the moment, I was taking this all at face value, and expecting a less romantic and more realistic novel, with nothing else much changing from *Jane Eyre* apart from a relaxing shift back to an omniscient third-person author, and a shift to more day-to-day themes – the downtrodden circumstances of women in early 19th century England; and the downtrodden circumstances of textile workers staring down the barrel of technological unemployment.

Regardless of the subject matter of a novel, it’s easy for readers, of the 21st century as in any other century, to expect the all-knowing third-person narrator in a novel – or indeed an artist or a film-maker – to keep his or her head below the parapet. We expect them to be as invisible as they are assured. It maybe charming that, in the film version of the *Wizard of Oz*, you can see one of the camera crew dodging behind tree, but it’s not particularly edifying.

From our earliest days, it’s been: ‘Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter’. We imagine it, and we believe it, and some of us may still expect much the same thing from a mature novel.

In *Shirley*, however, a major departure from this approach is a constant series of reminders that we are readers, and that we are reading a novel.

Here are some examples, of which there are very many, as to how we are continually reminded that we are reading a novel:

A female voice called to him ... the answer, and the rest of the conversation was in French, but as this is an English book, I shall translate it into English.

The black-muzzled, tawny dog, a glimpse of which was seen in the chapter which first introduced its mistress to the reader ...

The Caroline of this evening was not, (as you know reader), the Caroline of every day.

This is a little unusual, but not disastrously so, and if Charlotte Brontë is a little outrageous, so too is she inviting and welcoming:

So on a basic level this can be a little surprising, but correspondingly engaging, and personally I did find it engaging – at least until I had had further experience of the limitless duplicity of the wily Charlotte Brontë as I

progressed through the book.

Right up front, before we even come to the ‘something real’ line, we are taken inside the authorial tent. ‘Not of late years are we about to speak; we are going back to the beginning of this century’. And here’s a famous and more extended example – and I have not otherwise said much about the Curates, an omission which would be a bit of a blemish in any talk about *Shirley*.

You shall see them reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward into the little parlour – there they are at dinner. You and I will join the party, see what is to be seen, hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat, we will talk aside.

It’s all at once cosy, and cinematographic – I was reminded of Franklin D Roosevelt’s fireside chats; this is modern stuff, albeit with many antecedents, to have the author in your lounge-room, not just invisibly embodied in text, but there for a chat.

Drawing attention to the fact that this is a novel though is another way of saying that the novel is a ‘self-conscious’ one, and we can all associate the term ‘self-conscious’ with the idea of awkwardness. So even this well-meaning effect can be two-edged – because it lacks confidence. Some of this lack of confidence I did find irritating, although I accept that it can be conspiratorial and fun. Going back to the Peter Rabbit example, how would your childish faith in things have been affected when you were four, if the opening had been: ‘Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and *perhaps* their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter’. And here is just one example that I had quite a bit of trouble stomaching:

It was eight o’clock. The mill lights were all extinguished; the signal was given for breakfast; the children, released for half an hour from toil, betook themselves to the little tin cans which held their coffee, and to the small baskets which contained their allowance of bread. Let us hope they have enough to eat; it would be a pity were it otherwise.

And I’m obtrusively reminded of the fact that, buddy, you’re the author. And I may be unreasonable, but I expect you to know whether they have enough to eat or not. And it’s a foolish speculation anyway because you’re controlling every word as it hits the page and if you really feel that strongly about it then you can fill those kids up with hot dogs and fizzy lemonade.

The next layer of risk in this whole area of layers of fiction, and layers of authorship, is a deepening duplicity and a growing loss of trust. I particularly did a double-take on this passage:

Though I describe imperfect characters, I have not undertaken to handle degraded or utterly infamous ones. Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of a jailor; the novelist may be excused from sullyng his page with the record of their deeds.

I'm a little unbalanced by the fact that the author refers to herself in the first and third persons all in the one sentence. There is a link between self-consciousness, or heightened states of awareness, on the one hand, and the Luddites, on the other. And I'm still uneasy about the double entendre of 'something real lies before you'.

So – I'll leave you with three questions, one of which I'll have a stab at answering, and two I'll leave to you to think about.

1) Who is the author of the novel *Shirley*?

At least seven candidates come to mind: Firstly, Charlotte Brontë the person; secondly, Currer Bell the pseudonym; thirdly, Charlotte's predecessors amongst the world of novelists – this whole approach of having a chat with the reader being done in the wake of prior exponents, and arguably done better; fourthly, the characters in the book had a lash at authorship, notably Louis Moore, sitting in the schoolroom writing about how he proposed to Shirley. And as an aside, my take on that was that Jane Austen had ghost written that part – because the phrasing 'Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No: I have gone too far not to finish' was to my ears an exact rip-off of Mr Knightley's proposal to Emma; fifthly, reality was an author, as we've seen in the case of Oakwell Hall and Anne Bronte; sixthly, some mythical neighbour of Shirley's in the fictional parish of Briarfield puts her hand up as the author in the dying pages of the book. Or puts *his* hand up. And, of course you, the reader.

These two I'll leave to you:

2) Who is the reading audience of *Shirley*?

3) was her name *really* Shirley?

A useful reference:

Carol A Bock, 'Storytelling and the Multiple Audiences of *Shirley*' in *Journal of Narrative Technique*

The Australian Brontë Association

In 1986 Fergus McClory was appointed the Australian Representative of the Brontë Society, serving the members of that society who lived in Australia, and meetings were held in Sydney from time to time. Then, in 1998 the Australian Brontë Association was formed as an independent but complementary organization, in order to expand the local Brontë activities. Our patron is the distinguished Brontë scholar Christine Alexander, Professor of English at the University of New South Wales. We currently meet on certain Saturday mornings in the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street Sydney. This institute was founded shortly after the Keighley Mechanics Institute, of which Patrick Brontë was a member.

The current committee is as follows:

Patron: Professor Christine Alexander (Scientia
Professor of English at the University of NSW)

President: Dr Christopher Cooper

Vice-President: Sarah Burns

Secretary: Carmel Nestor

Membership Secretary: Mandy Swann

Treasurer: Michael Links

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