

The following papers are adapted from talks given at the Society's The Brontës and Education Conference in August 2011

Patrick Brontë's Education

Christopher Cooper tells of the determination and commitment Patrick Brontë brought to changing the path through life to which he was born.

In discussing the Brontës and education I think the place to start is with the father, Patrick Brontë, because education so dramatically transformed his life. As you probably know, he was born into a poor Irish family whose parents had little education. At the time of Patrick's birth his father, Hugh Brunty, earned a precarious living as a farm hand, mending fences and building roads. Without an education Patrick would have probably done much the same and his daughters would never have had the opportunity to become great writers.



Birthplace of Patrick Brontë

It was in 1776 that Hugh Brunty married Eleanor McClory at the Protestant church in Magherally in Northern Ireland – a mixed marriage because Eleanor was Roman Catholic and Hugh was a Protestant. Under normal circumstances Patrick would have been brought up as a Catholic, especially as Hugh was only a nominal Protestant and rarely attended church. But for some reason Eleanor chose to renounce her faith and become a Protestant. We



The homeland schoolhouse for Patrick Brontë

don't know why she did this, and it caused huge problems with her family. It even made it difficult to find a Protestant minister to marry them, because in the eyes of the community she was still a Catholic.

If Patrick had been brought up as a Catholic, his life would have been quite different and we wouldn't be here today celebrating the genius of his daughters. Perhaps he might have become a priest, in which case there wouldn't have been any daughters. But had he remained a Catholic he would have been unlikely to have listened to John Wesley on his visits to Northern Ireland, and unless his religious enthusiasm had been set on fire by that, he would more likely have become a blacksmith or a weaver living an uneventful existence in rural Ireland. Any daughters that he may have had under this scenario would probably have become overworked mothers of large families with limited education and with no time to write great novels.

It would be interesting to know what sort of person Eleanor was. There is a hint that she must have had a strong character to have made the decision to become a Protestant in the face of so much opposition. As CT Dixon says in his biography of *Patrick, A Man of Sorrow*,

there are tales of feuds, fierce opposition to the match, a rival for the lady's hand and runaway rides at night.

But we do know something of her appearance. She was:

a pure Celt, with long golden ringlets, forehead of Parian marble, evenly set teeth like lustrous pearls, rosy cheeks, long dark-brown eyelashes, deep hazel eyes with violet tint and melting expression, lambent (glowing) fire ready to flash indignation and scorn, a tall and stately figure, with head well poised above a graceful neck, and well-formed bust ...

It is known that Patrick in his youth was considered to be quite good looking, so he was his mother's son, but where Eleanor's genes went after that is a mystery. It's hard to imagine this description of Eleanor applying in any way to Charlotte.

After a brief honeymoon the couple lived with Eleanor's angry brother for a few weeks while Hugh sorted out a place for them to live. Although he'd been working for some years he hadn't been able to save any money. He'd been working in the limekilns at Dundalk for only two and sixpence a week. After their marriage he became a farm hand, but this didn't bring in much more.

But he found a small two-roomed cottage at Emdale, Loughbrickland in the parish of Drumballyroneycum-Drumgooland in County Down. It would only cost him sixpence a week.

Probably to call it a cottage makes it sound much grander than it was. It had mud floors and a thatched roof. The walls were of loose-fitting stone with gaps that let in the wind. The main room was the living area and there was a small bedroom at the back.

Soon Hugh decided to build a kiln in the main room to roast corn and roasting corn soon became his main occupation. It was on St Patrick's day in 1777 that their first child was born in the little back bedroom amongst the smell of roasting corn. And being born on the saint's day the little boy was called Patrick.

The next year this little family, with a second child on its way, was able to move to a small house at nearby Lisnacreevy where they stayed for the next 17 years. During this time eight more children were born. In 1794 they moved to a larger house, with three bedrooms and there the tenth child was born.

As the eldest, Patrick was looked up to by his brothers and sisters. He was tall, had bright auburn hair and an aquiline nose and was altogether quite good looking. The children didn't mix much with the local children because the marriage was considered to be a 'mixed' in the eyes of the locals. and therefore they were regarded as little more than heathens.

They were brought up on the plainest of food. Breakfast was coarse porridge and milk, served in a wooden bowl and eaten with a wooden spoon. Dinner, at about 12 o'clock, was a plate of potatoes. A meal known as 'piece-time' was eaten at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and consisted of home-made bread and a little butter-milk. The bread was made by mashing together potatoes and oatmeal. It was an indigestible mixture that gave Patrick heartburn, and he suffered from dyspepsia throughout his life. Supper was at seven and consisted of more potatoes and boiled milk. The only alternative to milk was peppermint tea, which was frequently drunk to help digest the indigestible bread. Occasionally they would have eggs and a couple of times a year they had meat.

During the day young Patrick helped his mother around the house but at night, when the family sat around the fire, Patrick taught himself to read from one of the four books that comprised the family library. He had little help from his parents because they were practically illiterate.

The four books were a New Testament, a Bible, a volume of Robert Burns' poems and *Pilgrim's Progress*. Patrick chose *Pilgrim's Progress* to teach himself to read. His father was familiar with this book because he'd had many passages read to him and he had sufficient of the basics of reading that he could puzzle out short passages, laboriously sounding out the words.

Patrick read and reread these four volumes many times and learned many passages by heart. He recited them to himself as he walked through the lanes and over the hills near his home.



During his rambles he came across the great preacher John Wesley. Every year or two John and Charles Wesley came riding up the valley and preached in nearby fields. Listening to John Wesley's sermons and hearing the singing of Charles Wesley's hymns stirred Patrick's soul and had a profound effect on him.



Above: Brontë's School
Left: The young Patrick

We think of Patrick as an ordained minister of the Church of England, as indeed he was. But

in many ways he was also a Methodist. It must be remembered that Methodism at the time was not a separate denomination, but an evangelical movement within the Church of England.

When he was 12 Patrick began to work as an assistant to the local blacksmith. He was a quick learner and it wasn't long before he could cast horseshoes and nails. He would pump the bellows and to the rhythm of this task he would recite, under his breath, passages from his four well-loved books. Sometimes he quietly sang verses from Wesleyan hymns.

There's a story told of a gentleman who came to have his horse shod. Patrick was listening while his master was engaged in conversation with the gentleman. The conversation came around to the definition of the word 'gentleman'. The blacksmith replied that in his eyes there were three kinds of gentlemen. There was the gentleman who was born a gentleman, and the gentleman who became one because of good fortune – probably he was thinking of the newly emerging industrialists. And then there are the gentlemen by nature. He pointed towards Patrick and said, loud enough for Patrick to hear, 'Now, for instance, that boy standing there ... is what I call a gentleman by nature'. Patrick stopped and looked. An indescribable sense of his own worth flowed through him.

How do we come to know what Patrick was thinking when he heard those words? Well, many years later, when Patrick was 81, he was talking to the Haworth stationer John Greenwood, and he admitted to Greenwood that 'No one can tell what effect those few words had upon me through life'. Greenwood recorded this conversation in his diary and added:

How true, and how prophetic were the words of this poor blacksmith! How oft have we had to remark that he was a real, a thorough, gentleman.

With, by then, four brothers and a sister, Patrick needed to earn more to help his family. Hugh knew a weaver, Robert Donald, and arranged for Patrick to be apprenticed to him. Patrick worked hard and developed considerable skills in weaving linen. Part of his duties was to take the linen that he'd woven to the markets of Banbridge and Newry. After he had finished his business he browsed among the bookstalls. It was like being in heaven.

Once he went to Belfast with a special order. He'd saved some money and bought as many books as he could carry. Now he had books of his own and he could venture beyond those four that belonged to his parents.

He began to prop up a book and read while he was weaving. Many years later Emily was doing something similar, performing some chore in the kitchen with a book propped up in front of her.

Reading while working may have been good for Patrick's education, but the quality of his work suffered. Patrick went to work in Banbridge with a linen draper named Clibborn. Clibborn had known the quality of Patrick's work before his reading had interfered with it and he was happy to employ him. Patrick resolved to concentrate on his work. But every moment of his free time was spent in reading.

He also added to his library. One great treasure was Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

This book was instrumental in his learning being noticed and was the first step on the road to Cambridge and onto Haworth.

Patrick would take a book with him on his rambles through the countryside during the long summer evenings of 1792, when he was 15. One day he was observed by the Reverend Andrew Harshaw, walking backwards and forwards between two trees, throwing his arms about wildly as he read out Milton's verse. To Harshaw Patrick appeared to be possessed, in a frenzy of excitement over the sublime poetry.

Harshaw was a Presbyterian minister without a living, but he was very well educated, with progressive views. He failed however to be appreciated by his church and was employed in teaching in a small village school. He'd had ambitions and was frustrated that his dreams hadn't materialised. But seeing Patrick, he saw himself as a youth, and wondered whether this clearly talented and motivated lad might succeed where he had not.

The two got into conversation and Harshaw offered to help Patrick in whatever way he could. He offered to lend Patrick books and to teach him the classics and mathematics. Of course Patrick still had to work. The pattern of his days at this time was to wake before dawn (it was summer so it would have been early), two hours tuition with Harshaw, then walk five miles to Banbridge, eating his breakfast on the way, working a long day before walking back home for supper and back to Ovid, Virgil and Homer. Sleep almost became a stranger. Yet his energy didn't fail him.

There was some danger that his eyesight might however. His reading at night was done in poor light, and his day work involved close attention. His eyes were often swollen and red in the mornings. Throughout his life his eyes troubled him and this early strain on his eyes was probably the beginning.

This went on for about a year. Then Mr Clibborn died suddenly and Patrick was out of work. By this time his two elder brothers were apprenticed and were able to bring in money for the family. So Patrick sounded his father out about the possibility of spending full time on his education. Hugh Brunty seemed to have no objection and had the foresight that it would lead to better employment.

So Patrick's education, with the help of Harshaw, went ahead in leaps and bounds. He was also able to catch up on his sleep and his eyes were under less strain.

When Patrick was 16 a vacancy for the sole teacher in the small Glascar Presbyterian Church School came up. Harshaw wrote to the church authorities and strongly recommended Patrick. Patrick had made tremendous progress in the last 12 months and would have had no difficulty demonstrating this with the qualifying examination.

It's fascinating to think that in these days it takes 12 years of schooling and several years tertiary education before one could be considered qualified to teach even at primary level. Yet Patrick, at the age of 16, and with only one-year's part time education, could be considered – though there is no doubt that Patrick's knowledge of the classics at the time was equal to that of a modern-day classics student at university. Even more fascinating is the thought that the classics were considered to be essential for the post, even though they would not be taught in the village school.

At first Patrick missed out. He was, after all, a Catholic! Or at least his mother was. Or at least she had been. So the position was given to another candidate. But when that candidate withdrew his application the objections to a Catholic background were overlooked and Patrick was appointed, subject to proving satisfactory in character and ability. Neither proved any difficulty and so Patrick got the job.

Patrick began to attend the Glascar Presbyterian church and he helped in conducting the choir. He continued his reading, borrowing from the library of the Reverend David Barber and buying books of his own.

Some of the books he bought were text-books that he needed for his teaching. He bought an arithmetic book by Vesper of Dublin, dated 1789, writing his name several times inside this book, and what is interesting, seemed to be experimenting with various forms of his surname. He wrote 'Pruty', 'Prunty' and 'Brunty'. Another book he purchased at this time was a geography book.

Each pupil in this tiny school paid a penny a week. Also, it was the practice for each pupil on Monday morning to bring a turf to help with the heating. This small income was supplemented by larger amounts, at least from some of the parents. One parent, John Lindsay, recorded in his account book 'November 1793 To Pat Prunty for David's School Bill £1'.

Patrick stayed at this school for 5 years until he was 21. He was highly thought of by the pupils and their parents. Moreover he developed educational principles that were far ahead of his time. For a start he tailored his teaching to the needs and abilities of the individual pupils rather than treating them as

a uniform mass. He avoided using the whip and instead was able to motivate the pupils. He visited the parents and encouraged them to keep their children at school for as long as they could. Where parents had several pupils at the school he encouraged them to keep the brighter ones at school for longer. He lent his books to the brighter pupils so that they could learn passages by heart. He even introduced some of the classics to the children, in preference to the set text-books. He allowed time for hymn singing for the benefit of their souls and introduced gymnastics for the benefit of their bodies.

For the slower students he introduced night classes to help them catch up. School excursions were another novelty. Frequently Patrick would take the class into the country-side and used this as a basis for instruction. He would point out birds, the geological formations and explained the rudiments of landscape drawing. During the summer vacation he took the boys into the Mountains of Mourne. Patrick loved the Mountains of Mourne and felt he was close to God there. He developed a deep love of Nature which Emily inherited.

In winter he would take them skating. Once he was out on the ice with a group of pupils when suddenly there was a low rumbling noise as the ice began to crack around them. He quashed the rising panic and led the group carefully to safety while the ice was cracking around them.

We tend to think of Patrick as a rather severe antisocial old man with no sense of humour, and maybe he was in later life. But at the age of 21 he was not only very well educated, he was also physically active. And emotionally he was a perfectly normal red-blooded Irishman.

There's a curious story from the summer of 1798, when Patrick was 21. It is reported in *A Man of Sorrows* but Dixon gives no source. One of his pupils was a mature girl of 15 with flaming red hair. Her name was Helen and she was the daughter of a local farmer. She had developed strong feelings for her good-looking charismatic teacher and Patrick found it difficult to ignore her. She was found to have verses written to her by Patrick in her pockets, 'not all of them of an educational nature'. And when the gallant Patrick was discovered kissing her among the corn-sacks the fiery Helen came close to destroying his career.

Good heavens, can this be true? Dixon doesn't reveal his source so we can't be sure. In today's world even a 'harmless' kiss between teacher and pupil would constitute criminal activity. But back then things were less well defined. The fact that Helen was 15 wasn't considered significant. After all, at that time she would have been of marriageable age. It was the fact that he was her teacher.

Still it was a gross impropriety and it goes without saying that her family were very angry. Her brothers threatened to thrash the schoolmaster. But they didn't make any official complaint and the whole thing seems to have blown over.

About this time the Reverend Thomas Tighe, vicar of the joint parish of Drumgooland and Drumballyrone, began to take notice of Patrick. Tighe was the most important man in the area and was a good friend of John Wesley. Whenever Wesley, or his preachers, visited Ireland they stayed with Thomas Tighe, or his brother William Tighe.

There was a school associated with the parish church of Drumballyrone and the position of teacher there fell vacant. Also, Tighe needed a tutor for his two sons. He offered both posts to Patrick Brunty and Patrick accepted. He resigned from the Glascar Hill school, with Harshaw's blessing.

So Patrick had gone from being a half Catholic to a Wesleyan to a Presbyterian and was now associated with the Church of Ireland. The fact that Tighe was happy to have Patrick tutor his sons, despite almost certainly having heard of the incident with Helen, shows that he didn't consider it as a serious offence. This was fortunate for Patrick because Tighe supplied the momentum that was to carry Patrick across the sea and to launch his career.

Tighe had had his eyes on Patrick for some time and considered him to be a most suitable candidate to become part of the evangelical movement within the established churches of England and Ireland, a movement that owed so much to John Wesley. Patrick didn't consider the switch from the Presbyterian Church to the Church of Ireland to be of any consequence. After all they preached the same teaching and sang the same hymns – mainly those of the great Charles Wesley.

This new school was bigger than the one at Glascar Hill and he was paid more. So he was able to save some money. Also Tighe's library was extensive and so Patrick had less need to buy books, though there were some areas in which Tighe's collection was deficient. About this time Patrick developed an interest in military history, politics and exploration. His hero was Lord Nelson. It was in that year, 1799, that Nelson received the title Duke of Bronte.

Tighe now encouraged Patrick to read books on theology and discussed their contents with him. Patrick had strong views about what he read. Some of what he read he strongly agreed with. Other ideas he violently opposed. His position was that of an evangelical, but one who supported his views with reasoned argument rather than taking the position of blind acceptance. This was very

much the Wesleyan tradition.

Patrick spent three years with Tighe and the school at Drumballyroney. During this time Tighe suggested that Patrick enter the ministry, and Patrick confessed that he had been forming the desire to do just this, but had no idea how someone in his position could go about it.

Had he not received the call to ministry Patrick might have entered the army. Throughout his life he maintained an interest in all things military and years later he wrote to the Master of Ordnance detailing suggestions for an improvement in artillery shells.

By 1802, when Patrick was 25, he had saved over £25 and was well versed in theology as well as the classics. Tighe arranged for him to go that October to Cambridge to enter St John's College, which Tighe himself had attended from 1771 to 1775. This was a sensible choice for Patrick. The fees were not excessive and there were many scholarships. Clearly, despite adopting a frugal lifestyle Patrick would need some financial assistance to be able to stay long enough to take his degree. At that time there were many men of Methodist persuasion in Cambridge. As Dissenters they could attend, but unless they subscribed to the 39 articles they could not take out their degree. Patrick had no qualms in taking the oath and preferred to remain a Wesleyan within the established church rather than become a Dissenter. But he had close contacts with those Wesleyans who remained outside of the Church of England.

In September 1802 Patrick set sail for England, never to return. As he stood at the ships railings he farewelled the distant Mountains of Mourne. They had been as much an influence on his life as the men of God that had seen his potential.

On 1 October 1802 he walked through the streets of Cambridge, entered the gates of St John's College and walked into the red-brick court. A statue of Mary Cavendish, Countess of Shrewsbury, who had financed the building of the college looked down at him from above the gates.

Patrick found the Registrar's office and signed in as a sizar. This was a student who performed certain duties in the college in return for a reduction in the fees. He signed in as 'Patrick Branty, born in Ireland; admitted sizar 1st October 1802; tutors Wood and Smith'. The practice was to give the details orally with the Registrar recording them in the register and 'Branty' was what how the Registrar had heard the name. Patrick noted the error but was too diffident to correct it. But two days later when it was time to take up residence it was recorded in the Residence Register as 'Patrick Bronte'.



St John's College, Cambridge

This was the beginning of a new life. No doubt Patrick thought of the many great men who had studied here. A few years previously William Wordsworth had been a St John's scholar and had similar thoughts. In *The Prelude* the poet wrote of feelings Patrick must have felt:

Such was the tenor of the second part
In this new life. Imagination slept,
And yet not utterly. I could not print
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps
of generations of illustrious men
unmoved. I could not always lightly pass
Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept
Wake where they waked, range that inclosure old,
That garden of great intellectuals undisturbed.

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**Christopher Cooper**

# The CVs of the Brontë Children

*Christopher Cooper gives us this enlightening précis of the education and employment of the Brontës*

The Brontë children had remarkably little formal education, and for much of their adult lives they were unemployed. This is an extract from their CVs.

## CHARLOTTE

### EDUCATION:

Aug 1824 – Jun 1825: Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge.

Jan 1831 – Jun 1832: Roe Head School.

Feb 1842 – Nov 1842: Pensionnat Heger, Brussels.

### EMPLOYMENT:

Jul 1835 – May 1838: Teacher at Roe Head School.

1839 (Apr – Jul): Governess at Stonegappe (the Sedgewick family).

1841(Mar – Dec): Governess at Upperwood House at Rawdon (the White family).

1843 (Jan – Dec): Teacher at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels.

## EMILY

### EDUCATION:

Nov 1824 – Jun 1825: Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge.

Jul 1835 – Oct 1835: Roe Head School.

Feb 1842 – Nov 1842: Pensionnat Heger, Brussels.

### EMPLOYMENT:

Sep 1838 – Mar 1839: Teacher at Law Hill School in Southowram.

## **ANNE**

### **EDUCATION:**

Nov 1824 – Jun 1825: Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge.

Oct 1835 – Dec 1837: Roe Head School.

### **EMPLOYMENT:**

1839 (Apr – Dec): Governess at Blake Hall, Mirfield (the Ingham family).

1842-1845: Governess at Thorp Green (the Robinson family).

## **BRANWELL**

### **EDUCATION:**

No formal education. Taught at home by father, Patrick Brontë.

### **EMPLOYMENT:**

1840 (Jan-Jun): Tutor at Broughton-in-Furness (the Postlethwaite family).

Oct 1840 – Apr 1841: Station assistant at Sowerby Bridge station.

Apr 1841 – Mar 1842: Clerk-in-charge at Luddenham Foot station.

Jan 1843 – Jul 1845: Tutor at Thorp Green (the Robinson family).

## **Christopher Cooper**

# A Single Woman in a Man's World

*- the life and trials of 19th century governesses*

Aristocratic families were in the habit of educating their sons using tutors who lived at the manor. But some enlightened families decided that girls could benefit from an education too. So they employed a governess.

Of course girls couldn't be expected to cope with the classics, or even mathematics beyond a little basic arithmetic. So instead girls were taught basic reading and writing, some music and a few practical arts like needlework.

Before the mid-18th century in England governesses were not very common. But the industrial revolution changed all that. The middle class sprang into being and suddenly many ordinary people, such as mill owners and manufacturers became well off. And consequently so did the bankers and lawyers who served them.

These families wanted to behave like the aristocracy and so it became the fashion to employ a governess. This did not apply to all middle class families of course, since many people lost a lot of money through poor investments, which resulted in the unmarried daughters of those families having to go out and find paid employment. But what could they do that was suitable? Working in a factory or working as a maid would not do. Office work would perhaps have been satisfactory but what little clerical work was available was only done by male clerks. Going into another family as a governess was a very natural plan. There were very few other possibilities. Sir George Stephen wrote:

In every other human pursuit there may be found the encouragement of expectation... The servant may become master, the labourer may rise into an employer ... but the governess, and the governess alone, has neither hope nor prospect open in this world.

Before the governess took up her first situation, she had the status every middle class woman enjoyed ... she was in charge of her own life. Now she became a mere appendage in someone else's household and less than a lady. How ironic! because you had to be a lady to get the job in the first place! After all, ladies do not have to work for a living! So by accepting paid employment, she fell from middle class respectability. Any writer describing governessing portrayed it as hateful. Jane Austen said:

To become a governess was to retire from all the pleasures of life, of

rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification forever.

According to the *Ladies' Journal* of 1841, the governess could be recognised by her 'plain and quiet style of dress, a deep straw bonnet with green or brown veil and on her face a look of utter despair.'

Many girls from middle class families in straitened circumstances became governesses to other middle class families who had been more fortunate. And although the demand was high, the supply was very much higher. The law of supply and demand meant that there were so many governesses available that they were paid a pittance. They got their board and lodging and often only £10 or £20 a year on top of that. From that they had to pay for their clothes, personal items such as pen and paper, and for travel to visit their families from time to time. They even had to pay for their washing. It was hard to save much out of what was left, to send home. A letter to *The Times* stated that a governess in charge of four children received 8 shillings per week – one penny per hour per pupil. Even a charwoman earned more than that – in fact she received two shillings and six pence per day. Sometimes no salary was offered at all! 'Wanted, a governess, on handsome terms.' And here is an advertisement that no prospective governess could possibly ignore:

Governess – a comfortable home, but without salary, is offered to any lady wishing for a situation as a governess in a gentleman's family, residing in the country, to instruct two precious little girls in music, drawing and English ... a thorough knowledge of the French language is required.

Governesses could not question their salary or conditions. After all, looking after young children was their lot in life – it was what all women were born to do. As one advice column put it ...

If a woman allows the cankering consideration that she is underpaid to come between her service and those tiny little ones, she is but a mercenary soldier of the Master Who loved them so well.

Of course this view suited many employers perfectly. But it meant destitution for many a poor governess. Her working life was very short, certainly in comparison with cooks, doctors or engineers. A young journalist, Frances Cobbe, recalled the case of a poor lady, daughter of a vicar, who was found after having been missed for several days, but not sought for, lying dead, scarcely clothed, on the bare floor of a room in a miserable lodging house in Drury Lane. Cobbe wrote:

I went to the house, and found it a filthy coffee-house, frequented by

unwashed customers. The mistress, supposedly respectable, told me that the lodger was a woman of forty, perfectly sober and well conducted in every way. Due to lack of employment, her clothes had become shabby and she had been walking all over London for many weeks, looking for work and selling everything she possessed for food. At last she returned to her wretched room, into which it was a pain for any lady to enter, and having begged a last cup of tea from her landlady, telling her she could not pay for it, locked her door and was heard of no more.

Charlotte Brontë received only £20 a year at Upperwood House and from this she had to pay for washing. Anne was luckier – at Thorp Green Hall she earned £40 a year before deductions. But this was only half what they paid Branwell when he worked there as a tutor. Branwell, after all, was a male!

The supply of governesses was huge – in the 1851 census there were 25,000 single women who described themselves as governesses – 2 per cent of the entire population of single women between the ages of 20 and 40. And why were there so many single women who needed to find employment? Partly because there were so many single women in the first place. In the 1851 census it was found that of every 100 females who were 20 and over, 57 were wives, 13 were widows and 30 were spinsters. W R Greg wrote an essay in 1862 attempting to analyse the large proportion of unmarried women. You might have expected him to title it *Where Are All The Husbands?* But no. His title was *Why Are Women Redundant?*

One possible factor is the higher mortality rate among men, especially with the wars with Napoleon. A more significant factor was emigration. Many more men emigrated to America and the colonies than women.

But another factor that has been put forward, one that particularly applies to middle class men, is the rise of the gentleman's club. *The Times* of 1861 remarked:

The luxuries which a bachelor can command at his lodgings and in his club on an allowance of £300 a year, are altogether out of proportion to those which a prudent father of a family would afford himself out of a joint income of thrice that amount, and it is not every man who will make the sacrifice.

In other words there wasn't the motivation for a man to marry. The gentleman's club provided all he needed, especially the companionship that a family

could provide, at less cost than marriage. And if further comfort was required this could be obtained at little cost, and with no responsibilities.

Yet another possible factor was the absence, till the Married Women's Act, of any financial protection for women. Marriage was for many women a financial gamble. Worse than living independently on a low stipend was the prospect of being tied to a debt-ridden husband. So a very high proportion of those single middle class women who needed to find employment did so as a governess.

As we know from reading Victorian novels, the life of a governess was very lonely. They were not encouraged to mix with the other servants, and being much better educated they probably had no desire to mix with them any way. But nor were they encouraged to mix socially with the family. Perhaps this

was no great loss because quite often the governess was better educated than the family that employed them. In fiction writing, the governess was often made to be an orphan. For example, Jane Eyre was poor but respectable, alone in the world, held back and tormented by a wicked stepmother, mocked by richer girls, cast down but finally reunited with a prince who always recognised her true qualities. Making the governess an orphan reflected her isolation both social and emotional.

Governesses were alone off-duty as well as on-duty. When Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey visits her old pupil Lady Ashby, she takes her meals alone in her room even though she is supposed to be a welcomed friend. Charlotte Brontë longed to see her friends, but worried that their visits may be considered improper. In agreeing to an annual wage of \$16, Charlotte was said to have acknowledged that

I have made a large sacrifice in the way of salary in the hope of securing comfort – by which I do not mean good eating and drinking or a warm fire, or even a soft bed, but rather the society of cheerful faces, and hearts and minds not dug out of a lead-mine, or cut from a marble quarry.



The experiences that Anne and Charlotte had as governesses are worth repeating:

In 1839 Anne was employed for nine months as governess at Blake Hall Mirfield by Joshua Ingham. Mrs Ingham's younger sister had been at Roe Head with Anne. There were five children (eventually there would be thirteen in the family) but Anne only had to teach the eldest two. But this was quite enough. They were lazy, ignorant, disobedient, over-indulged and under punished and Anne was unable to control them. It is clear that this was the family she had in mind when she wrote Agnes Grey. She was not allowed to discipline the children herself, always having to report their misdeeds to Mrs Ingham, who either stood up for them or very mildly scolded them and so it was a waste of time.

Charlotte had just two positions as a governess, though for short periods only. In 1839 she was employed as governess at Stonegappe by the Sedgewicks. It was only intended for three months, but for Charlotte that was three months too long. On 8th June she wrote to Emily:

I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house, and the grounds are, as I have said, divine. But, alack-a-day! there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you – pleasant woods, winding white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshine sky – and not having a free moment or a free thought to enjoy them in. The children are constantly with me, and more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew. As for correcting them, I soon quickly found that was entirely out of the question: they are to do as they like. A complaint to Mrs Sedgewick brings only black looks upon oneself, and unjust, partial excuses screen the children. I have tried that plan once. It succeeded so notably that I shall try it no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs Sedgewick did not know me. I now begin to find that she does not intend to know me, that she cares nothing in the world about me except to contrive how the greatest quantity of labour may be squeezed out of me, and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework, yards of cambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and above all things, dolls to dress. I do not think she likes me at all, because I can't help being shy in such an entirely novel scene, surrounded as I have hitherto been by strange and constantly changing faces. I used to think that I should like to be in the stir of grand folks' society, but I have had enough of it – it is dreary work to look on and listen. I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as having a living

and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil. While she is teaching the children, working for them, amusing them, it is all right. If she steals a moment for herself she is a nuisance.

The governesses' earnings, during their brief working lives, were usually needed elsewhere to support other members of the family. An institution, called 'The Governesses' Benevolent Institution,' was formed in 1841 because so many governesses were left destitute. Here are some examples of what they had to support:

First example: Maintained her mother until her death, apprenticed a brother, took the entire charge of one of his daughters, and assisted him in educating some of his other children.

Second example: Materially assisted two cousins ... began a school at the age of 13 with an elder sister, to support her mother, who had been left by her father with seven children, and then continued to support her mother for 20 years.

And finally: Lent her subsequent savings to a widowed sister in reduced circumstances. The salary of the governess did not go far.

I asked myself, how aware were employers of the plight of the governess? Most probably they chose to remain ignorant, since the governess spent her evenings in the schoolroom, and so it was easier for employers to assume she did not exist then.

I would like to finish my talk by mentioning some famous governesses.

Agnes Porter was the stereotype of what the ideal governess should be. She was very lucky as she worked for an aristocratic family who were generous towards her and to whom she remained loyal. She loved her work.

Then there was Mary Wollstonecraft, who was nine years younger than Agnes but was not at all suited to the life of governessing, and got out of it as soon as she could. She was far too intellectual, and the job was beneath her. She very quickly became a radical journalist and ruffled quite a few feathers in her lifetime, campaigning for women's rights. Her two sisters, Everina Wollstonecraft and Eliza Bishop, spent their whole lives as governesses, blown from pillar to post, endlessly looking for work, their lives powerless and desperate.

Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley's stepsister, who wanted nothing but an independent life, had to become a governess because she lacked money

and talent and this made her disillusioned with her lot in life.

Nelly Weeton was a governess for only four years, because she had enough money to live on. She took the job on because she was lonely, but ironically, the job made her lonely and led her into a disastrous marriage.

Anna Leonowens was a governess with a difference. She was born in India, married young, widowed and with two children travelled to Bangkok, where she found employment teaching the King of Siam's children. We could call her a governess ambassador.

Lastly, there was Anna Jameson, who was supported financially by an absent husband so she was able to question the powerlessness of the governess. Unfortunately, she could only take the fight so far. It was up to the women of the next generation to keep up the fight on behalf of the poor governess. Through their efforts, they paved the way for women to be able to take up any profession they wanted and still remain respectable.

### **Marloesje Valkenburg**



*Above: Claire Clairmont  
by Amelia Curran, 1819*



*Above: Anna Brownell  
Jameson. 1844.*

*Left: Anna Leonowens -  
teacher to the children of  
the King of Siam.*

## **Some Reflections on Aspects of early 19th Century Education: Dickens and the Brontës**

In *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens referred to a school being ‘a lamentable jumble’ in ‘a temple of good intentions’ which was a particularly apt description of the piecemeal haphazard efforts in education made by various individuals and groups during the first half of the 19th century. During that period education was simply a lottery as there was no established standard, the amount and quality of education received by children depending on their class and social status, their location and gender.

These educational conditions in England during Dickens’ lifetime were concurrent with those experienced by the Brontë family as their lifetimes were largely parallel. Dickens was born in 1812, just two years before the birth of the eldest Brontë child Maria in 1814, and he died in 1870, nine years after the death of Patrick Brontë. Although Dickens travelled to Yorkshire and Charlotte and Anne visited London, they were sadly never to meet. There were however some facets of the educational experience which impinged on both their lives.

When the Dickens family moved to London in 1822 it was a period of increasing financial desperation for them, and his mother attempted to remedy the situation by opening a school at their house. At that time anyone could open a private school as there were no training requirements or educational regulations, and in 1844 the Brontë sisters had their own plans to start such a school at the Haworth Parsonage. Recollecting his childhood, Dickens described how a brass plaque proclaiming ‘Mrs Dickens’ Establishment’ was placed on the front door, a prospectus was drawn up and young Charles was sent out to distribute it. Dickens later recalled to his biographer Forster:

Nobody ever came to the school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come or that the least preparation was made to receive anybody.

The plans for the school at Haworth similarly came to nothing when pupils failed to apply and the project was abandoned.

Neither the Brontës nor Dickens received much formal education, Dickens himself acknowledging that his own education had been ‘irregular’. He had

been sent out to work at age 12 when the family were imprisoned for debt. But he was determined to make something of his life and after long days working as a solicitor's clerk in a law firm, he taught himself shorthand in the evenings. Being an avid reader, he was a frequent visitor to the British Museum and applied for a Reader's Ticket as soon as he became eligible at age 18. Like the Brontë sisters, Dickens was keen to learn Continental languages, and taught himself both French and Italian to good effect.

The evidence of Dickens' deep interest in education is to be found in his novels, journalism, public speeches and private letters. In only his third novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, he illustrated the brutality and neglect of cheap boarding schools in Yorkshire. Dickens visited this, the county of the Brontës, in 1838 when he was carrying out research for this novel. Visiting several schools of ill repute, Dickens was most appalled by one at Bowes. The village church still contains the graves of 25 boys aged between 7 and 19 years old who had died there between 1810 and 1834. Dickens was inspired by one particular pathetic inscription to create his runaway boy Smike, and the character of his infamous headmaster Wackford Squeers was based on that of the headmaster at the Bowes Academy, William Shaw. The public outcry when the novel was published in 1838 was such that Shaw was put out of business by 1840, and within eight years even the last of his competitors had ceased to advertise. So the credit for the demise of these Yorkshire schools can largely be attributed to Dickens's exposure of their practises in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

During the 1830s the government had actually initiated steps towards some state supervision of schooling when it made an educational grant to be divided between the two institutions which were attempting to establish schools; the National, and the British and Foreign Societies. The first Secretary of the Cabinet Committee to oversee the spending of this grant was James Kay-Shuttleworth, who became a friend of both Dickens and Charlotte Brontë. Dickens had become involved with the Ragged School movement during the 1840s after a request by his friend the wealthy heiress Angela Burdett Coutts that he make a visit and report back to her. He accordingly went to inspect one such slum school in Holborn and was appalled at what he found – 'an awful sight'. He successfully appealed to his friend for assistance, deeming it 'an experiment that is most worthy of your charitable hand' (16/9/1843).

Thereafter Dickens made regular visits to these Ragged Schools, writing strong letters of support to the newspapers and writing articles in his own magazine *Household Words*. Dickens found an ally in James Kay-Shuttleworth

whom he met in 1846, finding that they both had a common interest in Ragged Schools. Dickens even wrote to him proposing that the two of them set up a model Ragged School;- ‘Surely you and I could set one going?’ (28/3/1846). However the proposal came to nothing.

James Kay-Shuttleworth was knighted for his government work and in 1850 he retired to Padiham in Lancashire, just over the moors from Haworth. *Jane Eyre* had been published in 1847, Charlotte becoming a reluctant celebrity, and so Sir James and his wife invited her to stay with them at their house, Gawthorpe Hall. Charlotte resisted so they called on her at Haworth instead and repeated their invitation which she eventually accepted, also staying with them later at a house they had taken by Lake Windermere. They then invited her to London where they hoped to introduce her to London society. Charlotte dreaded the prospect and made repeated excuses for not going. The only thing she regretted missing there was the opportunity to be present in the Ladies Gallery for the Royal Literary Fund Society Dinner where she would have been able to have heard the after-dinner speeches, including one by Dickens. ‘I don’t think all London can afford another sight to me so interesting’ she wrote to Ellen Nussey (18/5/1850). So Charlotte missed her chance to have heard Dickens.



*Charles Dickens and  
Charlotte Brontë*

The other area of education in which Dickens became personally involved was that of the Mechanics Institutes, sharing an interest in these establishments with Patrick Brontë who was a keen member of the Mechanics Institute branch at Keighley, taking advantage of the library, reading room and lectures offered there. Convinced that education was of great value to working men, Dickens was a great supporter of this self-help movement, attending functions, giving speeches and raising money on their behalf. Having studied himself in the evenings he felt great respect for those men who travelled to lectures and kept up their reading after a long day’s work imposed by the needs of

Victorian industrialisation. The first public reading Dickens ever gave to a paying audience in 1853 was at Birmingham, the proceeds going towards a new Mechanics Institute for this growing industrial city in the Midlands. Dickens was himself elected President there as well as at those Institutes at Chatham and Reading.

Like Patrick Brontë, another man who had raised himself from humble beginnings by his eagerness to learn and his willingness to work hard, Dickens had high hopes for his own sons, but both men were largely to be disappointed. The seven sons of Dickens showed little aptitude for self-motivated learning as had their father, despite being sent to a variety of schools as well as having tutoring. Three of them for example, Frank, Henry and Alfred, attended a boarding school in Boulogne which had been recommended by a friend and that Dickens had himself visited when staying there. Although the school was in France, it was actually operated by two Englishmen so the Dickens boys did not receive such a genuine Continental educational experience as did Emily and Charlotte at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. Happily for Dickens, towards the end of his life, Henry went on to study at Cambridge and in 1869 was awarded a scholarship by Trinity Hall, just a few hundred yards from St John's College where Patrick Brontë had studied over 60 years earlier. Henry was later called to the Bar, became a Queen's Counsel and was knighted for his services to the law. How proud Dickens would have been.

So within his lifetime, beginning with his own humble start and ending with one of his sons graduating from the most prestigious university in the world, Dickens witnessed a wide variety of educational experiences. Passionately believing that education was the means of avoiding social catastrophe, (but only if accompanied by the Victorian virtues of self-help, willpower and application), he spoke and wrote widely on the subject, using his influence to highlight the increasing need for reform. He was a pioneer for example in introducing the theme of education into fiction, a trend which Charlotte was to continue with her novels. Like Patrick Brontë, Dickens believed that education was the key to a meaningful life, and they would both have been gratified by the passage of the 1870 Education Act which marked the introduction of a state-supervised standard national education for all.

**Catherine Barker**

## *Wuthering Heights*

*Wuthering Heights*, a classic of stark grandeur, is concerned with the eternal principles of life, death, love and immortality. It is the very heart and soul of the romantic spirit. A complex, majestic novel of wild passion, there is nothing in all English literature quite like it.

The relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, a relationship that transcends societal and moral norms, is the centre and core of the book. Emily Brontë makes this deep, ‘otherworldly’ relationship convincing and inevitable through cunningly gearing naturalistic, concrete descriptions around it.

*Wuthering Heights* is a well-constructed book, for all its appearance of casualness and complexity. Emily Brontë uses two ordinary, normal people as the main narrators: Nelly Dean, the housekeeper, and Lockwood, the naïve neighbour. They make the story believable and grounded, interpret it from a common-sense point of view and thereby reveal in part the inadequacy of such common-sense.

Contrary to how it has been popularly displayed, *Wuthering Heights*, set in the Yorkshire moors between 1778 and 1802, is extremely concrete. It is concerned not with love in the abstract but with the passions of living people – property-ownership, social comforts, marriages, the importance of education, the validity of religion, the relations between rich and poor.

There is nothing vague about the novel. It has an elemental quality because the forces of nature are evoked. But the realisation is intensely concrete. We smell the kitchen, we feel the force of the wind across the moors, we sense the changes of the seasons.

The story of Cathy and Heathcliff, the book’s core, has four stages. The first tells us of the establishing of their very special relationship through their rebellion against Hindley’s regime. The second reveals Catherine’s betrayal of Heathcliff, culminating in her death. The third deals with Heathcliff’s revenge. The final part tells of the change that comes over Heathcliff and of his death.

Even in the last two parts, when Catherine is dead, her relationship with Heathcliff remains the dominant theme of the book, underlying everything that occurs.

Yet the nature and the depth of that relationship are difficult to describe. In a sense they are beyond description. It is an affinity forged first in rebellion. It is described in the scene (Ch. 3) when Lockwood is forced to stay overnight

at Wuthering Heights and reads a fragment of Catherine's diary describing a painful Sunday under the guardianship of her older brother Hindley, who has reduced Heathcliff to the status of a serf.

Catherine and Heathcliff's rebellion against the regime in which Hindley and his wife sit in comfort by the fire whilst they are compelled to read *The Broad Way to Destruction* under the tutelage of the hypocrite Joseph, is made completely concrete. In revolt Catherine and Heathcliff hurl their books into the dog-kennel and in their revolt discover their deep and passionate need for each other. He, the outcast slum kid, turns to the lively, spirited, fearless girl who alone offers him understanding and comradeship.

And she, born into the world of Wuthering Heights, senses that to achieve a full humanity she must associate herself totally with him in his rebellion against the tyranny of the Earnshaws. The rebellion immediately wins over our sympathy. It is from Catherine and Heathcliff joining in rebellion that the particular quality of their relationship arises. It is why each feels a betrayal of what binds them together is a betrayal of everything that is most valuable in life and death.

After reading Catherine's diary in the bedroom, Lockwood falls asleep (Ch. 3). A wind-blown tree branch scrapes on the windowpane. Lockwood dreams he breaks the glass and tries to tear the branch off but instead clasps the fingers of a little ice-cold hand of the child-ghost, Catherine, pleading to be let in. Terror strikes him and unable to shake 'the creature' off, Lockwood rubs its wrist on the broken pane. Heathcliff is horrified to find Lockwood has slept in his dead beloved's bed and is put into a terrible wrath and outpouring of emotion by Lockwood's tale. Heathcliff ...

got onto the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting ... into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! Come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh do—once more! Oh! My heart's darling! Hear me this time, Catherine at last!'

Heathcliff and Catherine's extraordinary, primitive, elemental passion for one another reaches even across death and is at odds with the realm of civilized, standard society that all the other characters inhabit. They reject this world, turning cruelly against it and all it represents, exemplified by the 'Terror made me cruel,' reason Lockwood gave for his cruelty. The window is a symbol of the divide. Catherine, lost now in the 'other,' cannot get 'in,' whilst Heathcliff, though he forces the window open and howls into the night, cannot get 'out.'



*Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon in the 1939 film version of  
Wuthering Heights.*

Shortly after (Ch. 6), Cathy and Heathcliff, banished by Hindley, sneak up to Thrushcross Grange. Standing under the drawing-room window (a window again!) they look in on the refinements of the splendid home. But the Linton children, Edgar and Isabella, are in the throes of a tantrum.

Cathy and Heathcliff are caught. Edgar recognises Cathy and she is taken in by the Lintons. Meanwhile dark, ragged Heathcliff is declared ‘a wicked boy... quite unfit for a decent house,’ and thrown out. Thus the first snare is laid by which Catherine is held for a human destiny—her feet washed, cakes and wine given her, her beautiful hair combed. She stays at the Grange five weeks (Ch.7), educated by the Lintons to turn her from her wild ways. Seduced by the comfortable, bourgeois life she abandons the moor where she and Heathcliff were free. She despises Heathcliff’s lack of ‘culture’- he has no conversation, does not brush his hair, he’s dirty (Ch. 9).

She betrays Heathcliff, accepting Edgar's proposal of marriage. But she tells Nelly that marrying Edgar would make her grieve for Heathcliff, her second half. She kids herself that she can keep them both.

Heathcliff runs away. Catherine, distraught, looks for him in the night. In the morning drenched and grief ridden, she becomes delirious and falls gravely ill. She recovers, marries Edgar becoming mistress of Thrushcross Grange, the old Linton parents die and Heathcliff returns.

From the moment of Heathcliff's return, Catherine's attempts to reconcile herself to the Grange are doomed. In their relationship now there is no tenderness, but, once Heathcliff is near, Catherine can maintain no illusions about the Lintons. The open air, nature, the moors are contrasted with the world of Thrushcross Grange. And the contempt for the Lintons is a moral contempt, not a jealous one.

We continue to sympathise with Heathcliff, even after his marriage to Isabella, because Emily Brontë convinces us that what Heathcliff stands for is morally superior to what the Lintons stand for. The climax of this inversion comes at the death of Catherine. Weakened by self-imprisonment and starvation she literally 'catches her death' by throwing open the window (the window again!), leaning out into the winter wind and calling across the moors to Heathcliff.

The stage is set for a moment of conventional drama. Catherine is dying, Heathcliff appears out of the night. Will Catherine reject Heathcliff and vindicate her marriage vow? Will true love triumph with Catherine and Heathcliff embracing at the end? Neither happens! Heathcliff engages in a ruthless tirade of Catherine.

You teach me now how cruel you've been—cruel and false. *Why* did you despise me? *Why* did you betray your own heart Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you—they'll damn you. You loved me—then what *right* had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you* have broken it, and in breaking it you have broken mine...Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you—oh, God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave? (Ch. 14).

It is one of the harshest and most moving passages in literature. The Catherine-

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Heathcliff relationship, standing as it does for a finer, more morally profound humanity than the standards of the Lintons and the Earnshaws has undergone the intense examination Heathcliff here brings to it.

On the night after her burial, unable to follow her (although he digs up her grave to lie beside her in the coffin), Heathcliff returns to the Heights through the window—for Hindley has barred the door—to wreak his fury on the living.

After Catherine's death Heathcliff continues his revenge. It is the most peculiar section of the novel. He becomes a monster: what he does to Isabella, to Hareton, to the young Cathy, to his son, even to the wretched Hindley, is cruel and inhuman. We may feel, perhaps, Emily Brontë has gone too far. Yet despite everything, we continue to sympathise with Heathcliff, to identify with him against the others.

Heathcliff's revenge has moral force. It is not merely neurotic. With complete ruthlessness he uses against his enemies, the Earnshaws and Lintons, their own weapons of money and arranged marriages, beating them at their own game. He buys out Hindley and reduces him to drunken impotency; he marries Isabella and then organises the marriage of his son to Catherine Linton, so that he controls the entire property of the two families. He systematically degrades Hareton Earnshaw to servility and illiteracy.

Throughout this dreadful section of the book Heathcliff retains our sympathy because instinctively we recognise a rough moral justice in what he has done to his oppressors and because, though he is inhuman, we understand why he is inhuman. We recognise that the very forces which drove him to rebellion for a higher freedom have themselves entrapped him in their own values.

If *Wuthering Heights* stopped there it would still be a great book. But in *Wuthering Heights* we have not done with Heathcliff yet. For at the moment of his horrible triumph a subtle change begins to come over him. He is startled one morning by the sight of the happy couple, the young Cathy and Hareton. Cathy is educating Hareton, teaching him to 'read it right,' and thereby they are falling in love. Heathcliff admits to Nelly that Hareton reminds him uncannily of himself, that the attachment between Cathy and Hareton is a 'poor conclusion' to his plans but that he is sapped of his desire for revenge. (Ch. 33).

Watching Cathy and Hareton's love grow, and, as Cathy teaches Hareton to write and stops laughing at his ignorance, Heathcliff comes to understand something of the failure of his own revenge. The young Cathy and Hareton are conceived on a less intense and passionate scale than Catherine and Heath-

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cliff. But they do symbolise the continuity of life and human aspirations, and it is through them that Heathcliff comes to understand the hollowness of his triumph.

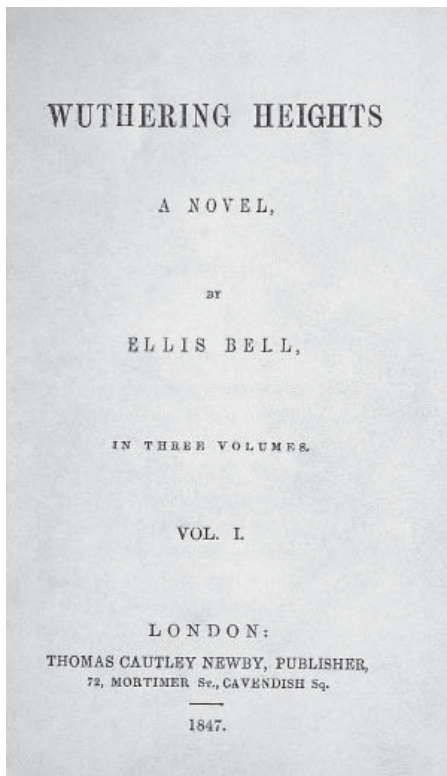
It is when Hareton comes to Cathy's aid when he, Heathcliff, strikes her that he becomes aware that in their feeling for each other there is something of the same quality of his own relationship with Catherine, the now-deceased mother. The change begins as soon as Cathy and Hareton are drawn together as rebels. For now, for the first time, Heathcliff is confronted not with those who accept the values of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights but with those who share, however remotely, his own wild endeavours to hold his right.

The great rage dies in Heathcliff but he does not repent. He has come to see the pointlessness of his fight to revenge himself. Facing the full moral horror of his betrayal he can die – not nobly or triumphantly, but at least as a man.

This re-achievement of manhood by Heathcliff gives the last pages of *Wuthering Heights* a sense of positive and unsentimental hope. At the end of the novel, Nelly tells Lockwood that Hareton and Catherine Linton are to be married on New Year's Day, 1803: surely a reconciliation of Wuthering Heights and the Grange and all that the houses represented: a turning from the strife and a brighter future based on love, education and social improvement.

The first half of the novel gives a picture of a fierce, passionate binary view in which the melodrama of the romance leads to competition and confrontation. The second half gives us, at the end, a novel of education, gentle love and quiet development, ending in the gentle evocation of nature in the final sentence.

The book gives us, above all, the depth of feeling that binds Catherine and Heathcliff. Their love is an expression of a necessity, if life rather than death is



chosen, to revolt against all that would destroy our treasured inmost needs and aspirations and, through acting together, to become more fully human. Catherine, responding to this deep human necessity, rebels with Heathcliff but in marrying Edgar betrays her own humanity. Heathcliff, by revenging himself on the tyrants, betrays his humanity too and destroys his relationship with Catherine, whose spirit must haunt the moors. Only when the new change comes over Heathcliff and he recognises through Hareton the full claims of humanity can Catherine be released from torment and their relationship re-established.

The book is concerned with greater issues than individual death. Heathcliff's rebellion is the rebellion of an individual who is spiritually and physically degraded by society. Just as he adopts the standards of the oppressors, the human values implicit in his early rebellion and in his love for Catherine vanish.

*Wuthering Heights* then is an expression of the stresses and tensions and conflicts that underpin society. Its powerful evocation of nature, of moorland and storm, of the stars and the seasons is an essential part of its revelation of the very movements of life itself. The men and women in the book are not prisoners of these forces of nature, but they live in the world and strive to change it, sometimes successfully, always painfully, with almost infinite difficulty and error.

This unending struggle is conveyed to us because the novel is conceived in actual, concrete, particular terms. And that is why Emily Brontë's novel is at the same time a statement about the life she knew and a statement about life as such.

**Sean Lennon**

# The Education Of Victoria

*'The most suitable education'.*

On 24 May 1832 Victoria became a teenager, five years before she ascended the throne of England. Her mother's Birthday letter to her wished...

my beloved Victoria to become a Pattern to Others: - you possess every means for doing so, you receive the most suitable education (Williams, 2009, p211).

Victoria's first tutor, when she was nearly four, was Reverend George Davys, Vicar of Willoughby-on-Thames, Leicestershire and a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. She had been resistant to reading and he came up with the idea of writing words on cards and hiding them around the room. She enjoyed this game. He also worked hard to obliterate the Germanic ring of her English, correcting her habit of confusing her Vs and Ws and training her to produce the 'ch' sound. As she grew older, he began to teach her to write on slate and complete simple arithmetic.

When Victoria was five her mother, the Duchess of Kent, chose Louise Lehzen to be her governess after her nurse Mrs Brock departed, and she was Victoria's governess until she became Queen at 18. Lehzen was treated as an equal – not a servant – by the Duchess and allowed to join the company, much to some guests' disgust. The Queen of Württemberg shrieked that 'she would not sit down to table with a maid servant'. She gave up all her friends and contacts and was not well connected or a political threat to the Duchess of Kent in England. Lehzen was made a Hanoverian Baroness by George IV, as Victoria was not to be served by a commoner. Consequently, all her time was spent with Victoria. A typical day was, 'Breakfast at half past eight, luncheon at half past one and dinner at seven'. The princess was her only object and her only thought for 13 years. She supervised lessons and piano practice, was driven around the Park and watched Victoria play. She read her stories whilst she was being dressed, so that she didn't habitually gossip with servants. On holidays and free time she was with Victoria and even took lessons in her room. Victoria was not a keen needlewoman, so Lehzen would sew and make dresses for her dolls with Victoria's direction on styles. Lehzen later remarked that she had never known a child as naughty as Victoria, particularly in her half-sister's (Feodora's) French lesson where she threw scissors at Lehzen, but she always treated her with kindness, patience and absolute loyalty.

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Unlike many 19th century children, Victoria was able to meet her mother's visitors and sup with the adults, this occurred infrequently. 'I had a very unhappy life as a child' claimed Victoria.

The Duchess of Kent appointed further tutors for her daughter. Thomas Steward, writing master at Westminster, was appointed to instruct Victoria in writing, geography and arithmetic, and Monsieur Grandineau came to teach French. Reverend Davys, her tutor of old, taught History. There was a riding master and a French Dancing mistress. Mr Richard Westall, a respected Royal Academician, became the drawing master and Mr Sale, the organist at St Margaret's Westminster, taught Victoria singing and music. Not an easy job: on one occasion when she was told that she must practise like everybody else, Victoria slammed shut the lid of her piano and shouted, 'There! there is no must about it'.

Lessons continued from 9.30 to 11.30, then there was play or walking with one hour for lunch. The second half of the school day lasted from 3.00 until 5.00, after which



*The young Victoria.*



Victoria learned English, German and French poetry by heart. On Wednesday afternoon Mr Davys gave her religious instruction. On Thursday she had a dancing lesson, and on Friday music. On Saturdays she read over her lessons until 11.00, learnt German at 3.00, wrote letters from 4.00 until 5.00, and then practised French for an hour. She was always accompanied in the lessons by her mother or Lehzen, and later by the Duchess of Northumberland and sometimes visiting aristocrats and dignitaries. This rigorous curriculum was very different to previous kings who had spent their time hunting, drinking or dallying idly with the court. Victoria was trained to be disciplined and hard-working, and she grew up absolutely accustomed to being watched and on show. The rigid organisation of Victoria's day was typical for a girl of her time, but the academic quality of her education was unusual. Many girls were still taught at home by their mothers. Education in girls' schools aimed to produce girls who would become submissive wives who had just enough qualities to make them appealing through rote learning, sewing and copying, particularly of music. Goldsmith's *History of England*, Rollins' *Ancient History*, Lindley Murray's *Grammar* and plenty of sewing and stitching were common. Many girls were encouraged to read improving texts and were advised to hide their learning or refrain from arguing. Victoria was encouraged to read history and



*Victoria, Albert and the dogs.*

consider the behaviour of kings and queens and she appears never to have been taught that she must be submissive to men.

The day after George IV's death...[Victoria's mother] sent a letter, written by Conroy and signed by her, to the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington. She demanded that the office of Regent be vested fully in herself, asked for Victoria to be given an official governess, a lady of rank to accompany her on formal occasions, and also requested that her daughter receive twice-yearly examinations from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord President of His Majesty's Privy Council, the Bishops of London and Lincoln and the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench (Ibid, p196).

Wellington refused the Duchess of Kent's political demands, but Victoria's education as Queen of England was officially to be funded by the government in the form of an official governess and twice-yearly examinations from clergy, the nobility and legislative council. Her mother's carefully designed curriculum was thorough in content and in further ensuring Whig support and Victoria's credentials to rule England after the profligate and unpopular leadership of her uncles George III, George IV and William IV during the turn of the 18th century.

Her mother had examinations set for Victoria by the Bishops of London and Lincoln. Victoria demonstrated a good knowledge of scripture, history and the precepts of the Church of England. She was adept at geography, arithmetic and Latin grammar and finding countries on her globes, and her English and Latin pronunciation was good. The examiners endorsed her grasp of modern languages and decided her drawings were executed with the freedom and correctness of an older child.

Their only recommendation was that the Princess should know her 'future position in this country'.

Her rigorous and academic education was a foundation that supported Victoria when she became Queen of England when she was 18. Her political education was about to begin, disastrously at first with Lord Melbourne's guidance; more successfully with her marriage to Albert.

### **Reference:**

Williams K., *Becoming Queen* U.K. 2009

**Annette Harman**

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*The following articles are adapted from talks given to the Society during the year.*

*This talk on Thomas Bewick was scheduled for February, 2011*

## Thomas Bewick

As Brontë lovers we are much interested in Thomas Bewick because the Brontës were influenced by him in their art, and especially because of the reference to his *History of British Birds* at the beginning of *Jane Eyre*.



*Thomas Bewick, above, and his home, Cherryburn.*

*Below: the workshop interior*



His name was a household word in the first part of the 19th century, yet he and his work are very little known today. His life did just overlap those of the Brontë sisters - when he died in 1828, Charlotte was 12.

He was born in 1753 at Cherryburn, a small farm on the south bank of the river Tyne, 12 miles west of Newcastle. His father rented both the farm and a small colliery and delivered coal to the neighbourhood. The house still stands and I visited it as part of a Brontë Society excursion some years ago.

Thomas was the eldest of eight children and helped his father, both on the farm and around the mine. He came mostly under the care of his aunt Hannah and his grandmother, who lived with them, I suppose because his mother had her hands full with the other children. But he himself was quite a handful, always getting into some scrape or other – getting scalded or falling out of a tree. Once he ran across the fields stark naked because he wanted to feel what it would be like to be a savage in wildest Africa.

He spent as much time as he could out of doors and he developed a love of nature,

birds and fish and rabbits. His other great love, of drawing, was evident at an early age. He was forever drawing pictures in every available space in his schoolbooks, carving pictures on the backs of pews, or drawing with chalk on the flagstones at home. He considered tombstones a marvellous canvas for his talents.

He was sent to the Mickley school, not so much to improve his learning but rather to keep him out of harm's way. His teacher was quite severe and young Bewick was often beaten for getting up to mischief, for nothing at all, or for failing to learn what he could not comprehend.



*Above: 'Bewick & son  
Engravers  
Copperplate printing'*

A lot of what we know of Bewick's life comes from the memoir that he wrote for his daughter Jane towards the end of his life, published posthumously.

*Below: A £5 banknote for a private bank*

On one occasion he was flogged, by what was called 'hugging'. A large boy had to stand in front of him and hold Bewick's hands over his shoulders. That left young Bewick's posterior easily accessible for the flogging. As Bewick tells the story, he recalled having bit the front boy on the neck causing him to scream out and fling Bewick to the ground.



The master seized him up but young Bewick kicked him in the shins with his clogs and ran off. The other boy's mother, living close by, came in on hearing all the noise. Bewick describes her as a 'spirited woman' and a fierce row developed between her and the schoolmaster. He didn't return to the school, instead playing truant. He amused himself by making dams in a small stream and sailing makeshift boats.

He was later educated by the Reverend Gregson in the rectory study, and that went rather better.

At 14 he was apprenticed to William Beilby, the only engraver in Newcastle, and soon learnt all the diverse aspects of the trade. He had to engrave coats of arms on swords, or silver mugs. He engraved clock faces, designs on glassware, brass plates for coffins and the dies for printing banknotes - at that time each bank issued its own banknotes.

A small part of his training was in cutting blocks for woodcuts. Beilby hated doing this, and wasn't very good at it. It wasn't long before Bewick was more proficient than his master in that aspect of the trade.

At the time most woodcuts were used to make cheap picture books for children, and the woodcuts were quite crude. At 15 he carved the diagrams for Charles Hutton's book on Mensuration.

His apprenticeship ended when he was 21, and he returned to Cherryburn for two years, working freelance. In 1776 he received a prize from the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts and in the summer went on a walking tour of Scotland. He found the Scots in remote places extremely friendly and hospitable. When he finished his Scottish adventure he went to seek his fortune in London, but hated his time there and had a very poor opinion of the inhabitants. After nine months he returned to Newcastle.

Bewick hadn't wanted to set up there in competition with Beilby, so when Beilby offered him a partnership Bewick was delighted. Although he is remembered for his woodcuts Bewick spent the majority of his time engraving on glass or metal. In the early years, when he wasn't engraving objects, he worked on



illustrating books of fables. In 1783 he began work on the book that would make him famous – *A General History of Quadrapeds*.

He married in 1786 and the couple had three girls and one boy. As with Patrick Brontë’s family, none of the children married, so there are no direct descendants.



It wasn't until 1790 when he was 37 that *A General History of Quadrapeds* was published. The next year he conceived the idea of a similar book on British birds. Because he preferred to draw from life he spent two months at the Wycliffe museum making sketches of the vast collection of stuffed birds. But when he came to carve the blocks he noticed the very great difference between preserved specimens & those from nature, no regard having been paid at that time to place the former in their proper attitudes, nor to place the different series of the feathers, so as to fall properly upon each other. The taxidermists of the day were not very skilled in arranging their specimens as they were in life.

So Bewick started to collect newly shot specimens. At first these came from friends, but soon word got around and hunters were sending specimens to him by the cartload. Some were very useful, but others were too decomposed by the time they reached him and were of no use.

Many specimens were live ones that he encountered on his walks, as he crept up on them. One bird he found injured, so that it couldn't fly, and he set it up near a window, where he fed it ants while he sketched it.

The first volume, *Land Birds*, was published in 1797. Although it was very successful

Beilby decided to dissolve the partnership and concentrated on manufacturing watches and clocks.

Both *Quadrupeds* and *Land Birds* went into several editions and in 1804, the second volume of *A History of British Birds: Water Birds* was published. Over the next few years Bewick illustrated many other books, the most famous of which was *Aesop's Fables*.

His memoirs, addressed to his daughter Jane, give a wonderful description of rural life in northern England in Georgian times. He also discusses the engraving techniques that he developed, and in later chapters branches out giving his ideas on religion, politics and education. He died at the age of 75 in 1828.



Now I'd like to discuss some of the technicalities of woodcuts. There is a fundamental difference between engraving on wood and engraving on copper or steel. With copperplate the picture is etched into the surface by means of a tool, or through the use of acid. The plate is inked and the surface is wiped clean so that the engraved lines become black and the untouched areas remain white. To achieve this the paper has to be slightly moistened and great pressure must be applied. This forces the paper into the etched lines to pick up the ink.

With woodcuts the ink is applied to the surface so that the un-etched areas become black and the etched lines remain white. The block is usually placed in the matrix together with the text, so that text and picture can be printed together in the normal way.

One technique to display texture is

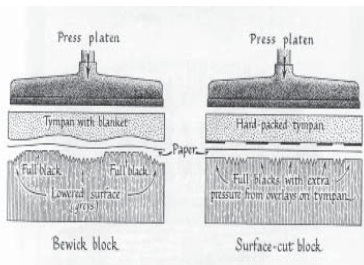


to cross hatch. With copper engraving this is very easy. You just engrave a series of parallel lines in one direction and then another series in another direction.



With woodcuts this isn't so easy because the hatched lines have to remain at full height, and so the many diamond gaps between them have to be gouged out with a tool. One way round this is to print twice, with one direction of lines being superimposed upon another. But Bewick discovered that texture doesn't need cross-hatching. He achieved a similar result by just one set of parallel lines, usually curved. He developed a special tool which scratched several parallel lines at the same time.

Another technique that Bewick developed was to engrave at different levels. Lines that were to be fainter were engraved deeper, with whites being the deepest of all. By using a soft tympan, a sort of cushion that goes between the press and the paper, the parts of the paper that were to be lighter were pushed down and picked up a little of the ink, but less than those areas that were to be black.



In early woodcuts the timber was engraved along the grain, but it was found to be better if the end-grain was used. Bewick used box-wood, cut across the grain, and polished the end with a scraper. Boxwood grows very slowly so that the annual growth lines are very close together. This makes for a very dense wood that can accommodate cuts very close together, allowing for reproduction in extremely fine detail. The downside is that the cross section of a box-wood branch is rarely more than 10 centimetres across so that a completed block was smaller than that, in



some cases very much smaller.

Older woodcuts that go along the grain could occupy a whole page but Bewick's were very much smaller. But this was ideal for the book on birds because the books were produced small enough that a naturalist could stuff it into his greatcoat as he went out observing.

There is a small number of woodcuts by Bewick that are somewhat bigger. To achieve this he divided the picture into four and engraved four separate pieces of box-wood. He did this so cleverly that it was difficult to see the joins in the finished print.



It would be natural to think that woodcuts would be less durable than copper or steel engraving, but that is not the case at all. A woodcut can print a million copies with no noticeable wear, while a copper plate, because of the constant polishing of the surface, and because of the chemicals in the ink, can show signs of wear after only a few hundred copies.



As well as the illustrations of birds, nearly every page of *A History of British Birds* has a vignette, or small picture, displaying some aspect of country life. These are delightful. They are called tail-pieces, essentially a way of filling up what would otherwise be empty space, because each bird had to start on a new page. But Bewick liked to call them 'tale-pieces' because, as he said, each one tells a story.



These were the pictures that young Jane Eyre found so interesting. Some of the common themes are tombstones, fishing, ships, little boys playing in the countryside. He showed his mischievous sense of humour



by showing little boys, or farm animals, creating havoc.

A fishing rod and the long, graceful line curving into the water can be depicted by a simple line across the picture. Although Bewick was capable of showing very fine detail by meticulous engraving he seemed to take great delight in finishing off a picture with one or more slashes across the surface.



To transform a scene on a fine day to one in rain, he scratched a series of oblique lines across the scene and these came out as white parallel lines, representing the rain.



The flow of liquid could also be achieved very simply in this way and quite a number of his pictures show this. There are several vignettes that show men, or little boys, relieving themselves against a wall. One or two show a vomit, or a leak sprung in a beer barrel.

He was a man of inventiveness and artistry, and the outcome of his work influenced both Jane Eyre and her creator, Charlotte Brontë.



## Christopher Cooper



# Charlotte Brontë and Romanticism

*Adapted from a talk to the Society in May 2011.*

*Mandy Swann achieved her doctorate within this year. Our congratulations to her.*

Charlotte Brontë is usually discussed as a Victorian writer. However, I suggest that she might be better seen as a *Romantic* writer and will explore the ways in which elements of Romanticism are important in her writing, her conceptions of writing, the writer, artist and even creativity itself.

There are several ways to say that Charlotte Brontë or any of the Brontës can be seen as Romantic. One is to describe some of the exemplary traits literary critics ascribe to Romantic literature and Charlotte Brontë's work exhibits them. Another is to compare with a writer from the Romantic period (between 1785-1830), long considered representative of that period like William Wordsworth, and Charlotte Brontë's work exhibits similarities of theme or ideology with that writer. I will focus on the latter means of establishing the Romanticism of Charlotte Brontë. One main similarity of theme and ideology between Charlotte Brontë and William Wordsworth can be summed up in the following claims:

- Charlotte Brontë and William Wordsworth portray the writer and 'artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman'.<sup>1</sup>
- Brontë and Wordsworth also portray engagements with art and literature (including seeing, reading and creating art and literature) as especially healing and redemptive. They do this both in their writing and their writing about writing.

The idea of the artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman has been identified as a key trait of Romantic literature by literary critics since the mid-19th century, and it continues to be discussed as a key trait of Romantic literature. Recent critics, Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy (2008), observe this, even as they dispute the efficacy of the terms 'Romanticism' and 'Victorianism'.

There are three areas of discussion: what is meant here by the portrayal of the writer and artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman; brief examples from Charlotte Brontë's and William Wordsworth's work; and a few examples from the work of Anne and Emily Brontë.

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1 Radford and Sandy, *Romantic Echoes*, p. 2.

One of the Romantic traits visible in the work of Charlotte Brontë is that she, like the iconic Romantic writer William Wordsworth, portrays the writer and artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman. So what does that mean? To address this question, it is important to take each word or phrase individually.<sup>1</sup>

To portray the writer or artistic figure (and this can include actors and musicians) as a ‘solitary genius’, is to portray the writer or artistic figure as in possession of special abilities like extraordinary insight and cognitive ability, the idea of their solitary nature makes them somehow pure, self-contained and self-assured – virtuous enough or having suffered enough to have that special insight and cognitive ability beyond that of ordinary people. Their solitariness also suggests they might be above or beyond ordinary human concerns, needs and desires.

To portray the writer or artistic figure as a ‘sage’ is to portray them as in possession of special knowledge and wisdom. A sage is a person venerated for experience, calm judgment, and wisdom and also one who is serious or solemn.

To portray the writer or artistic figure as a ‘mystical shaman’ is to represent them as having access to the divine or the unknown. In tribal cultures a shaman is a medium between the visible world and the invisible spirit world and a healer because of their ability to be that mediator. Therefore, to portray the writer or artistic figure as a mystical shaman is to portray them as having special access to supernatural knowledge or knowledge beyond the ordinary that gives them the power to heal emotional and mental fractures and to potentially heal anxieties about the human condition.

In summary, to portray the writer or artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman is to portray artist and writers, and experiences of art and writing (including reading and acts of creating art and writing), as being able to offer the insight, authority, wisdom and divine access that is necessary to provide answers or to address in some helpful or healing way, anxieties or questions about human existence - questions and anxieties, for instance, about human suffering, emotional turmoil, familial, love and social relationships, values and religious faith.

This essay will now focus on examining the manifestation of the depiction of the writer or artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman in examples

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1 *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘solitary’, ‘genius’, ‘sage’, ‘mystical’, ‘shaman’, pp. 1823, 664, 1642, 1141, and 1732.

from William Wordsworth's poetry and the writing Brontës.

In Book V of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth uses the symbolism of a shell to offer a vision of the immortal value of poetry and the divinity of the truth which it offers.<sup>2</sup> Below is the relevant section from Book V:

I saw before me stretched a boundless plain  
Of sandy wilderness, all black and void,  
And as I looked around, distress and fear  
Came creeping over me, when at my side,  
Close at my side, an uncouth shape appeared  
Upon a dromedary, mounted high.  
He seemed an Arab of the Bedouin tribes:  
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm  
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell  
Of a surpassing brightness. At the sight  
Much I rejoiced, not doubting but a guide  
Was present, one who with unerring skill  
Would through the desert lead me; and while yet  
I looked and looked, self-questioned what this freight  
Which the new-comer carried through the waste  
Could mean, the Arab told me that the stone  
(To give it in the language of the dream)  
Was 'Euclid's Elements,' and 'This,' said he,  
'Is something of more worth;' and at the word  
Stretched forth the shell, so beautiful in shape,  
In colour so resplendent, with command  
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so,  
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,  
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,  
A loud prophetic blast of harmony;  
An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold  
Destruction to the children of the earth  
By deluge, now at hand. No sooner ceased  
The song, than the Arab with calm look declared  
That all would come to pass of which the voice  
Had given forewarning, and that he himself

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2 *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979).

Was going then to bury those two books:  
The one that held acquaintance with the stars,  
And wedded soul to soul in purest bond  
Of reason, undisturbed by space or time;  
The other that was a god, yea many gods,  
Had voices more than all the winds, with power  
To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,  
Through every clime, the heart of human kind. (V. 71-109)

The voice of the shell is a prophetic heralding of both violent apocalypse and the potential for renewal. The enormous power of the shell's poetic song is to make living a dead language and to potentially heal human contradictions, and this is often read as evident in the contrary aural suggestions of 'blast' and 'harmony'. The mystical power of the shell is also visible since the unknown becomes 'in that instant' known, the heard language foreign yet completely understood. The shell is made exceptional, it is given magical connotations and a numinous power that the stone is not given. There is a ritualistic simultaneity in the utterance of the word 'worth' with the act of stretching out the shell, and the offering of the shell in the midst of the coming deluge is an almost sacrificial gesture, the dreamer's act of holding the shell to his ear evokes the transferral of power or perhaps the tactile meeting of the immortal and the mortal, as the shell's immortal prophesy blasts into the ear of the mortal man.

One of Wordsworth's overriding aims in *The Prelude's* is to characterise the growth of his poetic sensibility, and this is also a religious growth since he views poetic striving as a striving for truth and indeed 'a feeling of Poetry' is related to 'reverence for God'. In a letter to Lady Margaret Beaumont of 21 May 1807, Wordsworth writes:

It is an awful truth that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of Poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live or wish to live in the broad light of the world, among those who either are, or are striving to make them selves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth and an awful one because to be incapable of a feeling of Poetry in my sense of the word is to be without love of human nature & reverence for God—<sup>3</sup>

In 'Elegaic Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle', Wordsworth depicts the painting of Peele Castle in a Storm by his friend, George Beaumont, as

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3 J. Baker, *Wordsworth: A Life in Letters* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 90.

‘a passionate Work!’, ‘wise and well’, an expression of the deepest human truths, that, echoing Paul. 4.13, ‘not without hope we suffer and we mourn ‘the truth that humans suffer and that suffering is without meaning, unless it is possible to believe in God and resurrection’.<sup>4</sup> In Paul 4:13 where belief in the resurrection of Christ is employed to ward off the sorrow of mourners:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

When viewed in the context of Wordsworth’s letters surrounding his brother’s death, the parallels with Paul 4:13 are clear since ‘fortitude’, is for Wordsworth in these letters ‘granted and sustained by God’.



*William Wordsworth*

One final point to make about Wordsworth with respect to the depiction of the writer or artist as a solitary genius, sage and mystical shaman is that for Wordsworth, writing poetry is a vehicle and means of remembrance, and remembrance is at least in part a means to ‘the philosophic mind’, the mind that can access divine truth about human life. For Wordsworth the remembrance of experiences of the natural world is a means of emotional healing, of companionship even, it is the mental salve for anguish, loss and pain. Wordsworth quite self-consciously,

particularly in works like *The Prelude*, records experiences of the natural world in writing, in poetry.

If, as Wordsworth notes in ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘nature never did betray the heart that loved her’ and, speaking to his sister in the poem, those natural scenes that he declares will offer ‘healing thoughts’, ‘If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,/ Should be thy portion’, then poetry too, the act of writing and reading poetry has a role to play in the development and access to those healing thoughts,

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4 ‘Elegiac Stanzas’, ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’, in *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions, 1994).

because it is through this poem that in after-years, the remembrance of those natural scenes will be contained. The same is true in the poem 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' (1804): when the vision of the daffodils 'flash[es]' upon 'that inward eye/that is the bliss of solitude' and the 'heart' of the speaker of the poem 'dances with the daffodils' – poetry is also the vehicle of that 'bliss', that helps to heal the 'vacant' or 'pensive mood'.

The Brontës also depict the artist or writer as a solitary genius, blest with special access to knowledge, wisdom and even divinity, and the experience of art, writing or reading as offering special knowledge of self, solace or healing.

All of Charlotte Brontë's heroines and many of her heroes are solitary figures at key points in her fiction - at key points solitude defines her characters, makes them special, individuates, grants them special knowledge of suffering or independence that constructs them as worthy. Charlotte Brontë's imaginative creations, her 'visitors' or the 'spirits' from the 'vasty deep', enthral her but also fill her with shame and fear.<sup>5</sup> She is 'ecstatic' when the 'ongoings of the infernal world' of her imagination are clear to her;<sup>6</sup> yet, as she remarks in an often quoted letter to Ellen Nussey, if her inner 'thoughts' and imaginative 'dreams' (in this case of her Angrian world) were known, 'you would pity and I daresay despise me'.<sup>7</sup>



Charlotte Brontë. 1854

In *The Professor*, writing reveals aspects of self, such as depths of feeling and intelligence that makes Frances Henri attractive to William Crimsworth.<sup>8</sup>

In the later chapters of the novel, reading to each other symbolises the intimacy

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5 'My compliments to the weather' [undated], Alexander 'Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head', in *Jane Eyre: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, ed., Richard J. Dunn (New York: Norton, 2001 pp. 409-416, p. 409.

6 'All this day I have been in a dream' Oct 14, 1836. Alexander 'Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head', in *Jane Eyre: Authoritative Text*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Dunn ed. pp. 403-406, p. 403.

7 Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey 10 May 1836, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, 1829-1847*, vol 1, Margaret Smith ed.(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 143-4, p. 144.

8 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* (New York: OUP, 2008).

that develops and has developed between Frances and William, the intimacy that has solved for both of them the pain of isolation, an intimacy that offers them both meaning in life through a shared purpose in learning and teaching together.

In *Jane Eyre*, reading the vignettes and looking at the pictures in Bewick's *Book of Birds* offers the young Jane consolation and escape from her alienated and unbefriended, unloved status in her aunt's home. The experience of literature and art in this way also offers her a way in to her innermost self.<sup>9</sup> Showing Rochester her paintings, Jane reveals her inner depths and abilities and that makes her more attractive to him, makes her seem extraordinary and even blessed with supernatural power. Jane describes the act of painting these pictures as the happiest she had ever been. While Rochester is totally blind, as a way of expressing the total intimacy and devotion they have together, Jane describes the act of reading to Rochester and 'putting into words, the effect of field, tree, tow, river, cloud, sunbeam' (p. 590).

In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's violent reaction to the loss of a letter from Dr Bretton suggests that Dr Bretton's words contained so much solace, so much respite from isolate and emotional sterility, that their loss was not simply the loss of paper with writing on it, but the loss of an emblem, an emissary of companionship, of the answers that she was stitching together, even if foolishly, to the questions she had about what would make her life meaningful and worthwhile.<sup>10</sup>

My letter! my letter! I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly. Cruel, cruel doom! To have my bit of comfort pre-ternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue! (307)

By witnessing the theatrical performance of Vashti, Lucy Snowe sees represented both the heaven and hell of emotional expression and the experience of love. Witnessing Vashti, Lucy learns a moral lesson, and can see more clearly the terror and ecstasy that are part of human relationships and emotional experience, and understands the value of both restraint and the need to experience emotional expression and release.

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9 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 2006).

10 Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Margaret Smith ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

In the final chapters Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the vision of Hareton being taught to read by Cathy signals the potential for redemption and familial and emotional healing that is now possible after the agony and emotional privation of the past – not only Hareton's and Cathy's past, but the tortured past of Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton.<sup>11</sup> When Linton places the book in the listless and dying Catherine's lap, books become a sign of life or the hope for life and healing, though she does not take up the offer. This signals her decision to die, as much as keeping the window open or working herself up into emotional outbursts. In that famous scene, when Mr Lockwood spends the night at Wuthering Heights and sees the various names written over and over again on the lintel/mantle – Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, Catherine Linton, these writings and rewritings could be interpreted as Catherine's psychological mediations, her emotional and mental workings out of self and what her life could or should be. Writing in the Bible, the funny caricatures of Joseph are a means of expressing the self (otherwise repressed within an unloving household), and a means of emotional release and sanctuary, again, away from and in defiance of that unloving and unsympathetic household.

Finally, one brief example from Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: the production of art offers the heroine solace and assists her to heal emotionally after the end of her disastrous marriage, both by offering the means of making a living and by offering her an emotional release and way of expressing her individuality.<sup>12</sup>

Both Wordsworth and the Brontës portray the artist/writer (and experiences of art and writing, including reading and acts of creating art and writing), as able to offer the insight, authority, wisdom and divine access that is necessary to provide answers to or heal anxieties about human existence, human suffering, emotional turmoil, familial and love and social relationships, values and religious faith. This shared portrayal of the writer or artist encourages an exploration of the Romanticism in the writing of the Brontës. It also encourages an exploration of the Romanticism inherent to contemporary constructs of the writer/artist figure in our society.

## **Mandy Swann**

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11 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Richard J. Dunn ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002)

12 Ann Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

## ‘Who Are You, Miss Snowe?’

*From a talk to the Brontë group on 24 September 2011*

I came to read *Villette* after reading *Jane Eyre*, as. I would think, almost everybody, And I came with a very clear idea of what I wanted: another Jane, another Rochester – not necessarily the same story, but very definitely the same tone, the same humour, and the same heart in the heroine.

When I picked up *Villette*, I read this on the back cover:

Based on Charlotte Brontë’s personal experience as a teacher in Brussels, *Villette* is a moving tale of repressed feelings and subjection to cruel circumstance and position, borne with heroic fortitude.

Rising above the frustrations of confinement in a rigid social order, it is also a story of a woman’s right to love and be loved.

All right! This was the business. I skipped over the introductory notes, as always, and I set about to meeting my second *Jane Eyre*.

The heroine of *Villette* is no Jane Eyre, of course, but it is amazing for how long I managed to force parallels onto the text, insisting on hearing Jane’s

*Illustration for Villette by Wimperis*



voice in this other character's mouth. Perhaps you were not as inflexible as I was in that first reading, but I demanded a Jane from this story, and the more closely I read *Villette*, the more I suspect that Charlotte Brontë knew it. In fact, I suspect that this book was a kind of revenge upon her readers, or at least those readers who were so besotted with *Jane Eyre* that they wanted only Janes from Brontë, and wanted Brontë herself to be Jane for them.

And in reading *Villette* as revenge, I noticed more and more just how angry this heroine is, and more specifically, how little she respects or expects of her readers. I'm not saying Brontë herself was bitter or contemptuous, but rather that I think I read the text most clearly when I take seriously just how bitter and contemptuous she has made her heroine narrator.

And somehow, I've managed to say all this without yet mentioning that heroine's name. No accident on my part, just as it was surely no accident on Brontë's to leave that crucial name unspoken until the end of chapter two. And no accident that that first mention is not a self-naming introduction by the narrator, not even a direct address by another character, but a by-the-by disparaging comment made from the handsome, faithless Graham Bretton to the precocious Polly Home that he hopes to get some 'amusement' out of her, 'which mama and Mistress Snowe there fail to yield me.' (p.12)

Even then, it is not explicit that Miss Snowe is our narrator, she is so nebulous and tangential a presence in the action.

In chapter three, following the departure of her father, Polly Home is described as dropping to her knees and crying 'Papa!' in a voice that the narrator compares to Jesus' death-cry on the cross. She says:

During an ensuing space of some minutes, I perceived she endured agony. She went through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel; it was in her constitution: she would have more of such instants if she lived. Nobody spoke. Mrs. Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm. (p.17)

Calm indeed! Positively serene in the face of a little child's grief. But who is Lucy Snowe? Brontë considered calling her Lucy Frost, so it seems legitimate to me to read her through her name, which appears simple enough.

**Lucy:** from the Latin for light, it is also the feminine form of Luke – the doctor who wrote the most detailed and complete of the four gospels.

**Snowe:** which carries with it all the connotations of winter cold, purity, stillness, smooth and featureless white. Snow can be like a blank page, ready to be inscribed, or tramped across perhaps, but in its original state covering over and removing all trace of what lies beneath.

Taken together, Lucy Snowe seems a name of clarity, chastity and innocence. A tendency toward the severe, even the chilling, perhaps, but very honest, and simple.

I think, however, we would do well to remember that the effect of light on snow, while pretty for an instant, after prolonged exposure is likely to cause snow-blindness, and the reader ought to expect to be badly disoriented, lost and frost-bitten before Lucy is done with us.

So, to the first reading. I found it difficult to find my footing in this book. Not only because the narrator is anonymous, and both elusive and allusive in references to herself, but also because the narrative is continually switching its focus and frustrating our expectations.

On page one, we are told that this young girl, unnamed, is staying with her god-mother, Mrs. Bretton. A woman so entirely herself, she and her son are the Brettons of Bretton, twice named for themselves and their home. Our narrator says:

One child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of, and in a quiet way I was a good deal taken notice of by Mrs. Bretton. (p1)

On the very next page, though, on returning from a walk, she finds her room occupied by another's crib and chest, and the child herself arrives shortly after: Polly Home, who is younger, littler, prettier, quirkiest, funnier (although not on purpose), and more explicitly recently orphaned. All in all, she is entertaining, needy, adorable, and immediately supplants the narrator from her own narrative.

Naming her Polly was, perhaps, a warning shot from Brontë. Polly, short for Paulina, is the feminine of Paul. And while Luke got to write a gospel and the book of Acts, Paul was responsible for 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament, and was as well a major player in Luke's narrative of Acts.

And indeed, Polly quickly takes the focus of Lucy's narrative for herself. Introduced in chapter one, she is the drive of chapters two and three, and her relationship with Graham seems to be the heart of the story.

Chapter four, though, is our first major disruption of expectation: suddenly

Lucy is an adult, her entire childhood being elided in one bizarre extended sailing metaphor, the Brettons and Polly are vanished, and Lucy is completely alone in the world. The focus of this chapter is her first job, the paid companion to Miss Marchmont – an arthritic, crippled and bitter virgin, who was bereaved by the death of her fiancé on Christmas Eve. She pours out her story in a kind of confession and repentance one spring night, with storms whipping the house and the wind wailing with the cry of the Banshee – that Celtic phantom woman whose keening is an omen of death. Lucy is promised assistance – Miss Marchmont’s will is to be changed – only she dies in the night, and Lucy is again alone and directionless.

And so, she spends chapter five petitioning an old family servant for advice, decides to go to London to seek her fortune, and just as quickly ups the ante and decides to go abroad to teach English to French children.

Once Lucy reaches the continent, the narrative seems to settle into its trajectory. But only seems to. Although all novels rely on withheld information, on a certain delay of gratification and pacing of revelation, not many stories are so abundantly weighted with intrigue as *Villette*. Here, the shifting focus of earlier chapters gives way to increasingly intensive doublings of identity, misdirections, disorientation, puzzles, riddles, mysteries and coincidences, all beginning with the appearance of a kind English stranger who leads Lucy from the coach to a place where she can stay. Although, of course, he doesn’t lead her all the way. He takes her only a short distance, then points her in the right direction and sends her off alone, whereupon she is harassed by drunken men who are no gentlemen, and runs off in a panic that makes her very quickly lost. An ominous figure for the reader’s experience of the story, because we too are led only a short distance, and then expected to find our own path through a labyrinth of twisting possibilities.

I tried to write down the narrative from here, using only the questions raised in each chapter, and it took up nearly three pages of bullet points. There are so many mysteries, it would be the rest of the paper to detail them all, but the big ones include:

Who is Ginevra Fanshawe’s suitor, Isidore? Is he the one throwing letters over the wall?

Who is it that Dr John admires so ardently and goes to such lengths to protect? Is it Mme. Beck, Rosine, or someone else altogether?

Does Mme Beck intend to marry Dr John, or is she keeping M. Paul for herself instead?

How is Lucy rescued after she faints in the street, and where has she been taken?

And here is a period of revelation where double identities appear to collapse into a simpler narrative: We discover that Dr John was the kind(-ish) English stranger, and he is Graham Bretton, and he is Ginevra's luckless bourgeoisie, Isidore. We see Lucy's rootlessness and dislocation anchored once more to the Bretton household, and once again she is made much of, although in that quiet, almost off-hand way she knew in Chapter one.

But then a new wave of intrigue hits: M Paul, who has been a peripheral character until now, suddenly starts leaping into the action, with spasms of anger and rebuke for Lucy. What is his problem?

Lucy is haunted by what was thought to be an old ghost-story: a nun in the attic! How is that possible? Realism seems invaded by the gothic, which would bring a whole new set of expectations to the story.

A fire interrupts her outing with Dr John, and a mysterious young woman captures his attention and requires, or at least receives, his rescue. (Lucy, by the way, being left to fend for herself in his wake.)

Then a second wave of revelation, as the beautiful young woman, the Countess de Bassompierre, turns out to be Polly Home all grown up and ready to usurp Lucy from her own story again; and she is Ginevra's much whinged-about cousin. Lucy, though dropped from all consciousness by Dr John, is picked up by Polly, offered employment as a professional companion, dressed as a lady, taken out into society, and handles it all with such equanimity that Ginevra asks:

'Who *are* you, Miss Snowe? ... you used to call yourself a nursery-governess; when you first came here you really had the care of the children in this house: I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a *bonne* – few governesses would have condescended so far – and now Madame Beck treats you with more courtesy than she treats the Parisienne, St Pierre; and that proud chit, my cousin, makes you her bosom friend! ... I wonder you are not more flattered by all this ... you take it with strange composure. If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand.' (pp.287-88)

A pointed, and even piercing inquiry, but one that Lucy refuses to answer, either for Ginevra or the reader. It is a question from which she immediately distracts us with yet more intrigues.

There is another frightening intrusion from the nun, and then, having sorted out the complexities of the English characters, the native Labasscourians demand their turn:

What is the relationship between Mme Beck and M. Paul? Or between Mme Beck and Mme Walravens?

Who is the old priest in Mms Walraven's house – and could it be Lucy's erstwhile confessor, Pere Silas?

What subterranean Catholic network is active between all these people and M. Paul?

What possible 'sudden and urgent summons of duty' (Mme Beck's words, p.411) could call M. Paul not only away from the school, but out of the country, off the continent and away from the northern hemisphere altogether?

Will Lucy see him before he goes?

One last visitation from the nun, and then another mystery: where is Ginevra? And with whom?

Stretched beyond all resilience, Lucy finally loses her temper, and blazes out against Mme Beck: she must see M. Paul. And where deception, obfuscation, delay and good manners will no longer contain Lucy, Mme Beck does the obvious and drugs Lucy with opiates. Perversely, Lucy cannot be sedated. What ought to erase consciousness only heightens it, what should calm her agitates her further. Instead of sleeping, Lucy steals out of the school and goes on an hallucinogenic midnight ramble, drifting almost invisibly through a carnival, observing the apparently newly married Dr John and Polly who are accompanied by their loving parents. She sees Mme.s Beck and Walravens, Pere Silas, M. Paul and a young girl who he might just be intended to marry.

This set of circumstances is soon enough explained by M. Paul himself, and his intentions to Lucy are finally revealed, and then, just as her whole childhood was glossed over in little more than a page, so her whole engagement passes in an instant – three years of solitary life, working as the headmistress of her own little school, writing and receiving letters from her love, only to have him shipwrecked and lost forever on his journey home to her. The end.

And no matter how many obstinate romantics choose to take Lucy's sarcastic narrative loophole – 'There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope' (p.462) – as valid, and believe that M. Paul might

somehow have survived, I think his death is the least ambiguous or uncertain event in the text, being triply confirmed by:

The banshee wail of the storm that wrecks his boat – the same banshee that Lucy says accompanied three bereavements in her life, the first two being the loss of her family and the loss of Miss Marchmont;

The prefiguring story of Miss Marchmont herself, who was bereaved on the verge of matrimony;

The prefiguring story of Justine-Marie, M. Paul's first love, who was herself denied to him three times: first by her parents' rejecting him as a suitable husband, then by her retreat to into nunnery, and then by her death.

And that's even leaving aside Lucy's own connection with nunnery, being not only haunted by the fake nun, but choosing the haunted laneway as her retreat, and burying her too-treasured letters from Dr John under Methusaleh – an old pear tree with a hollow at its root.

Well – so much for my first reading. I staggered away, wondering at what point I was meant to have identified M. Paul as the romantic hero, because Lucy's switch in focus from Dr John to M. Paul had me completely by surprise. Moreover, I could hardly reconstitute him in my own mind, having been so thoroughly schooled to think of him in critical and derogatory terms: small, ridiculous, dark, childish, and impetuous.

On my second reading, I was determined to look for clues, to find Lucy out far earlier in her account. But of course, finding Lucy out is the very thing I could not do. And it was finding Lucy, not M. Paul, that became the puzzle in this reading.

What I noticed was a pattern of deliberately misleading and ambiguous metaphor in the place of exposition; and a quite dark predilection for imagery of the monstrous, demonic and insane. The obvious place to start is with that hurried pass over the remaining eight years of her childhood. She begins by describing her return home from the Bretton household:

I betook myself home, having been absent six months. It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. (p.29)

This is, clearly enough, a parallel to the shipwreck passage at the book's

close – a refusal to submit to scrutiny, a shielding of the self from the reader’s expectation, and in return, a kind of angry, contemptuous implication that the reader is too soft and naïve a creature to be able to imagine what the bosom of a family might actually mean for some people. If you missed the sarcasm here, don’t worry, because Lucy intensifies it for you, going on to say,

Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass – the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Leaving aside for the moment who it is that supposes women and girls are so readily passive, it is enough to hear Lucy’s central question: ‘why not I with the rest?’

And on she goes:

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must have somehow fallen over-board, or there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time – a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.

As far as I recollect, I complained to no one about these troubles. (p.29)

This, for me, is a kind of figure story for Lucy’s style of misdirection. What is going on here? She begins with a simile: imagine her ‘as a bark’ – her childhood is likened to a little boat, steered by one who is relaxed and happy – although with his eyes closed and his attention turned to prayer, he is perhaps not fully attentive to the task at hand.

In the next paragraph, though, the simile of Lucy as boat has shifted, and she is the quiet, sensual figure basking on the deck. No longer the boat itself, she is immediately tossed overboard – a loss of self to self, perhaps? Who knows?

– and the simile, allegory, whatever it is at this stage, becomes strangely literal: she tells us that in nightmares of this time, she re-experiences the terror drowning: she tastes salt water, she feels it in her lungs.

But, just as we are tempted to take her the simplest meaning of her words, she says, ‘I even know there was a storm.’ The shipwreck and crisis on the waves that appeared so physically accurate is now problematised by the presence of a real storm. It is not clear – nothing is clear here – but it seems that perhaps the storm is the literal, circumstantial context of the crisis, but the crisis itself is yet something else. Particularly as she ends her account: ‘as far as I recollect, I complained to no one about these troubles.’

How she could be aboard a sinking ship, tossed by storm for days on end, losing everything, with dozens of people drowned, and still meaningfully comment that she ‘complained to no one about these troubles’ is perplexing, to say the least. One, presumably, is spared the necessity of mentioning one’s ‘troubles’ when one is being rescued from a ship wreck. This line casts the rest of the passage into doubt. We know that Lucy is left without home or family, we know she is utterly isolated, but we have no real idea of how, or what and whom she has lost. She complained to no one at the time, and she certainly isn’t going to mention it to us now.

And it is this peculiar, elusive style that Lucy clings to throughout the narrative.

She tells us of her first impressions of London, and then says,

Since those days, I have seen the West-end, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the city far better. The city seems so much more in earnest: its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights and sounds. The city is getting its living – the West-end but enjoying its pleasure. At the West-end you may be amused, but in the city you are deeply excited. (p.42)

Noting Lucy’s preference for earnestness, seriousness and getting one’s living over amusement and pleasure, what really stands out here is her deep thoughtfulness and familiarity. She has fully explored London ‘since those days’ she first passed through. But when were those days? What kind of person is this telling us her tale? This isn’t Lucy, freshly bereaved and soldiering away in a little school in Vilette, which is how she ends her story. This is a woman who has returned to England and spent time in its parks and fine squares. She is someone who has developed a love for the city, and feels qualified to give her opinion on its character. But how, when, in what way, and to what

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end, we don't know.

What we do suspect, is that whoever Lucy is, she is not contained by her text – whatever her character, we are given only the slightest slivers of her, and those almost by accident, as though she occasionally relaxes her inner censor.

Later, on her life as the children's nanny for Mme Beck, she says of controlling her sense of boredom with her role:

I seemed to hold two lives – the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (p.68)

The comparison of the two lives, the inner and the outer, puts the rhetorical emphasis on the latter. Led on by the rhythm of her language, we pass over the conditions for satisfaction in her life of thought, and feel instead the weight of her practicality in valuing 'daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter.' But again, Lucy has hidden the crucial terms in plain sight, and if we slow down enough to hear her, those crucial terms are unsettling. Her life of thought is not fed by educating herself, in meditating on philosophy or faith, or even by some kind of creativity. No, she nourishes herself instead with 'the strange necromantic joys of fancy.'

Necromantic? Necromancy is black magic – more specifically, it is communication with the dead. It is perhaps another clue to the depth of loss she has suffered – that her only joys are connected to those already dead – but it also suggests the possibility of a much darker Lucy. A Lucy who is not merely plain, practical, protestant and hard-working, but also secret, heretic, forbidden and transgressive.

No wonder she must be so secretive. And no wonder she is so vulnerable to the suggestion of hauntings by vengeful virgin nun, or that she is so equipped to sit with the scandalous, transgressive sexuality of art. She sits in perfect composure in contemplation of the Cleopatra, a picture of a huge, naked pagan queen. And she is strangely aroused by the performance of Vashti (another pagan queen), who she receives as a revelation of a new order of being. She says:

I thought it was only a woman, though an unique woman, who moved in might and grace before this multitude. By-and-by I recognised my mistake. Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the

tragedy, kept up her feeble strength – for she was but a frail creature; and as the actions rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate, she stood. It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.

It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral. (p.240)

Lucy remarks on the strength afforded by demons who refuse to be exorcised, and of the strength of the white figure who stands like Death, and then says:

I have said that she does not *resent* her grief. No; the weakness of that word would make it a lie. To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. ... Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side ... (p.241)

This, I think, is possibly the closest we can come to a description of Lucy herself. And what a confession, if it is! A self-consciously defiant creature, who feeds on her own pain, and becomes a kind of exultant, masochistic Satan, triumphing over good, wisdom, beauty and grace. And grace, importantly, not as elegance, but grace with its full Christian import: the gift of forgiveness from God himself.

And Lucy's response? She says the performance ...

disclosed power like a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent. (p.242)

Another flood of irresistible water, but this one robbing Lucy of neither family nor fiancé – this one charging along with her native element: it is a winter river, a river of snow water and ice, and it takes her soul in the 'steep and steely sweep of its descent.' There is a rhapsodic delight in that alliteration. Lucy is damned, but willingly, and thrilled with the power it promises.

In comparison, the fire that breaks out and interrupts the performance – bringing Dr John and Polly together again, and reigniting the childhood romance – is very quickly dealt with:

All was silence and darkness: the roaring, rushing crowd all vanished and gone – the lamps, as well as the incipient fire, extinct and forgotten. Next morning’s papers explained that it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in a moment. (p.247)

Fire, heroism, chivalry and true love – they are little flares in the scenery. Dramatic in their own way, be soon extinguished and made dark and forgotten. What persists, what is stronger than death, is the cold, white brightness of defiance and rebellion.

Once I stumbled on the idea of a secret witchery in Lucy, I realised I could see it everywhere. It is not possible to list for you all the places her language exposes her, I haven’t found them all myself, I’m sure, even if we had time to list them, but they are there.

They are there in her really disgusting imagery of how she controls her longings, ‘after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples.’ That would be vivid enough, but it is biblical, and therefore conventional enough. What comes next though, is an image out of nightmare as she says of her own desires:

Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core. (p.99)

As if the ghastly reanimation of the murder victim were not enough, Lucy pictures her desires – her inner self – as turning on the nail, wrenching against what ought to have killed her, but what in fact only thrills her more deeply in making her bleed.

And again, when she recognises Dr John as her god-mother’s son, Graham Bretton, but chooses not to tell him, nor her reader, he is irritated and offended by the way she is looking at him, asking what it is he has done to attract such a gaze. She says:

I was confounded, as the reader may suppose, yet not with an irrecoverable confusion, being conscious that it was from no emotion of incautious admiration, nor yet in a spirit of unjustifiable inquisitiveness, that I had incurred this reproof. I might have cleared myself on the spot, but would not. I did not speak. I was not in the habit of speaking to him. Suffering him, then, to think what he chose, and accuse me of what he would,

I resumed some work I had dropped, and kept my head bent over it during the remainder of his stay. There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored. What honest man on being casually taken for a housebreaker, does not feel rather tickled than vexed at the mistake? (pp.88-89)

Lucy Snowe and her silent work! Misconstructed, and refusing to clarify, refusing to speak at all. Seeing that she never be rightly known by the good doctor, she chooses to be unknowable altogether. And yet, she is not entirely truthful with us even here. As well as keeping Dr John's identity from us, she keeps her motivation in silence secret too. She says she is soothed rather than irritated by Dr John's accusation. She feels calm in the face of his rebuke, whether he imagines her to be mooning over his handsomeness, or rudely staring instead, she couldn't care less. His misreading of the situation only deepens her satisfaction in having read him perfectly.

However, the pleasure she takes here, no matter what she says, is NOT the pleasure of being 'consummately ignored.' In fact, the opposite: this is almost the first time that Dr John has really registered her presence as an independent mind, and not just domestic furniture. And she tacitly admits as much in the surprising next sentence: 'What honest man on being casually taken for a housebreaker, does not feel rather tickled than vexed at the mistake?'

How, really, would Lucy have the slightest clue how honest people think? Innocence, usually, is outraged by unjust accusation. Criminals might be tickled to be mistaken for honest men, but honest men very rarely, I think, enjoy being identified as criminals.

And which is Lucy Snowe? Impossible to say, I think. But given the details she has let slip here and there, I feel sure that the life she hasn't recorded was far darker, wickeder, and more exciting than the portion she has. And her final revenge upon her readers is this: she leaves us no way of ever finding out.

## **Referenc**

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, 1849, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999.

**Rowan McAuley**

# Yorkshire Dialect in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

*From a talk to the Society on 5 November 2011*

I was born in Cheshire in the north of England with close ties to both Lancashire and Yorkshire, so when I read Emily Brontë's novel I had no difficulty understanding the passages spoken by both Ellen Dean as narrator, and Joseph, the manservant at Wuthering Heights.

I propose to cover an overview of the English Language, vital for the understanding of the origin of the dialect; the relevance of Joseph as a character and of his comments, to the overall structure of the work; and an analysis of the language in three of the passages with a translation into RP (received pronunciation – formerly known as the Queen's English).

In addition to their native English, the sisters spoke some German, French, and they knew Latin. Ann, Emily and Charlotte could all understand (and write) Yorkshire dialect, as exhibited by Emily's use of it in several passages in the novel.

## **A very brief history of the English Language:**

English is an Indo European language and can trace its roots back to Sanskrit

500 BCE to 43 CE CELTIC LANGUAGES spoken by the Celts. These still exist today in Welsh, Gallic, Cornish and Breton (France). Words with Celtic origins: London, Dover, Kent

c79CE –c450 CE ROMANS—surprisingly only 200 loan words date from this period. Early Latin words: win (wine) candel (candle) belt (belt)

449 CE ANGLO SAXONS—Germanic tribes invaded and Anglo Saxon dialects form the basis of the language now known as OLD ENGLISH. About 400 Anglo Saxon texts survive from this era. Words: earth, house, food, sing

597 CE – Arrival of St. Augustine and Christian missionaries injected hundreds of new Latin words into English. New words: altar, mass, school

789 CE THE VIKINGS - controlled most of North West and North East England for 400 years. The county was eventually divided into an area known as The Danelaw. At least 2000 new words were ceded to English: awkward, cake, die, egg, muggy, reindeer. Place names ending in 'by' which meant village: Whitby, Derby.

Many Northern English dialect words bear traces of Scandinavian languages.

CE 450—CE 1150 OLD ENGLISH: A mixture of Anglo Saxon and Scandinavian languages. Year 1000CE the poem *Beowulf*

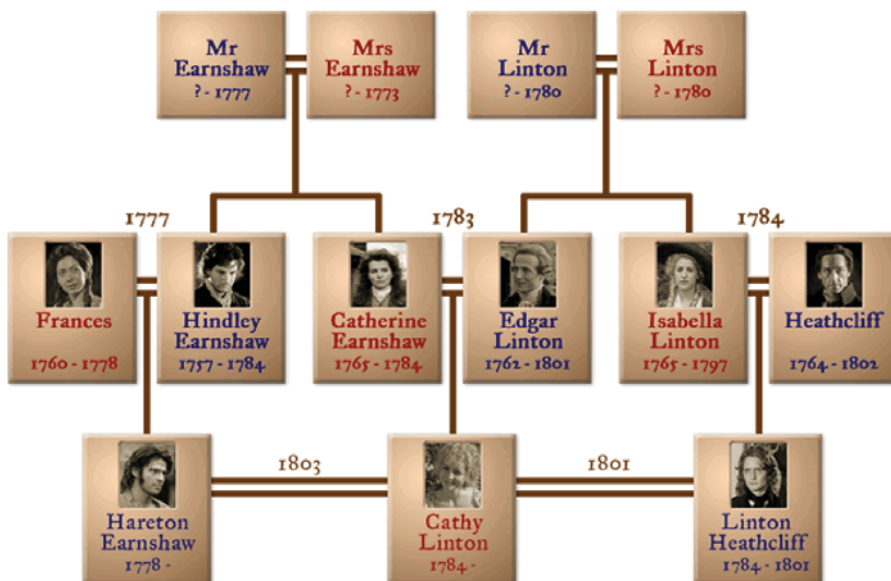
1066 CE THE NORMANS French was the language of the people in charge for over 300 years. Thousands of French words become embedded in English: The lower orders continued to speak a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian, which is why we have the words: pig and pork, cow and beef, lamb and mutton.

MIDDLE ENGLISH—Circa 1150—1500CE Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur*

MODERN ENGLISH 1500CE—present day. Shakespeare onwards.

### The Characters in *Wuthering Heights*

This is a useful reference point thanks to the tendency (which still prevails) of families using the same first names over and over again,. The reason we remember Heathcliff so well might be that he had a name which stood out – particularly as Emily did not give him a surname.



The two main narrators in the novel are Ellen Dean, housekeeper both at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, who speaks Yorkshire dialect fluently. The second narrator is Mr. Lockwood, a visitor



*Top Withins, now a ruined farmhouse and possibly the model for Wuthering Heights.*

*However, in 1964 the local Brontë Society put a plaque on the ruined farmhouse ‘in response to many inquiries’ denying real evidence*

from London who rents Thrushcross Grange from Heathcliff and is presumably included to give the reader a more objective point of view.

The people in the novel whose speech is written in dialect are: Joseph the general handyman and labourer at Wuthering Heights, a herd boy who has a few lines, the ostler and Nelly Dean who is bi-lingual in English and Yorkshire dialect. However, all of the other characters perhaps with the exception of Lockwood, can understand everything that is said to them in dialect but they always reply in standard English, probably as the Brontës themselves would have done when addressed in dialect.

Joseph was described by Charlotte Brontë as ‘one of the most graphic characters in the book’ which might explain her concern, not shared to quite the same extent by Emily, that people in the south of England would find the passages spoken by Joseph incomprehensible. But if the reader glosses over these passages they miss important elements of the plot.

Joseph has all the attributes of a dialect speaker: male, manual labourer, a non-conformist religious background and, in spite of his Bible knowledge, he is resistant to ‘book learning’. Not only is Joseph one of the most graphic characters in the book, but in my opinion his importance in the novel is threefold: he gives a sense of place, we know we’re in Yorkshire because of him; the language he uses dates back to some of the earliest forms of English; he is the only character who presents an alternative view of events and we see through his comments on the action a more prosaic rendition of events such as Catherine’s passion for Heathcliff. Thus he plays an important role in the narrative as a whole.

The first two passages below are quoted by Mr. Lockwood at the beginning of the novel and are interesting in that they are reported direct speech being extracts from a diary.

**1 Catherine Earnshaw's Diary**, Joseph's comments, Vol 1, Ch 3. Joseph the lay preacher and good Christian is lecturing young Heathcliff and Cathy.

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| ‘T maister nobbut just buried, and Sabbath nut o’ered, und t’sahnd uh t’gospel still i’yer lugs, and yah dare to be laiking! Shame on ye! Sit ye dahn, ill childer! They’s good books eneogh if ye’ll read ‘em; sit ye dahn, and think uh yer sowls!’ | ‘The master only recently buried and the Sabbath not finished and the sound of the gospel still in your ears and you dare to be playing. Shame on you! Sit down, bad children. There are plenty of good books if you’ll read them, sit down and think of your souls.’ |
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### Analysis

*T’maister nobbut just buried* T’maister (French origin—*maitre*) nobbut—(not) but. We might say ‘but recently buried’

*sahnd* (Middle English/Old English) phonetic pronunciation

*lugs* – in Old Norse this means knots, or knotted hair but here it means ears and is still commonly used in the North of England

*laiking* (from Old Norse—*laik/leck*)

*Sit ye dahn* – a reflexive verb – sit you down—no longer used in English used in French ‘I sit myself down...*Je m’assiez*’

*Pondon Hall, Yorkshire may have been the model for Thrushcross Grange. The Brontë sisters used the library here.*



*Childer*—German is kinder—Anglo Saxon?

'*They's good books enuegh*' = There are good books enough. Germanic sentence structure: *Ihre sind guten buchen genug* (Ango Saxon?). English now uses the French sentence structure: There are plenty of good books.

*sowls*—Old English spelling from Anglo Saxon.

## 2 Catherine Earnshaw's Diary, Joseph's comments, Vol 1, Ch 3.

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| <p>'Maister Hindley!' shouted our chaplain. 'Maister, coom hither! Miss Cathy's riven th'back off 'Th'Helmet uh Salvation,' un' Heathcliff's pawsed his fit intuh t'first part uh 'T'Brooad Way to Destruction!' It's fair flaysome ut yah let 'em goa on this gait. Ech! th'owd man ud uh laced 'em properly — bud he's goan!'</p> | <p>'Master Hindley!' shouted our chaplain. 'Master come here! Miss Cathy's torn the back off <i>The Helmet of Salvation</i>, and Heathcliff's kicked his foot into the first part of <i>The Broad Way to Destruction</i>! It's really shocking (fearful) that you let them go on in this way. Eee! The old man would have flogged them properly, but he's gone!'</p> |
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### Analysis

*hither* – here. Roots in Old and Middle English as *hider* and Icelandic as *hedhra*

*riven* – from the Old Norse *rifa* = to tear

*pawsed his fit*. The word *paw* is of Germanic/Anglo Saxon origin. 'Get your paws out of there!' is a rude way of telling people to keep their hands off something. Joseph has used this in connection with Heathcliff's foot. *Fit* (foot) is Anglo Saxon English: *fot*

*flaysome* – meaning fearful (of being flayed or beaten) from the original Icelandic word *fla* meaning to beat.

*Laced* – beaten them: from the Middle English *las*: French *laz* and Latin *laqueus*

## 3 Volume 1 Ch 9

Ellen Dean offers a much more prosaic, down to earth analysis of the narrative. Heathcliff has left *Wuthering Heights* on hearing that Catherine is engaged to

Edgar Linton and a distraught Catherine has searched for him in the rain and wind on the moors, arriving back at Wuthering Heights at midnight drenched and shivering. The reader mourns for the loss of Catherine’s one true love. However her behaviour evokes a stinging dismissal the following morning from Joseph. In his terms she’s a silly teenager, not a mature woman.

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| <p>‘Running after t’lads, as usual!’ croaked Joseph, catching an opportunity, from our hesitation, to thrust in his evil tongue. ‘If I war yah, maister, I’d just slam t’boards i’ their faces all on ’em, gentle and simple! Never a day ut yah’re off, but yon cat o’ Linton comes sneaking hither; and Miss Nelly, shoo’s a fine lass! shoo sits watching for ye i’ t’kitchen; and as yah’re in at one door, he’s out at t’other; and, then, wer grand lady goes a coorting of her side? It’s bonny behaviour, lurking amang t’fields, after twelve ot’ night, wi that fahl, flaysome divil of a gypsy, Heathcliff! They think I’m blind; but I’m noan: no’wt ut t’soart! — I seed young Linton boath coming and going, and I seed yah (directing his discourse to me), yah gooid fur nowt, slattenly witch! nip up and bolt into th’house, t’minute yah heard t’maister’s horse fit clatter up t’road.’</p> | <p>‘Running after the lads as usual!’ croaked Joseph, catching an opportunity, from our hesitation, to thrust in his evil tongue. ‘If I were you, master, I’d just slam the door in the faces of all of them: gentlefolk and simple(folk)! Never a day passes when you’re away but that cat Linton comes sneaking here, and Miss Nelly, she’s a fine lass! She sits watching for you in the kitchen: and as you’re in at one door, he’s out of the other, and which grand lady goes a courting outside? It’s fine behavior lurking among the fields after twelve at night, with that foul, fearful devil of a gypsy, Heathcliff! They think I’m blind: but I’m not, nothing of the sort! I saw young Linton both coming and going, and saw YOU (directing his discourse at me), you good for nothing, slatternly witch! nip up and bolt (rush) into the house the minute you hear the master’s horse’s hooves clatter up the road.’</p> |
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There is not sufficient time or space to analyse this particular passage, but I hope that this article will make your reading or re-reading of *Wuthering Heights* a more satisfying experience.

**Cindy Broadbent**