

BRONTË MYTHS

Christopher Cooper

This article is based on a talk given by Dr Cooper to members of the public, rather than to ABA members. It not only compares Brontë myths to reality, but gives a representative example of early writings from Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell.

In 2016 we'll celebrate the bicentenary of Charlotte Brontë's birth, and this year is the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Dickens commemorated by special events in England, and in Australia.

The Brontës are almost as famous as Shakespeare, Dickens or Jane Austen, but one fact makes them stand out from all the others. While Shakespeare, Dickens and Jane Austen moved around and lived in different parts of England, the Brontë sisters lived their whole lives in one house, the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth. This has, for some time, been a museum and it attracts



The Haworth Parsonage

more visitors annually than any other literary home in Britain apart from Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon. Also, there was much tragedy in the lives of the Brontës which also adds to their mystique.

Why *Brontë Myths*? Because much of what people think they know about the Brontës is quite inaccurate. The myths follow, and we will examine each of them.

The Brontës were an old Yorkshire family. Patrick Brontë had three daughters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, as well as a son Branwell. They were born in Haworth which was an isolated village on the moors. The three sisters were spinsters and they lived sheltered lives, rarely moving far from Haworth. They each wrote only one novel. Charlotte wrote Jane Eyre, Emily wrote Wuthering Heights and Anne wrote The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Branwell was a ne'er do well who never wrote anything, preferring instead to go drinking at the Black Bull. Emily wrote some poetry but none of it was published in her lifetime. Their father, Patrick Brontë, was the minister at Haworth. He had married a local girl, Maria, but as she

died soon after Anne was born he had to raise them all by himself. He encouraged them to write and he used to listen with interest as they read out chapters of their stories while walking around the dining room table. Branwell died of drink while the three girls all died of consumption. This left their father living all alone in the parsonage. All four children died in their twenties. The girls wrote about love but, as they were daughters of a clergyman, these stories were very proper and could be safely given to young girls as Sunday School prizes. Charlotte was a staunch Protestant and would never be caught going anywhere near a Catholic church.

(1) The Brontës were an old Yorkshire family.

The Brontë novels are steeped in Yorkshire traditions and contain much Yorkshire dialect. Consider, for example, the following piece of dialogue from *Wuthering Heights*.

T' maister nobbut just buried, and Sabbath not o'ered, und t' sound o' t' gospel still i' yer lugs, and ye darr be laiking! Shame on ye! sit ye down, ill childer! there's good books enough if ye'll read 'em: sit ye down, and think o' yer sows!



In fact the Brontës were Irish, or at least their father Patrick Brontë (left) was. He was very good looking and had flaming red hair. His wife wasn't from Yorkshire either. She came from Penzance in Cornwall.

Patrick came from County Drumballyrone in Northern Ireland. He was born in a one-roomed hut with an earthen floor, and his family possessed just three books, the *Bible*, a volume of Robert Burns poetry and *Pilgrims Progress*.

Patrick's parents were barely literate but Patrick taught himself to read using these three books. He attracted the attention of the local Presbyterian minister who helped him to further his education. By the age of 16, Patrick was reading Latin and Greek and was appointed the master of a small village school. Later he went to Cambridge on a scholarship and then took holy orders in the Church of England. Only when he took up his first appointment did he go to Yorkshire.

The name Brontë is a fake. Patrick was born Patrick Prunty. However he admired Lord Nelson, who received the title Duke of Bronte. So while he was at Cambridge he changed his name to Bronte. Then he experimented with various accents over the 'e' until he finally settled on the two dots.

(2) Patrick Brontë had three daughters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne ...

In fact there were five daughters. The eldest two were Maria and Elizabeth, who seemed to be just as gifted as their better-known sisters. Indeed Maria assisted her father by proof-reading his writings. But they died at the ages of 11 and 10 respectively and are thus not so well known.



(3) ... and a son Branwell.

In fact the brother's name was Patrick, after his father, but his second name was Branwell, after his mother's family name. However he was known as Branwell all his life. Some even see a likeness between Branwell and John Lennon!



(4) They were born in Haworth ...

In fact the first two were born in Dewsbury and the four younger Brontë children were born in Thornton, just outside of Bradford.

Even then Thornton was an ugly village on a main road, and today it is even uglier and the main road is even busier. The house is a poky two-storey terrace which now has a butcher's shop built right in front of it. -



The Thornton birthplace

hardly the building for a museum which the Haworth parsonage has become today.

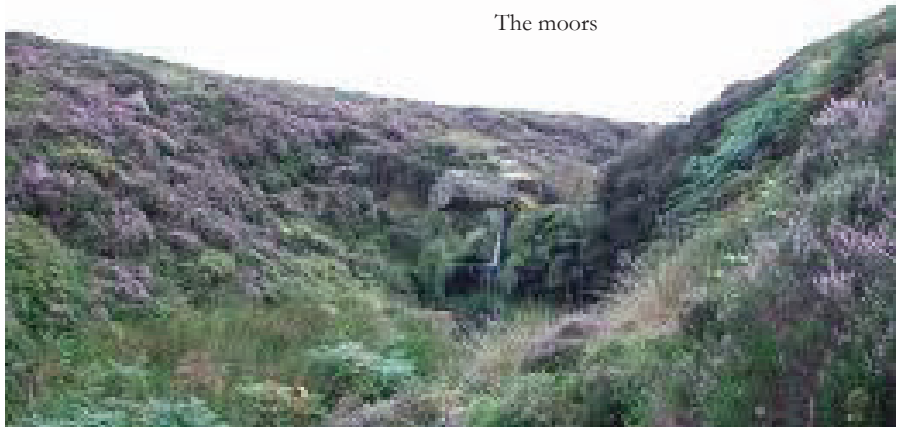
Fortunately Mr Brontë moved to Haworth parsonage at the end of the village of Haworth, on the edge of the moors. It was bigger than at Thornton, and being a stand-alone building it was possible for an extra wing to be built after Mr Brontë died.

(5) ... which was an isolated village on the moors.

Here we come to one of the major myths, on which Lucasta Miller's *The Brontë Myth* focusses, and it's one that Charlotte herself began. Charlotte was quite uneasy about the raw, wild, almost pagan world described by Emily in *Wuthering Heights*, so when it came to the second edition, after Emily's death, Charlotte wrote an introduction in which she begs the reader to excuse Emily's excesses. She asserts that Emily lived in a very remote place and had no knowledge of the wider, more civilized world.

Yet, at the time, Haworth was a small but busy town in which spinning and weaving were the local industries, most of which was carried out by individual operators in their own homes. And it was only a short walk to the larger town of Keighley where the girls could, and did, access two

The moors



libraries. During the Brontës' lifetime the railway came to Keighley from which one could readily reach London.

It's true that at the time of the Brontës the back door of the parsonage led directly onto the moors. It hasn't changed much in that respect. But out the front door, and through the graveyard directly in front of the house and past the church one was immediately in a bustling little town. Today the spinning and weaving have given way to tourism. On a summer weekend the main street of Haworth is crowded with visitors. Some have come to pay homage to the three sisters. Others have come because of the steam railway that runs from Keighley. Still more have come to enjoy a classic picturesque Yorkshire village that straddles both sides of a steep cobbled road.



Brontë waterfall, & Haworth, old & new



(6) They were spinsters ...

In fact Charlotte married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls, a year before she died.

Mr and Mrs Nicholls honeymooned in Ireland. Like her father, her husband was Irish. From her letters we learn that she was very happy during this short time. But tragically Charlotte Nicholls died before her first wedding anniversary. She was some months pregnant and her death is attributed to hyperemesis gravidarum – extreme morning sickness.

(7) ... and lived their lives, rarely moving far from Haworth.

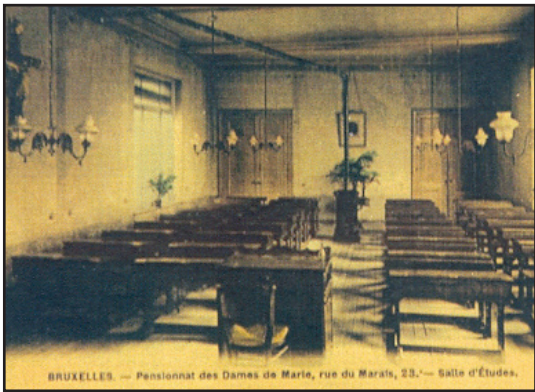
As children they spent time at boarding schools in various parts of Yorkshire and as adults they all worked as teachers or governesses, which again took them around Yorkshire. So while Haworth Parsonage was

‘home’ for all their lives, they were often away for months or years at a time.



Pensionnat Heger, Brussels, and a
Brussels Schoolroom

But they also travelled on the continent. Charlotte spent nearly two years in Brussels, first as a student and then as a teacher. Emily spent part of this time with her, but was only truly happy back on the Haworth moors.



During her time in Brussels Charlotte developed a very strong attachment to her professor, Monsieur Héger, who was a married man – not the sort of behaviour we normally associate with a shy spinster.

There’s no evidence that it was an actual affair and in fact, although he greatly appreciated Charlotte’s intel-

lectual genius it seems he was somewhat embarrassed by the passionate letters she wrote to him after she returned to England.

Neither Emily nor Anne married, so could be called spinsters. But Emily was not a typical one. Despite writing one of the most powerful love stories of all time, she seemed to not need people and was close to no-one except her sisters.

Anne had a crush on a curate, William Weightman, who responded, but he went off as a missionary to India and died there of typhoid.

(8) They each wrote just one novel. Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre*, Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* and Anne wrote *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

There is some evidence that Emily wrote a second novel, but it has not survived. Did Charlotte burn it? Anne wrote *Agnes Grey*, a short and rather inconsequential novel. But Charlotte wrote three other novels.

The first was *The Professor*, which she submitted for publication at the same time as Emily submitted *Wuthering Heights* and Anne submitted *Agnes Grey*. Emily and Anne's novels were accepted but Charlotte's was declined.

Charlotte then wrote *Jane Eyre* and sent this to another publisher, George Smith, who snapped it up and in fact it was published before her sisters' works. It created a sensation and her name became very well-known – or rather her pseudonym did.

Charlotte was Currer Bell, Emily was Ellis Bell and Anne was Acton Bell. They name 'Bell' probably came from Arthur Bell Nicholls, Mr Brontë's curate and much later Charlotte's husband. They chose the first names to conceal the fact that they were women.

Charlotte went on to write two further novels, both of which were published in her lifetime. *Villette* is based on her time in Brussels and the heroine Lucy Snowe, is a student at a Belgian school who falls in love with her professor.

Villette is written in the first person and in one sense it is autobiographical, but there's no way Charlotte identified with Lucy. She wrote once that she didn't like Lucy as a person, which is why she deliberately gave her a 'cold' surname. *Villette* is a novel that needs to be read twice because Lucy, the narrator, deliberately misleads the reader. Later events often



Girliebooks Presents

AGNES GREY
BY ANNE BRONTË

PENGUIN
BOOKS

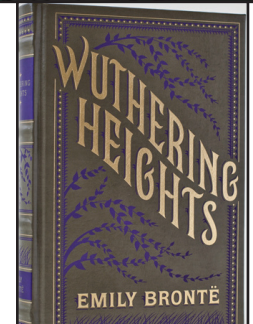
FICTION

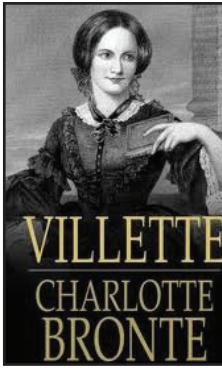
**THE
PROFESSOR**
CHARLOTTE
BRONTË

FICTION



The reading and listening.





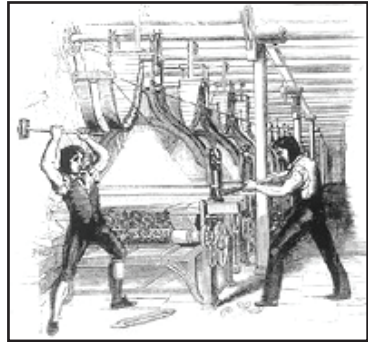
contradict what Lucy tells us earlier in the book.

There have been dozens of film versions of *Jane Eyre* but not a single *Villette*. Yet, as a psychological drama with many great cinematographic scenes, it would make a great movie.

The other novel of Charlotte's, also worth being better known,

is *Shirley*. On one level it's a love story, with two couples eventually finding romantic fulfilment. But this is against a backdrop of the Luddite uprisings that took place a couple of decades earlier.

At that time the weavers and cloth manufacturers were beginning to set up factories and introduce machinery, which would put hundreds of workers out of work. In this novel there are several scenes of conflict that would make an action-packed historical film, with a strong love interest. If I can be sexist let me say that the film *Shirley* would appeal to both men and women. It would be interesting to see who they would cast as Shirley herself. She is a strong, independent character. Her parents are dead and she has inherited their wealth, so she is financially independent and owns a woollen mill. It is said that Charlotte based *Shirley* on Emily, who was strong and independent, though not financially so.



The Luddites

These days the name 'Shirley' is fairly common as a girl's name. Actually, prior to Charlotte's book, it was only ever used as a man's name and it was Charlotte's novel which opened it up as a girl's name.

I highly recommend that you read both *Villette* and *Shirley*. If you wait for the film versions I fear you may be waiting a very long time. Every time we hear of a new Brontë film it is either yet another *Jane Eyre*, or one more *Wuthering Heights*.

You probably know the story of both of these. *Jane Eyre* is an orphan

who is put in a rather Dickensian school where the food is off and the girls are forever cold. This is based on Charlotte's own experience at Cowan Bridge School, where her two older sisters died. It is said that Helen Burns, who befriends Jane and then dies, is based on her sister, Maria. Most notable of the many actresses who have played Helen Burns over the years was in the classic black and white Laurence Olivier version – the then unknown 15 year old Elizabeth Taylor.



Cowan Bridge, and 15 year old Elizabeth Taylor as Jane Eyre

Jane grows up and becomes a governess to Mr Rochester's ward, a little French girl who may or may not have been his own daughter. Rochester is intelligent but rather gruff and often rude – perhaps another Monsieur Héger. Despite the difference in their circumstances they fall in love and end up at the altar.



But the marriage ceremony brings up the question 'Does anyone know of any lawful impediment...?' And there *is* an impediment. Rochester has a mad wife living in the attic, a fact that is revealed just in time. Jane runs off and discovers some cousins, but a supernatural voice calls to her across the miles and she returns to Rochester, only to discover his wife had managed to burn down Thornfield Hall. Rochester was injured while trying to save his wife, but is now free to marry Jane. A famous line opens the second last chapter: *Reader I married him!*



Wuthering Heights

The plot of *Wuthering Heights* is more intricate. It's like a piece of architecture, and in a way it is the story of two houses, the wild Wuthering Heights itself and the more civilised Thrushcross Grange. There is much uncivilized violence – I'm told this is why *Wuthering Heights* is so

popular in Japan, it fits into the Samurai mould – and there are plenty of creepy supernatural events. The narrator stays the night in Wuthering Heights and is awoken by the ghost of Cathy scratching at the window, begging to be let in.

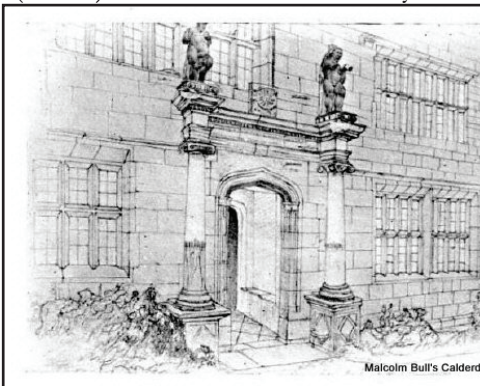
If you remember the scene where Cathy and Heathcliff come running towards each other across the moors you have probably only seen one of the film versions – this is not actually in the novel itself. But in case you've only seen one of the lesser film versions let me point out that the novel is in two parts, balanced against each other. The second half, which is often left out, comes after Cathy dies and tells of the younger generation where the chief protagonists are the young Catherine and Hareton, her cousin.

The house that Emily had in mind for Wuthering Heights is usually considered to be Top Withins (below), a farmhouse now in ruins, on the moor behind the parsonage. Thousands of pilgrims walk across the moors each year to reach it. Interestingly the signposts to it, and the nearby Brontë waterfall, are in English and Japanese! It's a nice walk, but even before it fell into decay it would have been far too small to be the



actual Wuthering Heights.

Top Withins probably suggested the location of Wuthering Heights, but the architectural details are more in keeping with High Sunderland Hall, (below) some miles further away.



Despite the imaginative excesses of *Wuthering Heights* it's interesting that it is a highly structured novel. The narration is like a set of Russian dolls. And I'm convinced that Emily deliberately included a puzzle with numerous clues, from which one, with a certain amount of effort, construct a complete chronology of the events.

Monsieur Héger once remarked that Emily had the brain of a man. Certainly it's possible to find a great deal of precise logic in the story. We think of it as mostly taking place on the moors but in fact most of the action takes place in the two houses. Next time you read it look out for the huge number of architectural references. Simply to count the number of uses for windows that Emily provides is an interesting exercise.

Anne's first novel, *Agnes Grey*, is quite short and not very remarkable. Her second - *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* - is much more worthy of attention. The tenant who has moved into Wildfell Hall is the mysterious Helen Graham, who has run away from her alcoholic and abusive husband, taking her young son with her. According to the law of the day she has committed a criminal offence because both she and her son were considered to be her husband's property. She makes a living by painting, and, much to her annoyance, attracts the attention of an eligible young farmer, Gilbert Markham.

It's interesting that Charlotte, who eventually married, wrote about the plight of the single woman while Anne, who remained a spinster, wrote about the plight of many married women.

(9) Branwell was a ne'er do well who never wrote anything, preferring instead to go drinking at the Black Bull.

There's certainly some truth in this. He was the black sheep of the family, but this was not always so. At one time he was a Sunday School teacher, organist in the church and secretary for the local Masonic Lodge. He wrote a great deal of poetry and some prose. There's even a rumour that it was he who wrote *Wuthering Heights* but this has been laid to rest.

(10) Emily wrote some poetry – none published in her lifetime.

All four children wrote quite a deal of poetry, though Emily's is considered to be the best. Before they moved to prose the three girls decided to self-publish a joint book of poems (Emily needed much persuasion). It got some good reviews but unfortunately it only sold three copies.

(11) Their father, Patrick Brontë, was the minister at Haworth.

True

(12) He had married a local girl ...

Patrick's wife was Maria Branwell and she came from Penzance.

(13) but as she died soon after Anne was born he had to raise them all by himself.

Maria died of stomach cancer a year after Anne was born. However Maria's sister, Elizabeth Branwell, came to Haworth from Penzance to help with the children until he got himself sorted out.

Patrick made several unsuccessful attempts to remarry. So Aunt Branwell never returned to Penzance and she stayed with the family for many years until she died and was a strong influence on the children. It was her money that enabled Charlotte and Emily to go to Brussels.



Aunt Branwell

(14) He encouraged them to write and he used to listen with interest as they read out chapters of their stories while walking around the dining room table.

The girls did read out their stories to each other while walking around the dining room table after dinner but their father was not part of this. In fact he always ate alone in his study. The first he knew of their books was after they were published.

However he did discuss politics with them while they were still children. They read several newspapers and periodicals and many contemporary historical and political events found their way in the children's juvenile writing.

(15) Branwell died of drink while the three girls all died of consumption.

Actually Branwell died of consumption, like his sisters Emily and Anne. Charlotte died from complications of a pregnancy.

(16) This left their father living all alone in the parsonage.

Patrick was afraid of living alone but he never had to. He had opposed the marriage of Charlotte and Nicholls because he felt that they might move elsewhere. But Charlotte assured him that they would not abandon him.

After Charlotte died Arthur Bell Nicholls stayed on in the parsonage and looked after Patrick, taking on more and more of the work of the parish. When Patrick died at the age of 85 it was expected that the church wardens would choose Nicholls as his successor. But they didn't, so Nicholls returned to Ireland, left the church, married his cousin and lived as a gentleman farmer until he died in 1906.

By then the Brontë cult was in full force. Even when Patrick was alive he was bombarded with requests for samples of Charlotte's handwriting and so he cut up manuscripts into little strips so that he could send them out to satisfy the demand.

Many relics remain. Some are in collections in America, but many are in the parsonage museum. You can see her shoes (she had tiny feet), her glasses (she was extremely short-sighted) and her wedding dress. Much of the furniture, which was sold off when Nicholls returned to Ireland, has found its way back, including a most unusual piano. The manuscripts are scattered, but the Brontë museum has quite a few. Earlier this year a tiny 8-page piece of *Juvenilia* was bought for £60,000 by the Museum of Manuscripts in Paris.

Before he died, Arthur Bell Nicholls gave his blessing to the formation of the Brontë Society. Our branch here in Sydney is called the Australian Brontë Association.



(17) All four children died in their twenties.

This is somewhat of an exaggeration. Branwell died in 1848 at the age of 31. Emily caught a chill at his funeral and died a few months later at the age of 30. A month later Anne was told she was dying. She died a

few months later aged 29. Charlotte lived alone with her father and used the proceeds of her novels to renovate the parsonage. In 1854, at the age of 38 she married Arthur Bell Nicholls who had been her father's curate for many years. In the early years she considered him somewhat ridiculous, as she did all the other curates who visited the parsonage. But as time went on she began to appreciate his true worth. After the honeymoon in Ireland they lived with her father in the parsonage. But she became pregnant and died of hyperemesis gravidarum, or extreme morning sickness, before her 39th birthday.

(18) The girls wrote about love but, as they were daughters of a clergyman, these stories were very proper and could be safely given to young girls as Sunday School prizes.

There was much controversy about the morals of *Jane Eyre*. It is true that when it was discovered that he already had a wife, albeit a mad one, Jane resisted his attempts to get her to live in sin with him. But she took a little time before she left him and she showed compassion towards him. When she returned to him she had no knowledge that Bertha was dead. This was considered scandalous.

I spoke to somebody recently who was given a copy of *Jane Eyre* when she was 10 and it was only many years later that she discovered that many bits had been left out.

Wuthering Heights also attracted a lot of criticism for its pagan themes and the fun it pokes at religion.

Even Anne, who was the most conventional of the three when it came to morality, was severely criticised for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The account of Huntington's debauchery was considered unnecessary. And especially bad was the fact that his wife, Helen, ran off in the night with their little boy. No matter how bad one's husband was a woman had a duty to stand by him. She was, by law, his property.

But if these things are considered improper for children to read, what about the stories the Brontës wrote when they were children? Their *Juvenilia* is quite different to their later novels and was inspired by what they read in the newspapers. They invented imaginary kingdoms in Africa and jointly wrote about battles and dukes and mistresses and murders and political intrigues.

These were written on tiny pieces of paper in the most minute writing. Some say that this was to prevent their father from reading them. His eyesight wasn't good. In fact with 20/20 vision one needs a magnifying glass to read them.

Our patron, Professor Christine Alexander at the University of New South Wales, is the leading scholar on the Brontë Juvenilia and over the years she has risked her eyesight in trying to decipher and edit these writings.



The tiny juvenilia

(19) Charlotte was a staunch Protestant and would never be caught going anywhere near a Catholic church.

It is true that Charlotte wrote some harsh things about Catholics. She regarded them as misguided at best and devious and malevolent at worst. What is not so well known is that her father was born a Catholic. He then taught at a Presbyterian school, was married by a Methodist minister and became a minister of the Church of England. Charlotte probably derived her anti-catholic attitudes from her mother and aunt, both Methodists from Penzance.

But there was an incident in Charlotte's life when she sought solace in a Catholic church and even went into a confession box! She was in Brussels, Emily had gone back to Haworth, it was the summer recess when all the other girls had returned home. Charlotte felt so lonely, so in need of human contact, that she went into a nearby church and slipped into the confessional. The priest thought he had a convert and asked her to meet him the next day where he lived. In the end Charlotte didn't do this, but in a letter she records the street where he lived and this can be linked to the priest's name. Since every priest had his own specific confession booth we can identify exactly which confessional Charlotte entered.

I'd like to end with a small sample of the writings of each of the Brontës. Rather than taking these excerpts from the novels I have chosen some unusual pieces. We begin with father, the **Reverend Patrick**

Brontë. Although he published some devotional poetry this short poem is one he wrote to a girl, Mary Burder, before he met Maria. There was an expectation that he would marry Mary, until Mary's family intervened and scared him away. A poor Irish clergyman was not good enough for their daughter. This poem was written to Mary on her 18th birthday and shows his religious earnestness as he reminds Mary that though she is young and beautiful, these things will pass and she should turn her mind to eternal things.

In thoughtful mood your parents dear,
Whilst joy smiles through the starting tear,
Give approbation due.
As each drinks deep in mirthful wine
Your rosy health and looks benign
Are sent to heaven for you.

But let me whisper, lovely fair,
This joy may soon give place to care,
And sorrow cloud this day;
Full soon your eyes of sparkling blue,
And velvet lips of scarlet hue,
Discoloured, may decay.

... whate'er they say,
You're but a breathing mass of clay,
Fast ripening for the grave.

He wasn't always so morbid. The following lines were written to Maria on her first birthday as his wife.

Sweet is this April morn,
To every cheerful swain,
Throughout the smiling plain;
To me it glows with sweeter far and brighter charms,
And all my throbbing bosom warms,
Maria, let us walk, and breath the morning air,
And hear the cuckoo sing,
And every tuneful bird, that woos the gentle spring,
Throughout the budding grove,
Softly coos the turtle dove ...

Pretty enough, but nothing as great as the poetry of his children, especially Emily.

For Charlotte I have chosen an excerpt from what might have been one of the first detective stories ever written if she had lived to complete it. The novel was to be called *Emma*, not to be confused with Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Miss Wilcox repaired to the reception-room and found a gentleman seated on the sofa, who, as he rose up, appeared a tall, fine-looking personage. He introduced himself as Mr. Fitzgibbon, inquired if Miss Wilcox had a vacancy, and intimated that he wished to intrust to her care a new pupil in the shape of his daughter.

This was welcome news, for there was many a vacancy in Miss Wilcox's school-room; indeed, her establishment was as yet limited to the select number of three. On taking his leave he left the address left written on a card – Conway Fitzgibbon, Esq, May Park, Midland County.

She handed to Mr. Ellin an envelope with a paper. It said, in brief terms, that there was no such place in Midland County as May Park, and that no such person had ever been heard of there as Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire.

On reading this, Mr. Ellin slightly opened his eyes. 'How very odd, no such place as May Park! The grand mansion, the grounds, the oaks, the deer, vanished clean away. And then Fitzgibbon himself!

'Shall I run down to Midland County and look after these two precious objects?'

'Oh! would you be so good, Mr. Ellin? I knew you would be so kind.'

Mr. Ellin 'ran down' as he said, to Midland County. It was an errand that seemed to suit him; for he had curious predilections as well as peculiar methods of his own. Any secret quest was to his taste; perhaps there was something of the amateur detective in him. He could conduct an inquiry and draw no attention. His quiet face never looked inquisitive, nor did his sleepless eye betray vigilance.

He was away about a week. The day after his return, he appeared in Miss Wilcox's presence as cool as if he had seen her but yesterday. Conway Fitzgibbon was a man of straw; May Park a house of cards. There was no vestige of such man or mansion in Midland County, or in any other shire in England. Tradition herself had nothing to

say about either the name or the place. The Oracle of old deeds and registers, when consulted, had not responded.

‘A quarter’s board and education owing, and masters’ terms besides,’ pursued Miss Wilcox. ‘How infamous! I can’t afford the loss. Matilda, indeed, and Fitzgibbon! A little impostor! I wonder what her real name is?’

‘Betty Hodge? Poll Smith? Hannah Jones?’ suggested Mr. Ellin. ‘Now,’ cried Miss Wilcox, ‘give me credit for sagacity! It’s very odd, but try as I would I never could really like that child. Her game is up now, however: and time it was.’

Branwell participated in the writing of the juvenile stories of wars, intrigues, spies, illicit love affairs and politics that occupied the children for many years. He was a writer of some talent – though not as much talent as his three sisters, but he did manage to get some of his poems published in newspapers. A lot of his writing has the element of the Gothic, with themes of horror and the supernatural and it has been claimed, falsely, that it was he who wrote *Wuthering Heights* not Emily. But in this excerpt he is more playful and one can perhaps hear some echo of childhood squabbles in his own family.

But Hush! A sound. The door opens. I look up. And in steals a thing in a muslin frock, black shoes, and mousey hair streaked over its eyes and forehead, with the fingers of one hand sucked into its mouth and those of the other pulling down its frock from one shoulder.

It marched hesitantly forward upon its heels with aristocratic nonchalance. But when it observed me standing erect to address it, the creature, with a well-bred stare and turning round, affected a hasty retreat from the room. I resumed my seat.

In about five minutes more, the door opened again, and the same being looked in with three or four sisters and brothers at its tail, marching up toward me with a circumgiratory motion and jostling one another with their shoulders and taking keen observations as they took their ground about me.

‘Who are you?’ asked a gentleman in blue and white – the heir, as I conjectured, of the Manor.

‘May I answer your question ... by asking ‘Who are you?’

‘Does Pa know you’re here?’ asked one in a frock and sash with a truly fashionable drawl.

But her brother cried ‘He hasn’t told me yet! What are you putting out your tongue for?’

‘I’m not putting out my tongue.’

‘She did.’

‘Oh, what a lie!’

‘She told a fib.’

‘She hasn’t!’

‘She has!’

‘She hasn’t!’

‘She has!’

‘You tell fibs!’

‘And so do you!’

Emily was by far the best poet in the family and her poem *No Coward Soul is Mine* is excellent. But for Emily I would like to read an essay she wrote in French when she was in Brussels. She had only been learning French for four months when she wrote this. Her spelling and accents are more accurate than in Charlotte’s *devoirs* but that is probably because she relied on dictionaries more. Her inexperience is reflected in the many English idioms she translates directly instead of using French equivalents.

Je puis dire avec sincérité, que j’aime les chats; aussi je sais rendre des très bonnes raisons, pourquoi ceux qui les haïssent, ont tort.

I can say sincerely that I like cats; I can also give very good reasons why those who hate them are wrong.

A cat is an animal that has more human feelings than almost any other being. We cannot compare favourably with the dog — it is infinitely too good. But the cat, although it differs from us physically, is extremely like us in disposition.

It is true that some would say that the resemblance is close only to the lowest human being and that their traits of hypocrisy, cruelty and ingratitude, detestable in humans are equally odious in the cat.

Without disputing the limits which such people might place on our affinity, I reply that if hypocrisy, cruelty and ingratitude are the characteristic only of base people, this category includes us all.

Our education develops one of these qualities to great perfection and the others thrive without having to be fertilised. Far from condemning them we embrace all three characteristics.

A cat, serving his own interests, sometimes hides his misanthropy under an appearance of most endearing gentleness; instead of snatching what he desires from his mistress's hand, he approaches in a caressing manner, rubs his pretty little head against her and sticks out his paw with a touch as soft as down. This act finished, he resumes the character of Timon. Such finesse in a cat we call hypocrisy, but in ourselves we give it another name — politeness — and any person not using it to disguise his true feelings would soon be driven from society.

'But,' says some delicate lady who has murdered half a dozen lap dogs by sheer affection, 'the cat is such a cruel beast he is not content to kill his prey, but torments it before its death; you cannot bring this accusation against us.'

Pretty near, Madame. Your husband, for example, likes hunting very much, but foxes are scarce on his land; he would not be able to enjoy the sport often if he did not manage his resources after a fashion. When he runs an animal to its last breath, he pulls it from the mouths of the dogs, and saves it to suffer the same ordeal two or three more times, ending finally in death.

Cats' ingratitude is another name for shrewdness. They are able to judge our favours at their true value because they discern our motives which prompt us to give them, and even if these motives are sometimes good, no doubt they still remember that they owe all their wretchedness and bad qualities to the great ancestor of the human race, for surely cats in Heaven were not mean.

Finally, **for Anne** I have chosen one of her poems. It is a poem about imprisonment in a dungeon and expresses despair. The Brontës seem very good at portraying the sad side of life. But remember this poem was written well after the deaths of her mother and two older sisters and well before tragedy again struck the family, a time when laughter filled the parsonage. The despair expressed here is not personal, but pertains to one of the characters in the juvenilia.

I'm buried now; I've done with life;
I've done with hate, revenge and strife;
I've done with joy, and hope and love
And all the bustling world above.

Long have I dwelt forgotten here
In pining woe and dull despair;
This place of solitude and gloom
Must be my dungeon and my tomb.

No hope, no pleasure can I find;
I am grown weary of my mind;
Often in balmy sleep I try
To gain a rest from misery.

.....

I thought he smiled and spoke to me,
But still in silent ecstasy
I gazed at him; I could not speak;
I uttered one long piercing shriek.
Alas! Alas! That cursed scream
Aroused me from my heavenly dream;
I looked around in wild despair,
I called them, but they were not there;
The father and the child are gone,
And I must live and die alone.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË IN LONDON

Susannah Fullerton.

An interest in cities is apparent in Charlotte Brontë's very early writings where she created the metropolis of Glasstown, but Charlotte had to wait until she was 26 years old before she saw the capital city of her own country.

It was in February 1842 that Charlotte boarded a train, with her father, sister Emily, and friends Mary and Joe Taylor, to travel to London as the first stop en route to Brussels. There was an 11 hour trip from Leeds to London to be endured and the party reached London late at night and went straight to their lodgings. Those lodgings were the Chapter Coffee House, near St Paul's, used by Patrick in his youth and a place once frequented by 18th century literati such as Dr Johnson and Goldsmith. It was not an entirely suitable venue for single ladies, but it was a convenient base for London sightseeing.

Those first days were very exciting for Charlotte. From the moment she woke and looked out her window to see the 'solemn orb'd mass, dark blue and dim – THE DOME' of St Paul's, to the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, the National Gallery and Westminster Abbey, all was thrilling and all gave her a sense of freedom: 'my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose.' She was astonished by London speech ('I had never before heard the English language chopped up in that way'), but she had only three days to get used to it before the packet left from London Bridge Wharf to whisk her off to Europe.

In 1843 she had even less time for seeing the city. On this occasion Charlotte was returning to Brussels for her second stint at the Pensionnat Heger, and the train brought her from Yorkshire to London only the day before the boat sailed. She went straight on board and spent the night before sailing in her cabin. There was not time to see any sights.

More satisfactory was the 1848 visit. *Jane Eyre* had been published and London was humming with gossip about its author. The unscrupulous Thomas Newby who had published *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, had been trying to cash in on *Jane Eyre*'s popularity by advertising Anne's book as 'Mr Bell's first novel'. George Smith, Charlotte's publisher,

wrote suggesting that he should be in a position to contradict this statement. The only thing to do was to go to London and introduce him to Currer Bell and, if possible, to Ellis and Acton Bell as well. But Emily refused to go, so it was Charlotte and Anne who set off in July for London. It was not an easy journey. They walked to Keighley through a snowstorm (in July!!!), sat in their wet clothes and boots all the way to London on the night train, and finally arrived exhausted at the Chapter Coffee



Charlotte Brontë

House ('we did not know where else to go') at 8am the next morning. They wasted no time in setting off to 65 Cornhill, premises of George Smith and his partner William Smith Williams.

How fascinating it would have been to have been a fly on the wall at that meeting! George Smith was busy and not pleased to be interrupted, but the two little ladies, dressed in their plain and old-fashioned gowns, were shown in to him. 'One of them came forward and presented me with a letter – addressed to Currer Bell Esq. I noticed that the letter had been opened, and said with some sharpness 'Where did you get this from?' 'From the post office' was the reply, 'it was addressed to me. We have both come that you might have ocular proof that there are at least two of us.' Once poor Mr Smith had recovered from his astonishment, he called in his partner and both men did their best to make their unexpected visitors welcome in London. The next days included a visit to the opera (memorably turned into the opera visit in *Villette* where Lucy Snowe, dressed in finery, fails to recognise herself in the mirror as she

goes up the stairs), shopping, church services, Kensington Gardens, and tea with Mr Williams and his family. By the end of this visit Charlotte found that her publishers had become friends – valued friends who would correspond, send her parcels of books, invite her to stay on future visits to the capital.

How often she must have thought of Anne on her next visit to London, because when Charlotte went again in 1849 she was in mourning, not just for Anne but for Branwell and Emily as well. George Smith had invited her to stay at his home and his mother made a huge effort to make Charlotte feel welcome and at home. She can't have been an easy guest, as George Smith recorded:

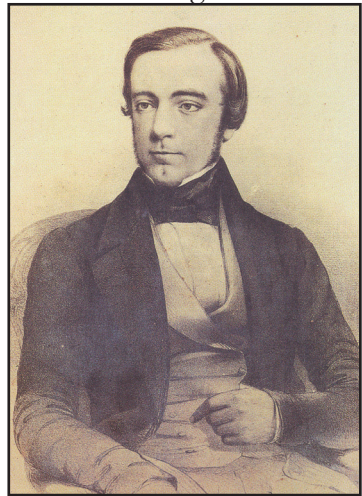
My mother and sisters found her a somewhat difficult guest and I am afraid she was not perfectly at her ease with them. She was very quiet and self-absorbed, and gave the impression that she was always engaged in observing and analysing the people she met.

Probably *Villette* was conceived on this visit, and of course George and his mother feature in that novel as Mrs Bretton and her son Graham. It's hardly surprising that Charlotte appeared distracted; and she had her recent losses to prey on her mind too. However, she was able to enjoy looking at Turner's water-colours ('nothing charmed me more during my stay in town'), listening to sessions at the Houses of Parliament, and meeting Harriet Martineau and John Forster. She was not impressed by the great actor Macready, whom she saw play the roles of Macbeth and Othello ('anything more false and artificial – less genuinely impressive than his whole style I could scarcely imagine'), and her first meeting with Thackeray reduced her to a state of nervous exhaustion. Thackeray had long been one of her heroes (she dedicated *Jane Eyre* to him, which proved to be a dreadful faux-pas because Thackeray had a mad wife who was shut away!), and meeting him strained every nerve. He was kind to her, but on this first meeting and subsequent ones, it became clear that the two famous authors had little in common. He towered over her tiny frame (according to one witness, she came up to his elbow); he was jovial and social, she was shy; he enjoyed his fame, she was trying to get used to hers; he was satirical and she wasn't into irony.

Charlotte's next visit to London took place in 1850. Once again she stayed with the hospitable Smiths and again she had a busy time. There was more opera and more art (she loved Landseer's painting of the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo), she was delighted by a visit to the zoo and by

seeing the Duke of Wellington in the flesh at the Chapel Royal, she sat in the Ladies' Gallery at the House of Commons, lunched with George Henry Lewes (whose face reminded her of her dead sister Emily's) and she called on fellow writer Julia Kavanagh. Her religious intolerance showed when she attended at a Quaker Friend's Meeting House. Again she met Thackeray – when he paid a morning call on her she informed him of all his literary short-comings, but Thackeray defended himself vigorously. He was not discouraged from inviting her to dinner, but the evening was a disaster. He annoyed her by publicly calling her 'Currer Bell' and from then on things just got worse. Charlotte was shy and sat quietly talking to the governess, conversation never took off, everyone felt awkward and in the end Thackeray could bear it no longer – he left his guests to it and decamped to his club!

It was on this visit that Charlotte succumbed to pressure from her publisher and sat for a portrait by George Richmond. He was well known for flattering his sitters, but Charlotte's visit started in tears, when the artist asked her to remove the false hair-piece she wore. The finished portrait made her think not of herself, but her youngest sister. Friends felt that Richmond had over-flattered her and Mary Taylor decided she would 'rather the mouth and eyes had been nearer together' and that Richmond had 'shown the veritable square face and large disproportionate nose'.



Publisher George Smith

For her 1851 visit to London Charlotte bought new clothes, for this the busiest and most public of all her visits. Again she stayed with the Smiths, again she met Thackeray (and heard him lecture), again she went to art exhibitions. But London on this occasion could talk of only one thing – the Great Exhibition. Charlotte went to see its wonders 5 times. 'What ever human industry has created – you find there', she marvelled, but it did not move her emotionally. Far more powerful were the performances of the actress Rachel at the French Theatre. Charlotte would vividly recreate those experiences when in *Villette* Lucy Snowe attends the theatre to watch Vashti – Charlotte never forgot seeing Rachel act.

But the excitement proved too much physically – she grew aware that she had brought headaches ‘carefully packed in (her) trunk’ and these stopped her enjoying the London social whirl to the full. She managed outings – to breakfast with the famous Samuel Rogers, to Richmond with the Smith family, and to a phrenologist who carefully examined her cranial bumps and told her (Charlotte had given a false name) that she had ‘a fine organ of language’.

Charlotte Brontë’s last visit to London was in early 1853. By this time Arthur Bell Nicholls had shown his interest in her and she had written *Villette* and was correcting proofs. The visit was a quiet one, but she did manage some unusual sightseeing – two prisons, the Foundling Hospital and Bethlehem (her hostess was ‘a little amazed at (her) gloomy tastes’ but Charlotte was left feeling slightly guilty that her latest novel was not concerned with industrialisation or social injustices (as was her friend Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*). *Villette*, with its picture of George Smith and his mother only thinly disguised, came out on 28 January and five days later Charlotte returned to Haworth, not waiting to see the reviews or to learn Thackeray’s unfavourable opinion of her work.

The following year she married Arthur Bell Nicholls, and travelled to Ireland with her new husband. Soon after that she was pregnant, and by the end of March 1855, Charlotte Brontë was dead. There would be no more trips to ‘the big Babylon’ which had so fascinated her, but it is nice to think that she did manage to go so often, that she saw so many interesting things and there met some of the great literary figures of her day. She used her London experience creatively in the brief time that Lucy Snowe spends in the capital in *Villette*. It is intriguing to think of this tiny, frail, short-sighted and rather dowdy Yorkshirewoman in the huge metropolis. She enjoyed her visits but always seems to have been happy to go home after a few days or weeks. Charlotte Brontë clearly did not agree that ‘when a (woman) is tired of London (she) is tired of life.’

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EXPIFLICATION AND SQUABASH: BLACKWOODS & THE BRONTËS

William Christie

Of all the books and periodicals that the Brontë children read, one truly did change their lives. This was *Blackwood's Magazine*, a monthly journal published from 1817 by William Blackwood of Edinburgh. They borrowed it from a Mr Driver, who may have been the Reverend Jonas Driver who lived in Haworth and died at the end of December 1831. A potent miscellany of satire and comment on contemporary politics and literature, *Blackwood's Magazine* formed the tastes and fed the interests of the Brontës for many years. They absorbed its Tory politics, made its heroes, from the Duke of Wellington to Lord Byron, into their own heroes and copied its serio-comic style. Its tremendously long and detailed reviews of new works of biography, history, travel, politics and, to a lesser extent, fiction, gave them access to books and knowledge which were otherwise beyond their reach, especially as extensive quotations were given from the books under review.

Juliet Barker's singling out *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817-1980) – or 'Maga' as it was called – from 'all the books and periodicals that the Brontë children read' as the one genuinely formative literary experience of her subjects' childhood will seem strange to most of the Brontës' 21st-century readers. This is a large claim to make about England's pre-eminent literary family, if you think about it. Surely that honour should belong to Shakespeare or, more immediately, to Byron or Walter Scott? 'Now Ellen', wrote Charlotte to Ellen Nussey on 4 July 1834, 'don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare, and Byron. Both these were great Men and their works are like themselves'. And 'for Fiction'? – Charlotte's advice was to 'read Scott alone all novels after his are worthless'. Besides, periodicals are ephemeral reading at best, are they not?

The Age of Periodicals

Ephemeral *Blackwood's Magazine* may have proved, but there are reasons for taking Barker at her word – reasons for the Brontës' fascination and emulation – that a closer look at the magazine's forms and culture will, I hope, explain. Before I begin that task, however, I want to remind read-

ers of a couple of salient things they may or may not already know about the Romantic literary culture inherited by the Brontës, things of which the culture itself was eminently and argumentatively aware. The first is that, while we might think of the Romantic period as the age of poetry – or, more specifically, of Wordsworth, or of Byron – they understood their own period as the age of the periodical. When the seventeen-year-old Branwell wrote his passionate, unrequited plea to ‘the Editor’ of *Blackwood’s Magazine* to include him in their stable to fill the vacuum created by the death of regular contributor, James Hogg (‘the Ettrick Shepherd’), we sense in Branwell’s straining self-consciously after effect and recognition nothing less than the desperate, self-abasing awe of the devotee. This is the highest literature to which he would aspire, and these the gods of his idolatry:

Sir, Read what I write. I have addressed you twice before, and now I do it again. But it is not from affected hypocrisy that I begin my letter with the name of James Hogg, for the writings of that man in your numbers, his speeches in your ‘Noctes,’ when I was a child, laid a hold on my mind which succeeding years have consecrated into a most sacred feeling. I cannot express, though you can understand, the heavenliness of associations connected with such articles as Professor [John] Wilson’s, read and re-read while a little child, with all their poetry of language and divine flights into that visionary region of imagination which one very young would believe reality, and which one entering into manhood would look back on as a glorious dream. I speak so, sir, because while a child, ‘Blackwood’s’ formed my chief delight, and I feel certain that no child before enjoyed reading as I did, because none ever had such works as ‘The Noctes,’ ‘Christmas Dreams,’ ‘Christopher in his Sporting Jacket,’ to read. And even now, ‘Millions o’ reasonable creatures at this hour—na’, no at this hour,’ &c. ‘Long, long ago seems the time when we danced hand in hand with our golden-haired sister, whom all that looked on loved. Long, long ago the day on which she died. That hour so far more dreadful than any hour that now can darken us on this earth, when she, her coffin and that velvet pall descended, and descended slowly, slowly into the horrid clay, and we were borne deathlike and wishing to die out of the churchyard that from that moment we thought we could never enter more’—passages like these, sir (and when that last was written my Sister died)—passages like these, read then and remembered now, afford feelings which I repeat I cannot describe.

But one of those who roused these feelings [Hogg] is dead, and

neither from himself or yourself shall I hear him speak again. I quiver for his death, because to me he was a portion of feelings which I suppose nothing can rouse hereafter: because to you he was a contributor of sterling originality, and in the 'Noctes' a subject for your unequalled writing. He and others like him gave your Magazine the peculiar character which made it famous: as these men die it will decay unless their places are supplied by others like them. . . .

Now, sir, do not act like a commonplace person, but like a man willing to examine for himself. Do not turn from the native truth of my letters but prove me; and if I do not stand the proof I will not further press myself on you. If I do stand it – why – You have lost an able writer in James Hogg, and God grant you may get one in

Patrick Branwell Brontë

Haworth, *near Bradford*, Yorks

December 1835.

Printed forms that were published *periodically* had been around in Britain since the beginning of printing in the fifteenth century, of course, in the form of almanacs, annals, and annuals. Certainly the Romantics did not invent the periodical. It took a number of legal, cultural, and political changes, however, as well as changes in what we would call communications and technology, to allow the network of newspapers, magazines, journals, and Reviews that we immediately recognise as a 'periodical press' to develop and flourish. The number of books available for purchasing, or for borrowing from new libraries that were starting up everywhere, climbed steadily throughout the 18th century (quadrupling between 1750 and 1800), but the surest sign that a publishing revolution had taken place was the proliferation of periodicals. During the Romantic period, with the English population at around 10 million and illiteracy at around 40%, some 4,000 magazines and Reviews still managed to get launched.

Why the British public became a reading public in the 18th century and began to place so much importance on being informed and on having opinions is a moot point, but not one we need to resolve here. It is enough for our purposes to know that a periodical press evolved to meet a new demand for information ('intelligence') and for a critical position on most aspects of communal life. In a complicated symbiosis, periodicals (to quote Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*) saw them-

selves as ‘among the legitimate means by which the English public both instructs and expresses itself’ – and, one hastens to add, amuses itself.

The second thing of which I would remind readers is the pivotal and powerful role of Scotland in all of this. To quote Ian Duncan:

Between 1802 (the founding of the *Edinburgh Review*, the publication of Scott’s first book *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*) and 1832 (Scott’s death, the Great Reform Bill), Edinburgh held an unprecedented sway in British letters, most conspicuously through the critical domination of ‘Scotch reviewers’ and a commercial dominance of ‘Scotch novels’. This literary production was closely identified with the politics of the Whig and Tory party establishments, and with the local ascendancy of an intellectual élite largely affiliated to the Scottish legal profession.

... Edinburgh was the crucible of the following major cultural formations in the first three decades of the 19th century: professional-class male public intellectuals; the entrepreneurial publisher; the critical quarterly and monthly magazine (*The Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s [Magazine]*), and the national historical novel.

The Brontës were not alone in feeling the transformative power of a Scottish literary renaissance, in other words, as a select handful from amongst the thousands of periodicals launched found their way into the ken of every literate Briton.

The formal heterogeneity of the monthly magazines that dominated post-Waterloo literary culture – publishing criticism and gossip and poetry and songs and curiosities and scientific information and anecdotes and book extracts and reviews of books – was their distinguishing feature. The magazine had become increasingly popular early in the 18th century, and had been around some time before Edward Cave’s *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1731-1914) first used the actual word in its title, describing itself as ‘a monthly collection, to treasure up as in a magazine’ (‘magazine’, from the original Arab word meaning ‘a storehouse’). The very number, variety, and brevity of the magazine’s various components were central to its appeal; its *raison d’être* (to quote Oliver Goldsmith) was ‘never to be long dull upon one subject’. (Juliet Barker is quite wrong to characterise their reviews of new works as ‘tremendously long and detailed’, and seems to be confusing them with periodical Reviews like the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and the *Westminster Review*.) A magazine market already amply supplied by the late 18th century was glutted by 1817,

the date of the launching of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The exigencies of this, as of other competitive markets, meant that, to stand out, a sensational critical and creative talent was required – or, at the very least, sensationalism. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* had both.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine

The two slang words of my title can be considered as synonyms. The first – ‘to expifficate’ – emanates from the Haworth household of the Brontë children, while the second – ‘squabash’ – from the iconoclastic (and often no less infantile) culture of *Blackwood's*. ‘Expifficate’ is a coinage of Charlotte Brontë's. In their shadow-play of the literary rivalry that the young Brontës inherited from *Blackwood's* and the Romantic period, Charlotte's fictional persona, Lord Charles Wellesley, assures ‘the reading publick’ that he has not been ‘expifficated’ by the ‘lash’ of Captain Tree (another Charlotte persona). It is a slightly pretentious version of the slang word ‘to spifficate’: ‘To deal with in such a way as to confound or overcome completely’, according to the Oxford English Dictionary; ‘to treat or handle roughly or severely; to crush, destroy’. ‘Squabash’ – meaning, similarly, ‘a crushing blow; a squashing’ – is (again according to the OED) ‘A fanciful combination of *squash* and *bash*, probably due to Prof. Wilson’. Prof. Wilson is John Wilson (alias ‘Christopher North’), with John Gibson Lockhart one of the two luminaries of the young *Blackwood's*, and ‘squabash’ was part of the private-public language the magazine's contributors evolved to characterize their own critical and intellectual hijinks.

Both words are redolent of the creative, agonistic literary play that characterised the two otherwise utterly different cultures from which they emerged. *Blackwood's* very existence was an act of opposition and retaliation. In the year of its birth, ‘The spirit which pervaded th[e] somewhat confined community’ of Edinburgh ‘was a spirit of intense Whiggishness’, wrote J. F. Ferrier in 1855: ‘the social and literary ascendancy of the Whigs had been secured, mainly through the agency of the *Edinburgh Review*’, which ‘nerved,—it held together, it even called into existence, a powerful party who re-echoed and disseminated its principles’. Patriotism and Religion were the two broad issues that *Blackwood's* had with the *Edinburgh Review*, whose genealogical roots in the cosmopolitanism and scepticism of the Enlightenment (at least according to *Blackwood's*) included ‘Hume, Voltaire, Gibbon, Condorcet, Diderot, and La Clos’. ‘You know as well as I do how natural a thing scepticism is; with what

a seductive charm it seizes upon the affections of the young', warns Lockhart, waxing hysterical; the *Edinburgh's* 'derision has acted as a corrosive pestilence, mutilating and wasting away, within them, everything that is most generous in feeling, and most sublime in principle'. For the *Blackwood's* crew, Voltaire and David Hume were diabolical spirits lurking in the shadows behind editor Francis Jeffrey and, as Samuel Johnson famously remarked, the first Whig was the Devil.

Reformist, enlightened, cosmopolitan, and largely indifferent to religion, except as a cause for toleration and liberalisation, the *Edinburgh Review* was the expression and symbol of everything intellectually arid, politically wrong-headed, and spiritually bankrupt for the publisher, William Blackwood – as it was for many better known figures of the period, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and later Thomas Carlyle. For radicals and reactionaries alike, the *Edinburgh Review* functioned as a warning, a dark prophecy of commercial and industrial modernity against which they felt compelled to define and defend their own existence and their own values. Ferrier is not quite right, as it happens; in 1817, power in Edinburgh still lay firmly in the hands of the Tories. But if the Tories had all the power, it did seem that the Whigs had all the talent. 'A reaction was inevitable', Ferrier continues, 'Toryism began to mutter and protest' and William Blackwood set out to *expiflicate* the *Edinburgh Review*.

Indeed, it was the failure of his original editors, James Cleghorn and Thomas Pringle, to produce a lively and challenging alternative to the *Edinburgh* in the first six numbers that led to their dismissal, and to Blackwood's reissuing his monthly under his own name, and under his own management, in October 1817, gathering about him a creative and editorial assembly of young Tory wits who found in the magazine 'a ready outlet for their high and irresponsible spirits'. Margaret Oliphant uses an appropriately military metaphor in her description of the founding both of the magazine and of the legend:

The decks were now cleared, the men were at their posts: the real battle was about to begin. One can imagine the bustle and commotion in [Blackwood's] rooms in Princes Street, the endless consultations, the wild suggestions: Lockhart, pensive and serious almost melancholy, in the fiery fever of satire and ridicule that possessed him, launching his javelin with a certain pleasure in the mischief as well as the most perfect self-abandonment to the impulse of the moment; Wilson, with Homeric roars of laughter, and a

recklessness still less under control, not caring whom he attacked or with what bitterness, apparently unconscious of the sting until it was inflicted, when he collapsed into ineffectual penitence; Hogg, bustling in, all flushed and heated with a new idea, in which the rustic daffing of the countryside gave a rougher force to the keen shafts of the gentlemen. That it must be a strong number, something to startle the world, a sort of fiery meteor to blaze across the Edinburgh sky and call every man's attention, was the first necessity.

John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854) was, like the Brontës, a child of the manse, educated at Glasgow University and Balliol College, Oxford, with a law degree from the University of Edinburgh. 'The Scorpion which delighteth to sting men's faces' was Lockhart's own choice of persona in the first number; editor of the *London Magazine*, John Scott, named him 'Emperor of the Mohocks' after the upper-class hooligans of the early 18th-century, and Scott would soon die at the hands of Lockhart's second during a duel fought between the two of them. A devoted Tory who would become intimate with cabinet ministers during his editorship of the *Quarterly Review* from 1825 to 1853, Lockhart was a reviewer and satirist whose cruelty – tempered by time and his father-in-law, Walter Scott – accompanied an impressive critical intelligence and acute social and psychological insight. Lockhart's treatment of the sexually repressive religiosity of the Presbyterian temperament in *Some Passages in the Life of Mr. Adam Blair* (1822) ultimately renounces that insight, however, and the novel falls victim to the fear of sensual abandon that inspired Lockhart's political and religious conservatism and notorious sneering in *Blackwood's*. It was Lockhart who initiated the attack on Leigh Hunt, John Keats, and William Hazlitt as 'the Cockney School of Poetry', dismissing them as underbred, lower middle class, and ill-educated.

As it turned out, it was not in journalism or in the novel that Lockhart would achieve his ambition of recording 'the Caledonian humours' of his own age, but in social and cultural documentary like *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1819) – a perceptive, if partial study of Scottish life and letters – and, pre-eminently, in his biography of Scott. Limited by conventional set-pieces and an ultimate concern with 'character' rather than personality, his seven-volume *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (1837-8) is otherwise innovative and strong in its detailed, critical recreation of social and physical conditions and its construction of an internal 'logic' of personal and professional development through different phases.

Like Lockhart, John Wilson (1785-1854) read Classics at Oxford after taking his first degree from Glasgow. The fact that Wilson is better known by his *Blackwood's* pseudonym, 'Christopher North', is a telling comment on a mercurial, obviously disturbed personality whose criticism, like his personal relations, could turn unpredictably from warm admiration to derision. Wilson's cultural significance derives less from his sub-Wordsworthian poetry and mawkish novels like *The Trials of Margaret Lindsay* (1823) – Wilson's antidote to the increasing utilitarianism, mechanization, and economic ruthlessness associated with the industrial revolution was to figure forth a deeply sentimental image of a nation of decent, god-fearing regional communities – than it does from high-spirited satire and occasional critical insight.

In 1820, John Wilson became Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, a political appointment to a position for which he was shamefully underqualified. Lacking any formal training in the subject, Wilson relied for much of his information on notes and sources provided by his boyhood friend, Alexander Blair, who continued in this supporting role until Wilson's retirement from lecturing in 1851. Professor Wilson was a fraud, in other words, but 'Christopher North' was harder to evaluate because harder to pin down – a various, inventive, and energetic (manic) writer, responsible with Lockhart for *Blackwood's* self-consciously miscellaneous and often scurrilous experiments in periodical 'familiarity'. The early years of *Blackwood's* in particular are noted for the malicious joy with which Wilson and Lockhart attacked all opponents indiscriminately, performing as much for each other and for their coterie as for the general public. If the poet Alexander Pope can be said to have made hatred into an art form, Wilson and Lockhart made malice and manic irreverence into an art form. Together, they supplied William Blackwood with exactly the combination of talent and vindictive force required to sell magazines and scarify the publisher's political opponents, as well as giving him ample cause for anxiety and costing him a small fortune in libel suits.

Among the other writers caught up in the *Blackwood's* enterprise, two are worth mentioning: James Hogg (1770-1835) and William Maginn (1794-1842). As it happens, Hogg's dealings with Lockhart and Wilson were never easy. He did write a good deal for the magazine (it was lucrative) but from the early 1820s onwards his reputation derived less for his own talents than from his portrayal (by Wilson and others) as 'the Ettrick

Shepherd' in the regular and immensely popular feature of *Blackwood's* entitled the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ' ['Ambrosian nights'] (1822-1835) 'an experimental series of rambunctious, colloquial, and argumentative symposia, combining political and literary and cultural criticism carried on by a collection of high spirited (often drunk) pseudonymous interlocutors. (The series was named after Ambrose's, a tavern where the *Blackwood's* crew often shared a drink.) The portrait of Hogg as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' in 'Noctes', to which Branwell alludes in his letter, is hardly a flattering one, however: if the Shepherd is a clichéd 'child of nature', he is also a braggart and a drunken oaf.

At the prodigious age of eleven, William Maginn entered Trinity College, Dublin, ranking near the top of examinations in Latin and Greek, and taking the premium in Hebrew. At 17 he was master of his father's school and already sending contributions abroad, first to London and William Jerdan's *Literary Gazette* and then to *Blackwood's*. Maginn was soon enlisted in 'Noctes', gradually becoming associated by the public with one of its characters, Sir Morgan Odoherty. Later, Maginn was the instigator of bookseller James Fraser's *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, where he was chiefly responsible for its direction and content and wrote a high percentage of its articles. The most common accusation against Maginn seems to have been that he was constantly inebriated, and when too drunk to walk managed to get home by breaking into a brisk jog. 'He was apparently never too drunk to write', according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Maginn was not on hand, however, when battle commenced in earnest in October 1817. Already in this first number *Blackwood's* had a startling effect, though how far it could be called its *desired* effect is a question William Blackwood must surely have been asking himself when Lockhart and Wilson fled Edinburgh to Wilson's home at Elleray in the Lake District, pleading with him to maintain their anonymity as the pattern of libel and lawsuit began with a vengeance. Contrary to popular belief, however, this first number of *Blackwood's* was not a spirited, coherent attack on the Whigs but an ideological miscellany. Only with the next, November 1817 number can we observe *Blackwood's* beginning to develop its Tory alternative, redressing what Lockhart and Wilson took to be the culpable neglect of the national religion by the 'set of cunning, dissembling, undermining, jeering, jesting, cynical antagonists of Christianity' at the *Edinburgh Review*. *Blackwood's* should be judged on what it

stood for – especially as it was constantly standing (and standing up) for one institution after another:

In our politics, we have been Tory through thick and thin, through good report and evil report; or, as Mr Montgomery well expressed it, come wind, come sun; come fire, come flood. Honouring and venerating the churches established under divine Providence in these islands, we have to the utmost of their powers supported their interests—not from any idle or obstinate bigotry, but because we conscientiously look upon them as the main stays of the constitution of England, as the bulwarks of the Protestant faith, as tending in the highest degree to promote Christianity, *i.e.* virtue and happiness. Finally, believing that a kingly government, checked and balanced by a proud aristocracy, with a due admixture of popular representation, is the only fit one for these kingdoms, (we meddle not with what may be fit under other circumstances in other lands or ages,) we have always inculcated the maxim of honouring the King, and all put in authority under him, with the honours they deserve. *Their* enemies, Whig, Jacobin, Radical, Deist, Demagogue, or whatever other title they take, are *our* enemies, and with them we have no truce. Caring little for the new-fangled and weathercock doctrines everyday broached around us, and knowing, by long experience, that we have thriven under the old notions, we hold to them with a tenacity, which to some may appear obstinate, but which, as yet, we have seen no reason to repent. Intimately convinced that this country is a great instrument in the hands of God, we hope that it will not be turned to evil, and to the utmost of our ability shall resist all machinations for that purpose. And loving that country with a more than filial love, attached to all its interests, rejoicing in its prosperity, grieved to the soul in its adversity, delighted to see it victorious in war, still more delighted to see it tranquil at home, and honoured abroad during peace, we shall never cease to advocate the cause of those whose exertions we firmly believe have promoted, and will promote, its happiness or its glory. Of the effect of our work in diffusing a healthy and manly tone throughout the empire, and of creating a proper spirit of courage and patriotism, it would be vanity to speak. It has had its effect, and we are satisfied.

Hark! exquisite music! Our street bands are indeed wonderfully executive.—’Wha wadna be in love with bonny Maggy Lauder?’—Come Tickler—a jig, a jig!—Gentle reader, farewell, and pardon us for having thus bestowed our tediousness upon you. Not one half of our good works are yet touched upon, but true merit is ever modest.

But it is not always this easy to pin *Blackwood's* down on a political or any particular issue. Indeed, *Blackwood's*, notoriously, made a self-conscious policy of heterogeneity and occasional incoherence. And, as I have already intimated, beyond issues of policy and intent, there are issues of what we might not unreasonably call psychopathology: the lability and perversity we identify in Wilson especially, in whom Lockhart (of all people) remarked 'a total inconsistency in his opinions concerning both men and things. And thus it is that he continually lauds and abuses the same person within the space of a day'. This (often perverse) inconsistency is something that divides recent commentary on *Blackwood's* and its writers – especially commentary on John Wilson. Let me simply quote Robert Morrison:

The manoeuvres and fictions of Wilson's own writing . . . has repeatedly led to the charge that Wilson was unprincipled, but in *Blackwood's* at least such inconsistencies were a virtue, for they helped to generate the open-endedness, and debate, and imaginative *frisson* that characterized the magazine. . . . Those looking for consistency were missing the joke—and the critical insight. Wilson habitually sought conflict rather than compromise; distortion rather than discretion; showmanship rather than sobriety; excess rather than restraint. He coupled a host of fictive identities and disguises with a creative impulse that was always pushing toward caricature and contradiction. It was part of the ploy, part of his temperament, part of selling magazines, part of creating controversy.

Indeed, it was in its heady, not to say anarchic mixture that, as Morrison suggests, *Blackwood's* strength – its innovation, its genius, and certainly its sensationalism – lay. Formally, *Blackwood's* changed what up until then had been the conventional layout of magazines, dropping all the different departments in the storehouse and mixing together articles, reviews, 'intelligence', poems, and correspondence, and making a brag of its miscellaneousness:

Essays on all imaginable subjects under the sun—letters to, from, for, and against almost every party, profession, and individual in the British Empire—sketches of character, so multiform and multitudinous, as to give an extended idea of the inexhaustible varieties of human nature—inquiries into a thousand subjects, the very existence of which had never been previously suspected—advices to people under every possible coincidence of circumstances—memoirs of men in the moon—disquisitions on the

drama, epic, lyrical, didactic, and even pastoral poetry, here, there, and everywhere, on continent and isle, all over the face of the habitable globe—songs, epigrams, satires, elegies, epithalamia, epicedia—and God knows what:—out they all came, helter-skelter, head-over-heels, and leap-frog, to the endless amazement of the wide-mouthed world. For upwards of eight years has this inexplicable system prevailed; and with true *'vires-acquirit-eundo'* spirit, the Magazine is now more pregnant and productive than ever,—boiling over like a Geyser, scalding all natural philosophers that approach without wisdom or warning.

With this intermixing and often inconsistency came relativity and what we call 'dialogism' – the unsettling interplay of different and even contradictory voices – which found its consummation in the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ'. Certainly, and paradoxically, it was as the orchestrator of these modified, often enriched or simply invented 'transcriptions' of conversations between himself, Lockhart, Hogg, Maginn, and occasionally others, all under different names, that 'Christopher North' found his authentic voice(s). Without authorial, thematic, or textual centre, the 'Noctes' enact a dialogic process that challenges conventional hierarchies and teleologies, as abuse, argument, and anecdote move promiscuously from ghosts to gossip and from poultry farming to poetry. Insofar as it allowed Wilson/'North' subtle arrogations as Lord of Misrule, it was ideally suited to one as constitutionally incapable as he was of adopting a consistent, accountable position.

The Brontës and Blackwood's

It is this restlessly creative, ludic element (reflected in the coinages we looked at) that, more than anything, appealed to the young Brontës and justifies what on the face of it might seem Barker's startling isolation of Blackwood's as a formative influence. The same kind of rivalrous highjinks – 'quizzes', 'bams', and 'balaam', as Blackwood's characterized and celebrated them – is evident in the Brontës' early articles and reviews. Under the guise of fictitious poets, historians, and politicians, Charlotte and Branwell compete for the attention of an imaginary Glass Town public, just as the reviewers and magazine personalities (and impersonations) competed for the attention of the real reading public in a crowded periodical market. In an age of provocative, sometimes vicious (and libellous) reviewing, when Blackwood's abused the publications

of a writer one week before praising him or her the next, Charlotte and Branwell write abusive fictional reviews of each other's work, carrying on what Christine Alexander calls

a continual verbal battle in editorial notes, prefaces, afterwords, and the actual texts of their stories. ... In the process, the young writers are not only playing with their material but with the process of narration itself ...

practising a kind of ventriloquism that revelled in character for its own sake and became the perfect apprenticeship for the novelist. *'Blackwood's Magazine'*, wrote thirteen-year-old Charlotte in her 'History of the Year 1829', is 'the most able periodical there is': 'The Editor is Mr. Christopher North' and 'his company are Timothy Tickler, Morgan O'Doherty, Macrabin Mordecai, Mullion, Warnell, and James Hogg, a man of most extraordinary genius, a Scottish shepherd'. The mixture real and imagined says it all. If periodical culture was contentious and conflicted, it was also clever and inventive.

There was more to Blackwood's than malice and much of it, as I suggested earlier, was talented: as well as the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ', there were some excellent poems and tales by James Hogg (and Felicia Hemans, David Macbeth Moir, J. H. Merivale, and Caroline Bowles, amongst others), some genuinely insightful social and cultural commentary (often from Lockhart), serialized fiction by John Galt and Susan Ferrier and Thomas De Quincey, and an assortment of tales of terror to make the toes curl. But the most significant influence is on what Christine Alexander calls the 'robust dialectic nature' of the Brontë juvenilia, in which 'various roles and ideas can be explored and questioned', the 'cacophony of voices as narrators of disparate texts challenge each other for the "Truth" of their story'. Creative hijinks, that is, courtesy of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

THE BRONTËS AND FOOD

Michelle Cavanagh

There is more to eating than just sitting down and putting food into our mouths. Inspired by my Yorkshire grandmother, who made the best Yorkshire Pudding imaginable, I decided to explore the Brontës and their relationship to food. Did the Brontë sisters enjoy the delights of learning to cook Yorkshire Pudding which in my grandmother's house was always eaten with gravy before we had the roast beef dinner? (possibly to fill you up before the main course, thereby leaving left-over meat to make further dishes during the week).

Research shows that the first ever recorded recipe for what was initially called 'A Dripping Pudding' (the dripping coming from the roast meat) appears in the book published in 1737 *The Whole Duty of a Woman*.¹

Make a good batter for the pancakes, put it in a hot toss-pan over the fire with a bit of butter to fry the bottom a little, then put the pan and butter

under a shoulder of mutton instead of a dripping pan, keeping frequently shaking it by the handle and it will be light and savoury, and fit to take up when your mutton is enough; then turn it in a dish and serve it hot.

Ten years later, following publication in *First Catch Your Hare: The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* by Hannah Glasse – one of the most famous food writers of the time and, according to a 2006 BBC documentary, the

Yorkshire Pudding just like Grandma used to make



mother of the modern dinner party – Yorkshire Puddings became the nation's favorite dish as Hannah Glasse re-invented Dripping Pudding by calling it Yorkshire Pudding'.²

It is an exceeding good Pudding, the Gravy of the Meat eats well with it.... I only hope my book will answer and meet the ends I intend it for which is to improve the servants and save the ladies a great deal of trouble.

Certainly Yorkshire pudding appears in Victoria Wright's *A Bronte Kitchen - Recipes from the home of the Brontës*. The final instructions telling the reader to 'serve it straight away with gravy, before the meat'.³ So my grandma was carrying on a tradition which was no doubt part of the Brontë household.

By all accounts Tabitha Aykroyd – known as Tabby – who went to work for the Brontës in 1824, was not the great cook my grandmother was. When a homesick Charlotte wrote to Emily in 1843 while she was in Brussels, she mentioned Tabby 'blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue'. That said, English cookery, even my grandmother's, is somewhat different from the way we cook food today.

Haworth was a poverty-stricken little town in the Brontë days with no running water in the houses, but at least the Parsonage had its own privy while most of the townsfolk had only the use of shared privies. However the Brontë children, as the children of the curate, while they themselves were comparatively poor, no doubt did live a more refined life than most of the inhabitants of Haworth. As Juliet Barker tells us in her book *The Brontës*, during their mother's final illness the Greenwoods of Bridge House occasionally had the children over for tea. This suggests that the Brontë children were taught the good manners and etiquette expected on such occasions.

Diary notes regarding cooking confirm that the children's diet at home consisted of porridge for breakfast; and according to Juliet Barker, dinner was at 2pm with their father, when they were given plain roast or boiled meat and vegetables followed by desserts – rice puddings, custards, fruit pie and slightly sweetened preparations of egg and milk. Tea usually consisted of bread and butter with fruit preserve.

Following Patrick Brontë's failed efforts to find a new wife after his wife Maria's death, and with the responsibility of his six children to educate, Maria and Elizabeth were sent initially to board at Crofton Hall. It's not

known how long they remained there, but it proved to be quite costly, so when Patrick saw the advertisement in December 1823, for a new school – Cowan Bridge – for Clergymen’s daughters, it must have seemed the ideal solution for him. In Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* published in 1847 the school Lowood is based on her experiences at Cowan Bridge.

No records appear to remain on what sort of food was served at Crofton Hall, but certainly the food which the children were expected to eat at Cowan Bridge was nothing like the food they had been given at home. Karen Smith Kenyon in her book *The Brontë Family: Passionate Literary Geniuses* tells us that at Cowan Bridge ...



The Haworth Parsonage kitchen

the morning’s oatmeal porridge was often burnt, and the midday beef was spoiled. An odor of rancid fat steamed from the oven in which most of the food was prepared. The rainwater used to make the rice pudding was full of the dust it collected from the roof.⁴

Indeed Maria and Elizabeth found the food so horrible they began to go without eating. Having just got over scarlet fever before they went to Cowan Bridge, it’s no wonder that the two eldest Brontë children became sick. By late November 1824 Charlotte and Emily had joined their sisters at the Cowan Bridge school. At that time of the year it must have been bitterly cold on the two-mile walk to the damp church at Tunstall each Sunday for the under-nourished Brontë children and it must have further exacerbated their poor health. Maria and Elizabeth both contracted tuberculosis which was rife amongst the school’s pupils and had followed an outbreak of typhus. The two eldest Brontë children were amongst around a third of the schools pupils who caught the disease.

One girl died at the school – portrayed as Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre* – and six others died once they returned home. It is therefore not surprising that Patrick Brontë then took his four daughters out of the school. Doubtless the nourishing home cooking they would have received on their return to the Parsonage must have seemed like heaven. But it wasn't enough to save Maria and Elizabeth who both died in 1825.

It was a year earlier that Tabitha Akroyd (Tabby) had been hired as a cook/housekeeper for the Parsonage. The small kitchen was Tabby's domain where, following the deaths of the two eldest Brontë children, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne would gather; lured by the smell of vegetables – such as potatoes and turnips – baking, and the sweet smell



Plum Bread and Farmhouse Cake in the Parsonage dining room with the tea cosy made by Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

of cakes and puddings cooking. As Juliet Barker points out it was good food, along with daily walks in the fresh air of the moors and the re-establishment of a routine of lessons which helped to ease the pain felt by the children at the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth. And what better way to help ease the sadness felt by the whole household than helping in the kitchen with some lessons in cookery?

A twelve year old Charlotte, sitting at the kitchen table wrote

I am in the kitchen of the parsonage house Howarth. Tabby the servant is washing up after Breakfast and Anne my youngest Sister (Maria was my eldest) is kneeling on a chair looking at some cakes which Tabby has been baking for us.⁵

The sort of cooking Tabby and the children engaged in was not something a cook in the 21st century would easily recognise, or for that matter would be able to do in the same manner. Tabby, who was possibly illiterate, could doubtless kill, pluck and draw a bird, skin and joint a hare and other such basic skills necessary to put food on the table, including fetching blood from the farm to make black pudding. In those days no one had all the measuring tools most kitchens nowadays boast. Tabby would have measured by the handful and cooked on the small stove in the Parsonage kitchen. Seeds and stalks would have been removed from the fruit by hand – something no doubt the Brontë children helped to do while suet was brought from the butchers in one piece and chopped and grated at home as needed. And of course many recipes used ingredients that grew wild. Could it be that the children were sent out to forage for things like blackberries and wild mushrooms; and could it be that's where Emily learnt her love of roaming around the moors?

It's interesting that when Tabby slipped on the ice in Haworth's main street in 1836, badly breaking her leg, and Aunt Branwell suggested that she be nursed elsewhere by her sister Susannah, the Brontë children objected. That objection included going on a hunger strike which resulted in Aunt Branwell relenting so Tabby stayed at the Parsonage to be nursed by the children, by that stage all young adults.

Where words had failed, fasting carried the day--an important lesson that Emily, who may have been the one to propose the strike, well knew. It was a lesson which was simplicity itself. One need never be entirely powerless and devoid of control. If worse comes to worse, one could simply refuse to eat.⁶

Gradually though, when Tabby's leg never fully healed, Emily took over many of the household duties with the lessons learnt in the kitchen from their faithful servant.

Possibly, when *The Cook and Housewife's Manual* by Mrs Margaret Dods came out in 1826, which like *Blackwood's Magazine*, was an Edinburgh publication, the Brontë household ordered a copy. That same year Thomas John Graham's book *Modern Domestic Medicine* was published, a copy of which Patrick Brontë owned. *Modern Domestic Medicine or a Popular Treatise illustrating the character, symptoms, causes, distinctions and correct treatments of the diseases of the human frame. Embracing all the modern improvement in medicine with the opinion of the most distinguished physicians* includes a 'copious collection of approved prescriptions', 'ample rules of diet', 'a

table of the doses of medicines' and is 'intended as a medical guide for the use of clergymen, heads of families and invalids.' And it *is* a mighty tome! It's hard to say how much of the advice offered in *Modern Domestic Medicine* was followed by the Brontë household. but with the early deaths of his wife Maria and the two eldest children, Maria and Elizabeth, Patrick Brontë would have made sure the household acted on it. Otherwise why would he have a copy of the book? In it Graham states that:

It is certain that simple cookery is a useful art. By it our food is rendered more palatable and digestible, and more conducive to health.

Graham notes there are six ways to cook meat; Roasting, Broiling (somewhat like grilling), Boiling, Stewing, Frying and Baking. Favouring Roasting as being the preferred method he states that -

it was certainly the first mode invented to prepare animal food; for boiling is a more complicated process, and required the art of manufacturing vessels that could withstand the effect of heat. It is an excellent method of rendering food wholesome and nourishing, as, without greatly changing the chemical properties of meat, it renders it more tender, sapid, and high flavoured, whilst there is not so much dissipation of its nutritive juices as in baking, boiling, and some other processes.

...The ingenuity of man has been exerted to discover a number of other preparations, which may with great propriety be arranged under the head of refined or compound cookery, – a system more flattering to the palate than favourable to the health. As it is impossible to speak of this system with any degree of approbation, I shall merely observe, that the generality of ragouts, made dishes, and the like, are difficult of digestion, and very liable to derange the functions of the stomach and intestines, and, therefore, cannot be too sedulously avoided by those who entertain any anxiety for the preservation of their health.⁷

From this you can see where Patrick and his children got some of their ideas from. So it comes as no surprise to find that food plays a part in the books the Brontë sisters wrote.

Reading part of Chapter Five in *Jane Eyre* – published in 1847 - we can get an idea of what Charlotte thought of the food served at Cowan Bridge by reading details of the food which the pupils at Lowood had to endure:

Ravenous, and now very faint, I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; but the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess; burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it. The spoons were moved slowly: I saw each girl taste her food and try to swallow it; but in most cases the effort was soon relinquished. Breakfast was over, and none had breakfasted. Thanks being returned for what we had not got, and a second hymn chanted, the refectory was evacuated for the schoolroom. I was one of the last to go out, and in passing the tables, I saw one teacher take a basin of the porridge and taste it; she looked at the others; all their countenances expressed displeasure, and one of them, the stout one, whispered 'Abominable stuff! How shameful!'

Food and eating habits change in *Jane Eyre* as Jane's social status changes. Jane never eats with the Reed family with whom she is living when the novel starts. She watches the Reed family's feasts and festivities from the staircase. And later when she moves to Thornfield to become the governess for Adele, Jane either eats her meals with her charge in the nursery or with Mrs Fairfax, Thornfield Manor's housekeeper. And in Chapter 17, when Mr Rochester organises a week-long house party, in the hustle and bustle of preparations Jane helps Mrs Fairfax 'learning to make custards and cheese cakes and French pastry, to truss game and garnish dessert-dishes.' Even when she becomes engaged to Mr Rochester Jane refuses to eat with him, thereby maintaining her social class. When she runs away from Thornfield Hall on discovering that Mr Rochester already has a wife, and is eventually taken in by the Rivers family to be nursed back to health, only then does she feel comfortable enough within her social status to enjoy tea in the parlour and dinner at the dining table with Diana, Mary and St John Eyre Rivers. She also helps their servant Hannah with domestic duties. In Chapter 34 we see Jane helping to make the Christmas cake when she describes the 'beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince pies and solemnizing of other culinary rites'²⁸ something which Charlotte herself no doubt did in the kitchen at Haworth.

Unlike most of us who make mince pies each Christmas the Brontës were not able to go to the supermarket to buy what is now called fruit mince but needed of course to make it all themselves. Theirs was a far longer and more arduous process than ours is today.

Without food we die, but only those with plenty of money and therefore in a higher class of society, are able to over-indulge in their choice and quantity of food and the ways in which it is presented. In the paper *The Dialects of Food: Negotiating Social Bodies and Sexual Desire in Jane Eyre* the writer concludes that

Food and taste preferences encode themselves on our physical bodies and may create dialectic in social and emotional status.

The writer argues that Charlotte Brontë engages food habits to amplify Jane's physical and emotional desires. To quote

Jane's blood may be as passionate as wine, but she restricts her freedoms to indulge on the basis of structured social habits. She starves her desires and even when she finally indulges in them, she does so with water, not wine, moderating her indulgence.⁹

According to Ellen Nussey in her *Reminiscences* published in *The Brontës: Interviews and Recollections* and edited by Harold Orel, during the time Charlotte was at Roe Head school -

Her appetite was of the smallest; for years she had not tasted animal food; she had a great dislike to it; she always has something specially provided for her at our midday repast. Towards the close of the first half year she was induced to take, little by little, meat gravy with vegetable, and in the second half year she commenced taking a very small portion of animal food daily. She then grew a little bit plumper and more animated, though she was never what is called lively at this period.¹⁰

During the time she worked as a governess, Charlotte would have been familiar with the structured social habits expected of such a position with regard to food. During her lifetime when she experienced such events from a completely different perspective, such as on her visits to London, she never appeared able to enjoy what food was put before her. When writing to her friend Mary Taylor during one of her London visits she confides that 'I always feel under awkward constraint at table' and that she found dining out a bore. After Charlotte and Anne were guests at a fine dinner given at George Smith's grand house in Paddington she told Mary that 'neither Anne nor I had appetite to eat'.¹¹

While it took place 14 years earlier than their London visit, the simple pleasures of the familiarity of the kitchen at the Parsonage can be understood when reading what Emily Brontë wrote on November 24, 1834.

Anne and I have been peeling apples for Charlotte to make us an apple pudding and for Aunt nuts and apples Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly and she was of a quick but limited intellect. Taby said just now Come Anne pilloputate (i.e. pill a potato) Aunt has come into the kitchen just now and said where are your feet Anne Anne answered On the floor ... we are going to have for Dinner Boiled Beef, Turnips, potatoes and apple pudding. The Kitchin is in a very untidy state Anne and I have not done our music exercise which consists of b major Taby said on my putting a pen in her face Ya pitter pottering there instead of pilling a potate I answered O Dear, O Dear, O dear I will directly with that I get up, take a knife and begin pilling (finished) pilling the potatoes.¹²

It has been said that Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as a mirror of her life, personality and beliefs. Katherine Frank in her biography, *Emily Bronte A Chainless Soul* argues that 'if Emily Brontë were alive today and would submit to psychiatric treatment that she would certainly be diagnosed as suffering from anorexia nervosa.' According to Frank the family ate plain Yorkshire fare; simple and small portions together with a few sips of weak, milky tea. The Brontës were a family plagued by stomach and eating ailments; dyspepsia, loss of appetite and nausea. While Barker contends that Patrick ate dinner with his children, Frank claims that Patrick Brontë only ate breakfast with the family; that dinner and the evening meal were eaten alone in silence 'lest conversation or any other sort of stimulation might trigger an attack of 'bilious' indigestion.' Dinner was picked over by the Brontë children.

The children had their meals across the hall (from Patrick's study) or sometimes in the kitchen, un-superintended, so that there was no one to see that they finished their vegetables before consuming baked custard or apple puddings.¹³

Ellen Nussey in her *Reminiscences* says that Emily and Anne always gave their dog a portion of their breakfast. She also noted that during the time Emily spent at Roe Head school she was getting thinner and thinner each day. Charlotte tried to persuade Emily to eat but to no avail, which resulted in Emily returning to the Parsonage after only three months at the school. Once home Emily resumed eating, taking an active role in the kitchen, not only peeling potatoes, kneading bread and various other cooking chores, but also studying French and German with the books propped up on the kitchen table. While there is no doubt that Emily was extremely slim, refusing to eat when it suited her, she was preoccu-

pieced with food, cooking and with an obsessive need for control.

In a paper *Power and Hunger: Self will and self starvation in the novels and lives of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* the writer claims that

Wuthering Heights seems to revolve around food. Much of the plot takes place in the kitchen. When Catherine is challenged by her husband to choose between him and Heathcliff, she refuses, and ceases eating for days. Deliriously, Catherine, who was dying of starvation herself, remembers finding in childhood a nest filled with the skeletons of baby birds who had died of starvation. Although she consents to have dinner a few days later, she is already so ill that she never fully recovers, and months later dies within hours of giving birth to her daughter. As time passes, Heathcliff eventually starts restricting his diet more and more until he is eating only one meal a day. Soon he limits himself to no food whatsoever.¹⁴

The novel focuses on food, hunger, and starvation, while the kitchen is the main setting, and most of the passionate or violent scenes occur there. Alternately, Emily's supposed anorexia is used to explain aspects of the novel. Katherine Frank characterises Emily as a constantly hungry anorexic who denies her constant hunger. Frank asks:

Even more importantly, how was this physical hunger related to a more pervasive hunger in her life – hunger for power and experience, for love and happiness, fame and fortune and fulfillment?

During Emily's final illness, having contacted tuberculosis from Branwell who died three months prior to his sister, she hardly ate anything at all. She finally died on 19 December 1848, and when the carpenter William Wood made Emily's coffin it was five feet seven inches in length and only sixteen inches across, the narrowest coffin he had ever made.

The year Emily died Anne's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published. Like all her siblings before her Anne had spent time as a governess, including with the Robinson family of Thorp Green, the family who also employed Branwell as a tutor, a position from which he was sacked. Not much has been possible to ascertain about Branwell's eating habits; but a few days before he died he was invited to a meal in the Black Bull by Francis Grundy, his friend from their days working on the railway at Luddenham Foot. While he died of tuberculosis, Branwell was by then an alcoholic and an opium addict which probably meant that he didn't eat too much himself since most alcoholics are malnourished.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, the second novel which Anne Brontë wrote during Branwell's last years, concerns the perils of drink as portrayed in the characters of Arthur Huntingdon and his friends - theirs was an appetite for wine - and is often seen as one of the first feminist novels, challenging the morals of Victorian society. Much of the mentions of food appears in the part of the novel written from the perspective of Gilbert Markham and relates to happy family life. But I wonder what part of the character of the Reverend Micheal Millward was based on the Reverend Patrick Brontë.

He had a laudable care for his own bodily health – kept very early hours, regularly took a walk before breakfast, was vastly particular about warm and dry clothing, had never been known to preach a sermon without previously swallowing a raw egg – albeit he was gifted with good lungs and a powerful voice -and was generally, extremely particular about what he ate and drank, though by no means abstemious, and having a mode of dietary peculiar to himself, - being a great despiser of tea and such slops, and a patron of malt liquors, bacon and eggs, ham, hung beef, and other strong meats, which agreed well enough with his digestive organs, and therefore were maintained by him to be good and wholesome for everybody, and confidently recommended to the most delicate convalescents or dyspeptics, who, if they failed to derive the promised benefit from his prescriptions, were told it was because they had not persevered, and if they complained of inconvenient results therefrom, were assured it was all fancy.¹⁵

Tenant was a great success on publication, but less than a year later its author was dead.

While during the last part of Anne's illness Charlotte tried to prevent her sister from travelling to Scarborough – where she had such happy memories of visiting during the five years she was governess for the Robinsons – Dr Teale, who was treating her, agreed that she should be allowed to go there. Patrick Brontë recorded Dr Teale's advice in the margins of his book *Modern Domestic Medicine* - 'change of place & climate, could prove beneficial, only in the early stages of consumption – that afterwards, the excitement caused by changes of scenes, and beds, and strange company, did harm'. Finally on her fathers insistence that she accompany her sister, Charlotte went with Anne to Scarborough, as did Ellen Nussey Juliet Barker records that Anne's expenses while

in Scarborough were meagre: ‘.two shillings for dandelion coffee, three pennies for a glass of lemonade, four for half a dozen oranges.’ Prior to her death Anne breakfasted on boiled milk and so graciously and quietly died that no-one in the guest house had any idea what had happened; ‘dinner was announced through the half-open door even as Charlotte leaned over to close the eyes of her dead sister.’ Writing to William Smith Williams, Charlotte’s ‘reader’ at Smith Elder & Co, a month after Anne’s death Charlotte told him of her terrible grief;

I am rebellious – and it is only the thought of my dear Father in the next room, or the kind servants in the kitchen...which restore me to softer sentiments.¹⁶

A comparison to the present day is pertinent: the sendoff the Meagher family gave to their murdered daughter and friend made me think about the early deaths of the Brontë children. Life expectancy during their lifetimes in Haworth was only about 30 years, but death is traumatic no matter what age. It must have been a sad little household once the Parsonage only contained Patrick and Charlotte. As Charlotte wrote in a letter to Mrs Gaskell on 27 August 1850, one year after the last of her siblings had died ‘Papa and I have just had tea; he is sitting quietly in his room and I in mine; ‘storms of rain’ are sweeping over the garden and churchyard; as to the moors – they are hidden in thick fog’.¹⁷

The subject of this talk being food, I was hoping for some insight into what was served at the wedding breakfast when Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nichols in June 1854. But all I could find was an account of John Robinson eating some boiled ham at the Parsonage after the newly marrieds had departed for their honeymoon.

And we mustn’t forget Patrick Brontë who outlived all his family, dying in 1861. Maybe Patrick’s eating habits were after all more like those of Reverend Micheal Millward in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Gluttony, starvation, the enjoyment of food - whichever of these vices or virtues you want to call them - we are what we eat. So I’ll finish with an inviting scene in the Parsonage and to invite you all to share some of the Yorkshire Parkin I made yesterday with thanks to my wonderful Yorkshire grandma.

Postscript

Graham's *Modern Domestic Medicine* is most interesting in view of the Brontë family's eating habits:

In consumption of food we are liable to commit errors, both as to their quantity and quality. The error in the quantity, however, is generally the most detrimental. A small portion of food can be better-digested, and more easily changed into chyle, or that alimentary fluid from which the blood derives its origin, than a larger portion, which injures the coats of the stomach, and prevents them from exerting their force. Hence every excess is injurious.

In our current times, the argument against excess is pertinent.

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