

Wuthering Heights and King Lear: The Natural, the Unnatural and the Supernatural.

Wuthering Heights was written by Emily Brontë in 19th Century England, Queen Victoria ruled.

King Lear was written by William Shakespeare in 17th Century England, King James ruled 16th-17th centuries.

**An interactive talk given by Annette and Graham Harman
on 7th June 2014**

Annette: Hello Everyone, thanks for coming! Our talk has been entitled *Wuthering Heights and King Lear: The Natural, the Unnatural and the Supernatural*. And as we thought about these issues in Emily's novel, we soon realized that we had more than enough material for many talks!

So today we will be emphasising The Natural, although we'll also be exploring selected aspects of the full spectrum right through to the unnatural, and to the outright weird.

Graham and I have planned a more interactive presentation with you, and if you're wondering about the sheets on your chairs, in a moment you can have an opportunity to jot down your own responses on the topic.

But this is also an interactive session in the sense that a number of members of the ABA, unable to contain their questions until

question time at the end, have already put up their hands. Firstly, our Patron, Christine Alexander is keen to know what, exactly we mean by “natural”, and in particular, given the historical lens that we will be bringing to our presentation, what the OED, that is, the Oxford English Dictionary, has to say on the subject?

Graham: Thanks Annette. By “Nature” and “Natural”, we mean each of three things.

- Firstly we mean “human nature” or “a person’s nature”. For example, Heathcliff has a “devilish nature”
- Secondly, we mean nature in the sense of the natural world, Mother Nature, the moors and the hills and the trees and the flowers.

Annette: And those two meanings fit tightly together in Emily’s writing, don’t they?

Graham: Yes they do – and in King Lear likewise!. But I anticipate. Throughout the novel, there is a recurring use of natural imagery – in the sense of plants, and of trees, and of rocks – to enrich our understanding of the characters and their behaviour. To take one famous example, Cathy states that:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary.

That parallel usage of “nature” is something we’ll be taking a closer look at, as we move through today’s talk.

- Thirdly, we mean the “natural order of things” in a societal sense, including the legal framework and in particular primogeniture. This is a more controversial usage of the word “natural”. In some universal sense it is merely an accident of birth that Hindley is the heir of old Mr Earnshaw; and that Hareton is an heir in his turn.

But *Wuthering Heights* in many ways is a novel about property and property rights – as we explored in detail in our February meeting

with Chester Porter. As we foreshadowed in the title of today's talk, Hareton is described by Emily Brontë a "natural heir".

Just to be on the safe side though – it was recommended to us that we go to the ultimate authority regarding what words meant, in particular periods – that is the Oxford English Dictionary.

So I went online; I clicked on the word natural; I found a nice neat one line definition; and then in an unguarded moment I clicked on "view full entry". 19,500 words about "natural", spread over 77 pages, immediately appeared on my screen! But – just briefly - let's go to the third umpire – what does the OED have to say about the "natural"? And, in particular, does it support a sense of the "natural" in relation to societal relations; inheritance; and property rights?

Annette: Well – a number of meanings relate to the first of our themes. "Natural" means "inherent in the very constitution of a person or thing"; and it can mean "formed by nature, unprocessed, part of the environment, uncultivated, or like a wilderness". There you go, for the Yorkshire moors!

But – you don't have to delve too far into the 77 pages to find that "natural" also means "expected or normal"; and there is a whole suite of meanings relating to this societal meaning of "natural" – for example, "Relating to birth or family; native. Of a person: having a status (especially. of allegiance or authority) by birth; natural-born. Of the transfer of a privilege, property, etc.: according to right of heredity.

Graham: And that's what it meant in Emily Brontë's time, specifically. Here's an example from J. Hall's *Harpe's Head* in 1833: "I do not know whether I ought to accept the bounty of my uncle, which, by making me rich, deprives you of your natural inheritance."

So that's it for our views on what the natural is, and the OED has had its say and more. Let's turn to Emily Brontë's views about the natural, and give everyone here a chance to think about what it means to you, as well.

Together we are going to look to look at the following definition, using from Harvard a Thinking routine called See, Think and Wonder: Annette gives brief explanation here.

Annette: This comes from the Natural History entry in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (C. Alexander & M. Smith, 2006, pp.339-340).

Nature for Emily was a mysterious and powerful force, dominating life with unremitting will. There is none of the benignity (kindness) that Wordsworth saw in the natural world. As Hillis Miller points out, her vision of a fallen world is close to that of Wesley (Reverend John Wesley, 1703-91, founder of Methodism), who believed that both man and animals were implicated in the fall from grace but that man surpasses the animals in cruelty since he acts ‘of his free choice’...

In the final analysis however, Wesley, like the Brontës, sees not a vision of destruction but a vision of a new heaven and a new earth in which the animal world will also be uncorrupted and free...

Wuthering Heights demonstrates a similar emphasis on earthly antagonism, yet there is a Providence (a powerful force at work, in Christianity God) at work even among the most distorted creatures and in spite of a sense of the remorselessness of time. The novel has been characterized as a veritable bestiary of predators and victims...

The importance of nature in the novel, however, is not only to stress man’s affinity with the instinctive world and an awareness of human corruptibility that is seen as consonant with natural history, but to convey a unity in creation.

Every phase of the characters is accompanied by nature... Emily is able to convey the rhythm of a larger natural life against which the inevitability of the individual evil represented by Heathcliff seems to dissolve.



Holding the thoughts you have, hold them in your mind as we begin our examination of *Wuthering Heights* and *King Lear*.

Both authors were ruled by different monarchs, from your impressions and knowledge, what were these monarchs influence on the writers? OK, great, that gives us a roadmap to get started. But still on this theme of audience pre-participation though, there's a question on that Elizabethan perspective that we've now introduced, from our past President, Christopher Cooper. He was interested in the literary interrelationships between Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, on the one hand; and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, on the other.

Annette: Was that his exact question?

Graham: Well - no! I think it was more a comment. What he actually said was, "Hey! You can't just pick any two random books, and put them side by side, and see what happens! And – what's the point of such an exercise if you do do that?" Cool. Thanks for that input Dr Cooper!

I think we've hinted at a couple of our purposes in drawing parallels between *Wuthering Heights* and *King Lear* already.

- Firstly, there are many striking similarities between the two works, and particularly with regard to the interweaving of natural imagery in a landscape sense, with the representation of the characters' natures.
- Secondly – and this was partly the point of the King James exercise – the historical perspectives will provide us with some insights into Emily's positioning in the broader sweep of the history of attitudes and ideas.
- And thirdly, of course, Emily was clearly a reader and a student of Shakespeare, and she explicitly references *King Lear* in Chapter 2. Annette – can you just remind us of that passage?

Annette: Of course:

On opening the little door, two hairy monsters flew at my throat, bearing me down, and extinguishing the light; while a mingled guffaw from Heathcliff and Hareton put the copestone on my rage and humiliation. Fortunately, the beasts seemed more bent on stretching

their paws, and yawning, and flourishing their tails, than devouring me alive; but they would suffer no resurrection, and I was forced to lie till their malignant masters pleased to deliver me: then, hatless and trembling with wrath, I ordered the miscreants to let me out - on their peril to keep me one minute longer - with several incoherent threats of retaliation that, in their indefinite depth of virulency, smacked of King Lear.

Graham: And the Lear reference?

Annette: *I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall – I will do such things, –
What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep
No, I'll not weep.*

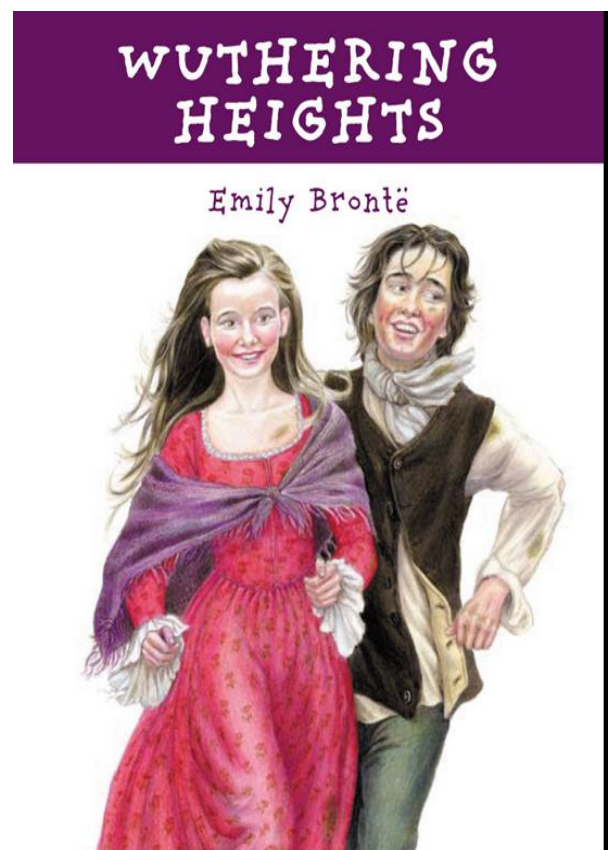
Graham: So – keep your eye out for possible Shakespearian influences on Emily Brontë, as we go through.

OK. So let's examine our hypothesis – that *Wuthering Heights* is replete with natural images and wholesome, natural ways.

I was first introduced to *Wuthering Heights* when I was 9, and a kind auntie gave me a copy for Christmas. I still have the book, and here's an enlargement of the cover.

This is a simple, heart-warming story of young love. Secondly, there are lots of other circumstantial details – for example, young Miss Cathy “grows like a larch” – which draw on the healthy naturalness of the surrounding moor. Indeed – the final act of Catherine and Hareton in the book is “to take a last look at the moon – or rather, at each other by her light”

And thirdly, on this reading, the societal message of the novel, is also



affirmation of the natural order.

Wuthering Heights was established in 1500 by Hareton Earnshaw. The name and the date are hewn in stone, over the lintel, where they may still be read today. Old Mr Earnshaw is a legitimate landed patriarch. He has two children, both Earnshaws. Each marries a nice suitable other unrelated person – Frances and Edgar Linton respectively. Each has a child – Hareton Earnshaw and Cathy Linton. The children marry. At the end of the novel, Earnshaws still hold the Heights. The original Hareton Earnshaw, in a sense, lives on. The natural order prevails.

[Annette looks incredulous]

Annette: Graham – I don't think that that's "our" hypothesis. That's your hypothesis! The characters in *Wuthering Heights* cannot imaginably be described as "normal and natural". The above characterisation leaves out Heathcliff for example.

Graham: Wait! I forgot! Emily also gives us an insight into Heathcliff's "natural" character, in the episode where Hindley drops his son Hareton off the banisters!

"There was scarcely time to experience a thrill of horror before we saw that the little wretch was safe. Heathcliff arrived underneath just at the critical moment; by a natural impulse he arrested his descent."

Annette: Sure – the last of the nice guys –and immediately his countenance expresses, "plainer than words could do, the intensest anguish at having made himself an instrument of thwarting his own revenge".

And then – thirteen major characters? And – every one of them, is related to every other one of them?

Seriously! And – young Cathy? The innocent young face of the future? Who sequentially marries her aunt's son, and then her uncle's son, all while she is still a teenager? That is just, creepy!

Graham: *Wuthering Heights* is an unnatural novel, or at least, a "novel of the unnatural", across a range of fronts.

Firstly, let's look at the initial critical responses:

... the Unnatural ...

Double Cat Films

presents

“A strange, inartistic story”

*“A compound of
vulgar depravity”*

“Most disagreeable”



- Early critics of the novel dismissed it as ““A strange, inartistic story”; “A compound of vulgar depravity”; “Most disagreeable”. Secondly, let’s go to the Blogosphere, and find out how modern readers find the novel. A commentator describing themselves as “Bookworm” was definitely in the “most disagreeable” camp in terms of their own response, but they were on the defensive until someone called Nickie chimed in.



Nickie 29 June 2012 06:00

I thought this book was an absolutely miserable read, too. There was not a single redeming quality in any of the characters, and I was so happy when Catherine finally died. If it's an acquired taste, I'll never acquire because there's no way I can reread this book.

Reply

▼ Replies



BOOKWORM 29 June 2012 18:13

Thank you. So far you are the only one who agreed with me. I was beginning to doubt my brain has got some problems.

Thirdly, let's look at the natural imagery, and Emily's use of that imagery.

Annette: And don't forget to tell us about King Lear. Do people need a refresher on the plot? King Lear, in Shakespeare's play of that name written around 1600, is the King of Britain.

He's a "Legitimate" leader under the established, "natural" feudal order. He gains his authority from the accepted societal structure. He acts "on the gad" (by disinheriting his daughter Cordelia) and precipitates disorder.

Graham: Sounds like old Mr Earnshaw – who acts "on the gad" by collecting Heathcliff and adopting him, and likewise precipitates disorder in the establishment.

Annette: Meanwhile – to continue with the King Lear précis – one of Lear's lieutenants, the Earl of Gloucester, is fooled by his scheming illegitimate son Edmund, into disinheriting his honest, legitimate son Edgar. Poor judgement, from senior member of the natural order, exacerbates problems.

Annette: So who do you have chalked up for Heathcliff?

Graham: The scheming gate-crasher Edmund – although, as we’ll see shortly, perhaps with some Regan and Goneril, the wicked sisters, mixed in as well. Here’s what Edmund has to say in Act I, scene ii:

Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:

All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.

OK – there’s Heathcliff.

Annette: I suppose... But are you just drawing a comparison, or are you claiming that Edmund was a prototype for Emily’s character? Well, that would be a very big call, especially with all these experts in the room! Personally, though, I can see parallels in the decline of feudalism, back in Shakespeare’s time, and the challenges to the established church and the beginnings of Darwinism, at the time of Emily Brontë. Edmund and Heathcliff in some measure embody those developments, in my opinion. Both Edmund and Heathcliff are “illegitimate” leaders under an unfamiliar “new order”. Both gain authority from their individual enterprise. Both act in a premeditated and calculated fashion. And I did manage to find a journal reference to provide some support as well – here’s what A. J. Tough has to say, in the Spring 1972 edition of the journal, *English*:

“While Heathcliff suffers intensely, he also inflicts great suffering. Like Edmund, he is a child of nature and feels, with some justice, that he has been unjustly treated, so that his behaviour is justifiable”.

Certainly the daughters of the old order in these texts are attracted by the subversive, unnatural, and scheming individualists.

So – that’s Goneril and Regan, in *King Lear*, and it’s Cathy Earnshaw and Isabella Linton, in *Wuthering Heights*.

So that leaves Edgar and Hareton, respectively, as the natural heirs.

Annette: That was a pretty long précis of *King Lear*, Graham. We’re supposed to be looking at nature, in its two senses of character, and of the natural world, in *Wuthering Heights*. And I’m still not convinced that the emphasis is on the natural, rather than the unnatural. Nickie’s response to the novel – that it’s a “miserable read” – is not completely without foundation.

Graham: Sure. Go ahead. Don’t forget *King Lear*.

Annette: Well, first up, it's true that young Cathy "grew like a larch, and could walk and talk too, in her own way, before the heath blossomed a second time over Mrs. Linton's dust." And – staying with the nature analogy, it's also true that "She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house"



But when we turn to the characterization of Heathcliff, we find a very different take on the tree imagery. With reference to Hareton, we hear Heathcliff say,

“Now, my bonny lad, you are MINE! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!”

The evil side of Heathcliff's nature is also revealed through animal imagery – and, yes, it's just like King Lear. Goneril, in Shakespeare's play, is a “detested kite”; “most serpent like”; “like a vulture”, and “blessed with a wolvisish visage”, while together the two sisters are “pelican daughters”, “dog-eared daughters”, and “tigers”. Heathcliff, in the same vein is “a bird of bad omen”; “a fierce, pitiless,

wolfish man” who “gnashed and foamed like a mad dog” and “howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast”.

And he’s a “monster” whose “mouth watered to tear you with his teeth; because he’s only half man – not so much”. And – when animal images fail to suffice, both Goneril and Heathcliff are “fiends” – which takes us towards the Supernatural.

Graham: That’s right – and I wanted to say something about Emily Bronte and romanticism in that supernatural context. But what about “nature” in the sense of the “natural elements” – where does Emily go with that strand of metaphor?

Annette: Well – one point of difference about *King Lear* and *Wuthering Heights*, is that the structures are different. Each work has a main plot and a subplot; but in the case of *Lear*, the two plots are interwoven simultaneously, and the storm scene peaks in the centre of the play. In *Wuthering Heights*, it’s storm and tempest from the get-go – both meteorological, and domestic; but by the end of the novel, Lockwood lingers around the graves of the main protagonists; and “watched the watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth”.

Graham: Given all that you’ve told us about the unnatural, Annette, I’m coming round to the view that maybe those slumbers are unquieter than they might appear to the unperceptive Mr Lockwood. We should draw some of the historical threads together at this point, although there’s a risk in doing that, of opening up a whole new and boundless topic. The interaction of humanity and nature is a vast and fascinating one – a story that starts with the Classical Golden Age, or the Garden of Eden, with an earth so bountiful that the trees pretty much proffer you fruit, naturally. To generalize outrageously, in the interests of time, we might say that in the Middle Ages Nature was God’s harsh but revelatory book; and in the Renaissance, it was to be exploited. Often, for Shakespeare, a period of immersion in a wilderness allows the characters to find their true selves, either

beautifully, as in *As You Like It*, or more confrontingly, as in *King Lear*.

In the long period between Shakespeare and the Brontës, there's some amazing stuff.

Annette: There was a book written by Thomas Burnet, *Sacred Theory of the Earth* – published in 1681. The basic concept is, that God made the world, smooth: “not a wrinkle, scar or fracture in all its body; no rocks nor mountains”. And then – in due course – God inflicted ugly, irregular, inconvenient, bad mountains on the Earth, as a punishment for Sin.

Graham: Cop that!, Wilderness Society. But Edward Gibbon had a similar view – “I go to the country to visit my friends. I don't go to look at the trees.”

By the mid 1700s though, Nature as landscape was beginning to become appreciated; and the true Romantic period, nature had become a source of virtue. In that sense, we might think of Romanticism, at the time of Emily Brontë, as the “Renaissance of the Renaissance”. In that sense, there is a link back to Shakespeare's day.

But I think Emily Brontë was already somewhat disparaging of that Wordsworthian view of Nature, a view which she attributes, in the opening lines, to the hapless Lockwood:

... a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's heaven.

To my mind, Emily anticipates a view of Nature, which was propounded by the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins in 1888, in the sonnet titled, “That Nature is a Heraclitian fire, and of the comfort of the Resurrection”.

In that sonnet, we find a portrayal of “Nature as battleground” – just as we heard from Annette, in her introduction, that Emily emphasized Nature's Darwinian antagonism:

Hopkins writes “Million-fuelèd, nature's bonfire burns on”

which is his summation, of both the Natural, and of the “Unnatural”. But Hopkins believes in the Resurrection, and in the same sonnet he writes:

*Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam.*

So – we also heard from Annette about a Wesleyan vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth. So – what’s beyond those graves, in *Wuthering Heights*?

We should also round out the story on the Supernatural, before we close; and as I indicated previous there is a hook-up here with Romanticism, a period which Emily Brontë was in, but not of. One of the very greatest romantic poets was John Keats, who penned the following lines:

*Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu! For once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through..*

Annette: That’s from the Sonnet entitled – “On sitting down to read *King Lear* once again” – the sonnet that commences: “O golden tongued Romance”

Graham: Sure. But it could equally be about *Wuthering Heights*.

Annette: Apart from the fact that it was written first.

Graham: Apart from the fact that it was written first – yes.

*Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu! For once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through.*

The point I wanted to make was, that we often think of Romanticism and of Nature, as part and parcel of each other. But there is also a meaning of “natural” – which contributes a big chunk of the OED’s 77

pages on the subject by the way – which is “prosaic”, or “mechanistic” – if you like, the antithesis of aspirational romantic thinking.



To my mind, a lot of the supernatural aspects of *Wuthering Heights* are what I might describe as the “natural, supernatural”. For example, there’s the classic “cross-roads experience” which Nellie Dean describes, in Chapter 11, as she gazes at the milestone:

I gazed long at the weather-worn block; and, stooping down, perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles, which we were fond of storing there with more perishable things; and, as fresh as reality, it appeared that I beheld my early playmate seated on the withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate.

For me, that’s a country superstition, an instance of phenomenology; and whilst more dramatic, I’d view Catherine Linton’s thrusting of her

hands through the window panes at night, in the opening scenes, in the same light. These are what we might call “everyday” instances of the supernatural.

Ultimately though, as we’ve seen, it’s probably more accurate to characterize Emily as foreshadowing Darwinism, than as exemplifying a supernatural Romanticism.

Annette: That’s right. In the examples I gave before – looking at some of the comparisons that Emily makes between people and animals – I’m not even very confident that they were entirely pejorative. Some of you may be familiar with the famous reference, about Emily, at Law Hill near Halifax, that “the house-dog was dearer to her than the students” were.

Graham: But that central scene in *Wuthering Heights* – so enjoyed by our Blogosphere friend Nickie – the scene in Chapter 15 where Catherine dies – that truly is supernatural. And I think it would be uncontroversial to argue, that Catherine’s description of this earthly world, and her description of the Heathcliff of this world, are descriptions of a natural materialism which is ultimately unsatisfactory, like the shadowy cave of Plato’s famous parable.

Time to finish up and take questions Annette – so let’s close with this neo-Platonic description of the supernatural and glorious world, which we are told waited for Catherine Linton beyond her death:

Oh, you see, Nelly, he would not relent a moment to keep me out of the grave. THAT is how I'm loved! Well, never mind. That is not MY Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he's in my soul. And,' added she musingly, 'the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there: not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart: but really with it, and in it.

THE DEPICTION OF TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECT ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE BRONTË FICTION

A talk given by Dr Patrick Morris on 28th March 2015

The Brontë sisters are renowned as writers who had the ability to express the deepest emotions of their characters in powerful and affecting ways. This ability to express, and indeed their affinity for, powerful emotional responses is one of the reasons their works have retained a resonance and popularity today, more than 150 years after they were written. Not only has there been a passage of years but there have been dramatic changes in Western society over that time, probably most notably in the role of women in society. We have progressed from the avowedly patriarchal society that the Brontës wrote in and about to one in which gender equality is entrenched in law and women have far more legal rights and educational and work opportunities than previously. This is particularly relevant to the Brontës' work where we are usually presented with a female perspective to society, often from a position of severe disadvantage. The issue of trauma in the form of child abuse and domestic violence in the Brontës' novels are prominent concerns in a number of their works. The three critical texts in the Brontë canon which deal with the issue of traumatic experiences are *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. The fact that each sister has written a novel which foregrounds these issues allows an analysis of how the traumatic experiences of child abuse and domestic violence are presented and approached by each individual writer.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a powerful portrayal of individual and institutional child abuse and the effect it has upon Jane. Jane is able to overcome the abuse through her innate strengths coupled with interactions with strong and supportive women like Miss Temple at critical times in her development. Despite her at times wavering self-confidence she is able to assert her individuality with two powerful men in her life, Rochester and St John Rivers. She eventually takes the lead in finding happiness with Rochester.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* presents a much bleaker picture of the effects of child abuse. Heathcliff has no relief from the

abuse of Hindley and Joseph and particularly has no significant adult supportive and protective figure like Jane had in *Miss Temple*. He has the deep bond with Catherine but when she breaks that and falls in with the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange he loses his ties to humanity. He becomes a violent, abusive, psychopathic man who treats his wife and son with unbelievable cruelty. Although he eventually develops some degree of understanding of his young alter-ego Hareton, he remains to his death a lonely misanthrope, haunted by his past.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, whilst not as complex as the two other novels, presents a realistic picture of domestic violence in the early nineteenth century in England when married women had almost no legal rights at all. Helen's desperate marital situation yet also her courage in leaving Arthur and starting her own independent life are depicted with clarity. The continuing scars of her experience are left in her extreme protectiveness of her son and her own fear of relationships with men, only brought to an end by her husband's death and her relationship with and marriage to Gilbert Markham.

The Brontë sisters, in their unique individual ways, had a deep appreciation of human nature and especially the ability to describe graphically the emotional content of human interaction. Their understanding of the experience of trauma, for children and for married women in particular, is deep and their ability to express its effects and the way their characters deal with it is vivid and realistic. At the core of their enduring appeal are a keen observation of human nature, vivid imagination and clarity of expression. Their characters react to their traumatic experiences in ways that are very understandable from the perspective of modern psychology. The Brontës' profound psychological insight is one of the core elements underlying their enduring popularity as writers through the years into an entirely different society and cultural milieu.

For a more detailed analysis of the depiction of trauma in these three novels please see the following reference:

Morris, P. (2013) The depiction of trauma and its effect on character development in the Brontë fiction. *Brontë Studies*, 38(2): 157-168.

Patrick is a Consultant & Forensic Psychiatrist and Clinical Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at the Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney

MEDICAL MISHAPS AND MALADIES IN THE BRONTËS' LIVES AND NOVELS

A talk given by Dr Vasudha Chandra on 3rd October 2014

The Brontës' novels are full of illnesses, injuries and untimely deaths, as were their own lives. This article summarises the talk presented on October 3rd, exploring the health of the Brontës and the treatments used in their time.

The Brontë family lived in Haworth which was a village on the side of a hill. The Brontë's house was at the top of the hill, above the church and backing onto the moor, and surrounded on two sides by the cemetery. Elizabeth Gaskell was the first biographer of Charlotte Brontë and published her account in 1857 after Charlotte had died. Mrs Gaskell tells us: "The people of Haworth were [not] very poor."

Patrick Brontë, the father of the three sisters Charlotte, Emily and Anne, came to Haworth as the rector in April 1820. He was born in 1777 in a two-roomed traditional Irish cabin, where the family led a simple life – they ate plain fare of buttermilk and bread made from a mixture of potatoes and oatmeal. This unfortunately induced indigestion in the young Patrick and he believed it caused the dyspepsia that plagued his adult life. Dyspepsia is the symptom we commonly call heartburn, and is related to stomach acid.

Patrick may have had gastro-oesophageal reflux disease or even stomach ulcers. His doctor likely recommended hydrochloric acid, pepsin wine, and bitter tonics such as cardamom or strychnia as a gastric stimulant. Strychnia is strychnine, which is poisonous! These days, we generally try to avoid prescribing our patients poison! Instead of giving acid for dyspepsia, we use medications that decrease stomach acid. I don't think cardamom would have done any harm, but pepsin wine probably didn't help – we usually advise patients with dyspepsia to avoid alcohol, as it can worsen symptoms.



An apothecary prepares his remedial concoctions.

Patrick Brontë also had problems with his vision and by 1845 was almost blind. Charlotte took her father to see an eye doctor who performed an operation to remove cataracts. Mr Brontë would have been awake while the doctors cut into his eyes, after which he lay in a darkened room for a month.

Maria, the mother of Charlotte, Emily and Anne, came from a well-established and prominent Cornish family. At 29 she went to live with her aunt and uncle in Yorkshire, where she and Patrick met and fell in love. They married in December 1812 and had six children. Historians tell us that Maria was a small woman and not very strong – but I think enduring and surviving childbirth six times in a period when maternal and child mortality was so high suggests otherwise!

The young family moved to Haworth in 1820. Maria was taken ill in January 1821, and was essentially bed-bound for the next seven months. It is believed that Maria had cancer of the uterus. There was little that could be done to treat her cancer or help her symptoms – biographers have written of the “prolonged physical pain” that she suffered. Patrick later noted in his copy of Graham’s *Modern Domestic Medicine* in the margin of the pages on cancer that ‘Drinking a table spoonful of brandy, & water \and salt,\ four times a day, and bathing

with this mixture; the parts affected, is said to be good for a cancer'. Beneath this he added: 'This remains to be proved... As I have read, and seen, sometimes but not always – when a cancer, is radically cut out in one part, it breaks out in another'. While I don't think the brandy and salt water bathing would have helped, Patrick's observation of cancer spreading to other parts of the body was correct. Nowadays surgical removal of cancer is sometimes followed with chemotherapy or radiotherapy to mop up microscopic disease elsewhere in the body. In September 1821, Maria died, leaving behind her six children, the eldest of whom was 7, the youngest only 20 months.

During Maria's illness, the children came down with scarlet fever, which was often fatal in those times. Scarlet fever is an infectious disease caused by streptococcal bacteria, and most commonly affects children. Its name derives from the characteristic red rash and the bright red strawberry-like tongue it causes. Death could occur during the initial illness, or later because of long-term complications such as kidney or heart disease. The management of scarlet fever at that time really only addressed symptoms: for example cool baths to keep down the child's temperature, and chloral, a sedative to help the child sleep. It is remarkable that all six Brontë children survived. Nowadays, scarlet fever can be treated with antibiotics and the long-term complications can often be prevented.

In July 1824, the two eldest Brontë sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, were sent to Cowan Bridge School. (They should have gone earlier, but because they were still delicate from having had whooping cough and measles in the spring, their entry was delayed). In August, Charlotte was sent and in November, Emily as well. Anne who was only four remained at home with her Aunt, while their brother Branwell was taught at home by his father. The school register notes the diseases each girl has had at the time of enrolment, and that they have been "vaccinated", presumably against smallpox. (There were no immunisations for diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, polio, or tetanus in those times. These are now routine immunisations for children).

The history of the smallpox vaccine is interesting. Smallpox cases were increasing in the 18th century and had a mortality rate of 40%. Those who survived were often left horribly scarred. Cowpox was a mild infection found on the udders of cows. Many dairymaids and

farmers at the time believed that those who had contracted cowpox would not get smallpox. This led physician Edward Jenner to carry out an experiment in 1796. He took pus from the cowpox vesicles on the hands of a dairymaid and inserted it into the arm of his gardener's boy, who promptly developed cowpox. Later, Jenner infected the boy with smallpox matter but he remained healthy. After further experiments on other villagers, Jenner published his findings. He called this new method "vaccination", from the Latin *vacca*, meaning cow. Jenner's vaccination was not accepted by all but gradually became more popular. Through the efforts of global vaccination campaigns, smallpox was eradicated from the world in 1980.



Edward Jenner demonstrated that cowpox vaccination could protect against small pox.

So coming back to Cowan Bridge School. There is no doubt that descriptions of life at Lowood School in *Jane Eyre* are based on the sisters' own school experiences. The school was strict and rigorous in its discipline and daily routine. The children were often hungry and cold, and their whole existence was generally without comfort.

Ironically, the school did put considerable emphasis on cleanliness, unlike some institutions of the time, presumably in a vain attempt to maintain health.

In the late winter of 1825 an epidemic of typhus broke out at the school. Typhus was sometimes called low fever, putrid fever, jail fever or ship fever. It was found on board ships, in prisons and wherever people were packed together in overcrowded and insanitary conditions. Typhus is an infection caused by *Rickettsia* bacteria, and is transmitted from person to person via body lice. The symptoms of typhus were often confused with typhoid. Typhoid actually means “typhus-like”, but is a separate and unrelated gastrointestinal disease caused by the bacteria *Salmonella typhi* and spread by contaminated food or water. Both can cause fever, headaches, confusion and a rash.

Charlotte describes the spread of disease in *Jane Eyre* in Chapter 9: “That forest dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bread pestilence; which... crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded [rooms]... Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils... Many... went home only to die: some died at the school, and were buried quietly and quickly, the nature of the malady forbidding delay.”

A fellow pupil at Cowan Bridge described the school’s callous neglect of Maria Brontë, the eldest Brontë sister, to Mrs Gaskell some thirty years later. We are also told that Maria had “a blister applied to her side” by the school doctor. Blistering was thought to be effective for a variety of medical issues including gout, inflammation, fevers, and cases of insanity. A fine powder derived from certain beetles, together with other stimulants, such as pepper or mustard-seed, were mixed with plasters and spread on the skin's surface to produce a blister. When the blister was fully raised, it was often "snipped" open. Sometimes the blister was dressed with a ‘healing’ ointment on a linen rag, which I expect would often introduce infection into the open wound. I think this treatment would have caused pain and been of no benefit to the patient!

Maria became very unwell with typhus. In February, she was taken home, where she died about three months later. Elizabeth, who was also very unwell, left Cowan Bridge on May 31st 1825, and soon after so did Charlotte and Emily. Elizabeth died less than a month later.

Helen Burns, Jane Eyre’s friend at Lowood, is based on Charlotte’s lost sister Maria.

That same year, Tabitha Aykroyd came to the Parsonage as servant and cook and was to remain with the family for thirty years. At the end of 1836, Tabby, now in her 60s, fell heavily in the street and broke her leg. No surgeon could come to set the fracture until the following morning. Tabby’s leg later became badly ulcerated and she had to leave the Parsonage for a while. Tabby luckily recovered, though was left with a pronounced limp.



Amputation without anaesthesia, 1793.

Things could have been much worse for Tabby! At the beginning of the 19th century, fractures that tore the skin almost inevitably became infected. A surgeon who was strong and quick could sometimes successfully save a life by amputating a mangled limb and cauterising the stump, but the death rate from shock, blood loss, and infection was high. Interestingly, surgeons had originally been barbers. They did procedures such as setting bones, pulling teeth, and treating wounds, usually “in the backroom of a barbershop with a rusty knife

and leather straps for restraints” (Mukherjee, 2011). Aseptic surgery using sterile techniques originated with Joseph Lister in the late 1860s, but it took time to catch on. It was only in the 1890s that it became customary for surgeons to scrub their hands and boil their instruments.

In 1831, at age 15, Charlotte went to school again, this time to Roe Head. Mary Taylor, a fellow pupil and friend, described Charlotte as “so short-sighted that she always appeared to be seeking something... in a game...she could not see the ball”. Charlotte Brontë had myopia, which is often called short-sightedness. She wore spectacles in her adult years. Charlotte’s myopia may have been in part due to the miniature painting she did and the small books that the Brontë children used to write. Mrs Gaskell described these books as “almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass.” One of Charlotte’s characters, William Crimsworth, is also short-sighted and has to wear spectacles, perhaps from all the studying he had to do to become *The Professor!*

Patrick Brontë had been very ill in 1831, and feared that he would ‘fall into a decline.’ He did not; despite his indigestion and his fear of bronchitis, which caused him to encircle his throat in layers of silk to ward off the cold, he outlasted his family, dying only at age 84. However his illness raised the terrible possibility of the Brontë children being orphaned. The four siblings had to contemplate making their own way in the world. For the sisters, career options were limited. They took up various teaching roles, but the prospect of a lifetime as a governess was bleak. In 1841 the sisters began discussing an alternative: starting their own school in Haworth. In order to become more qualified, Charlotte and Emily left for a school in Brussels to learn French and Italian. While in Brussels, in September 1842 Charlotte and Emily received the sad news that William Weightman, Mr Brontë’s curate, had died of cholera at age 28.

Cholera was a feared disease at this time. It killed rapidly on a massive scale, attacking people of all social classes. Its cause was unknown and there was no treatment. Death could be very quick but more often came after several days of abdominal pain, vomiting and profuse diarrhoea. Cholera victims essentially died from dehydration. Nowadays, patients with cholera can be treated with fluid and electrolyte replacement, but many people still die from this in developing countries.



19th century representation of the cholera epidemic spreading via ‘poisonous air’.

Our understanding of infections has evolved dramatically over the centuries. Since ancient times, it was widely believed that epidemics like cholera and ‘The Black Death’ were caused by *miasma*, a noxious form of “bad air” that emanated from rotting organic matter. The word *miasma* in ancient Greek means “pollution”. Opposing this common assumption, William Budd and John Snow argued that cholera was “a living organism... which multiplied in the intestine.” We know now that cholera is spread through the ingestion of water that is contaminated by human faecal waste containing the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*.

In 1854, Snow plotted the locations of several cholera cases in London on a map, and found they were concentrated around a particular water pump on Broad Street. Arguing that water carried the disease, Snow persuaded the authorities to disable the pump, and the cases of cholera decreased. This was to become a key event in the history of public health. Yet most doctors rejected Snow’s analysis of cholera and upheld the *miasma* theory. In 1861 Louis Pasteur

discovered that germs, or microorganisms, caused disease, not 'bad air' particles. It wasn't until 1890, however, when microscopic research had identified the organisms responsible for cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, and diphtheria, that germ theory was finally accepted.

Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* was the first comprehensive investigation of the people's health. By the mid-1840s, reputable numbers could demonstrate that poor drainage, inadequate water supplies, and overcrowded housing were related to increased rates of serious illness and early death.

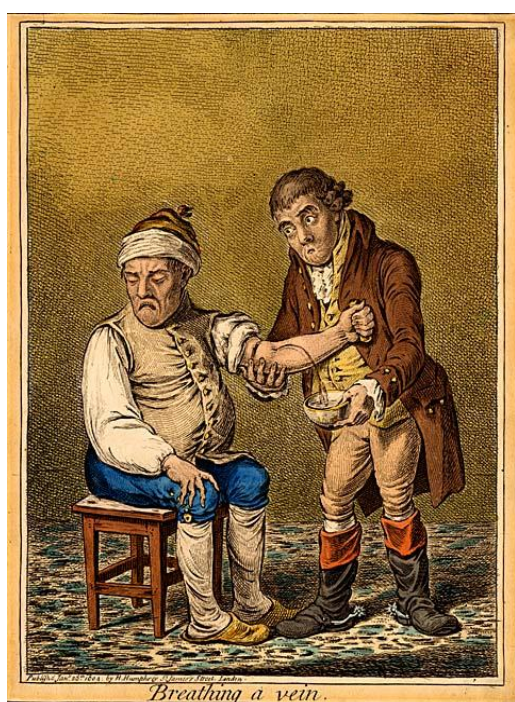
The alarmingly high mortality rate in Haworth prompted Patrick Brontë and the local surgeons to petition the General Board of Health for assistance in procuring a better water supply. In 1850, Benjamin Babbage, who was sent as the inspector in charge of the inquiry, published his now famous report. His observations and conclusions were shocking. Babbage found that the average age at death in Haworth was 25.8 years, comparable to some of the most unhealthy districts in London; 41.6% of the population of Haworth died at less than six years old.

The high death rate was due to poor working conditions and to the appalling sanitary state of the village. In some instances one privy was shared by the inhabitants of twenty-four houses. Babbage describes piles of dung and refuse building up below windows, standing sometimes for months. There were no sewers in the village; drainage was mostly in open channels along the road. The whole village was also affected by the hill-top position of the graveyard with the town below. The flat stones lying horizontally on top of the bodies and the lack of drainage meant contamination of the water supply. Babbage recommended the immediate closure of the graveyard and the installation of "air-tight pipes into the main sewer", as well as all the drastic improvements needed in the village as a whole, including an adequate number of privies, the provision of drainage and sewerage, the building of a reservoir, and the piping of water to every house.

Cholera wasn't just a problem in Haworth. In October 1842, within a month of William Weightman's death, Charlotte's friend Martha Taylor also died of cholera at her school in Brussels. Then, the following month, Aunt Branwell, who had always enjoyed good health, suddenly fell ill. However, it was not an infectious disease, but an

obstruction of her bowel. Aunt Branwell would likely have been given laudanum, a tincture of opium mixed with wine or water, which was widely used as a painkiller and sleeping medicine. In *Commentaries on the History and Cure of Diseases* published 1802, Dr William Heberden recommends bleeding, blistering, cathartic extracts and purgative agents. It is likely such remedies left the patient feeling even worse!

Bleeding was once a popular treatment for a whole host of maladies. Around 400 BC, Hippocrates proposed that the human body was composed of four cardinal fluids called humors: blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. In the normal body, these four fluids were held in perfect balance. All illnesses were thought to be a result of an imbalance between these humors. Methods such as bloodletting, cupping and using leeches were intended to restore the balance. However, bleeding usually did more harm than good, and patients were often bled to death.



Blood letting

Laudanum, which contained opium, was widely used, and it was not until the end of the century that doctors started warning about the dangers of addiction. Given Branwell's fits of fury and drunken stupors, no well brought-up young ladies could come to the house as potential pupils for the sisters' school.

Like his sisters, Branwell too had to find work. Yet despite early promise, a career as published poet or portrait painter was never realised. He worked in (and was dismissed from) a series of jobs. His last post was as a tutor with the Robinson family, where he joined Anne who was already a governess there. Reverend Robinson later dismissed Branwell for "proceedings... bad beyond expression." It came out that Branwell had fallen hopelessly in love with the lady of the house. Branwell spiralled into despair, seeking solace in alcohol and laudanum.

The broken Branwell likely inspired Emily's character Hindley in *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's Arthur Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In fact, convinced that the dissolute character of Huntingdon was too exact a portrait of Branwell, Charlotte was opposed to a reprint of Anne's second novel after its authors' death. Branwell died September 1848 at age 31, his death no doubt hastened by the effects of alcohol. In terms of treatment of alcohol dependence, little was done. These poor souls were either tolerated, as Branwell was, or woke up in the gutter, prison, or mental asylum.



Branwell's last known drawing, about two months before his death.

The drunken Branwell apparently once lit the bed on fire, an event that is said to have inspired the episode in *Jane Eyre* where Bertha Rochester lights fire to her husband's bed. Bertha is portrayed as a frightening figure, the madwoman in the attic. Mr Rochester tells us that his "unchaste" wife liked to drink. Perhaps her insanity is an effect of long-term alcoholism, which can cause cognitive decline. Others have suggested that Bertha's insanity may be due to tertiary syphilis. This venereal disease can in its late stages cause neurodegeneration, resulting in dementia. Treatment for syphilis at that

time might have included calomel, which is actually mercury chloride and highly toxic. Syphilis can now be treated with antibiotics.

Rabies is another disease that can cause what may appear as madness. Rabies is a viral disease spread through the bite of an infected animal such as a dog or rodent. It causes inflammation of the brain resulting in symptoms such as paralysis and delirium. In her novel *Shirley*, Charlotte recalls an incident suggested by an identical event in Emily's life: Emily had offered water to an unknown dog, which had bitten her. Aware of the danger of rabies, she went immediately into the kitchen and cauterised the wound with a red-hot iron, telling no one until it was healed. Luckily, neither Emily nor the character Shirley contracted rabies. Louis Pasteur first developed the rabies vaccine in 1885, which together with immunoglobulin antiserum can now prevent rabies and treat it in the very early stages. However, once the symptoms of rabies develop, it is still almost always fatal.

After Branwell's burial, it is said that Emily went walking in the cold rain with her dog Keeper. Several days later, she became very ill. She refused for the doctor to be called. She died December 19th 1848 at age 30. Charlotte wrote: "her fever is quieted, her restlessness soothed, her deep, hollow cough is hushed forever...". Emily was extremely thin when she died. Her coffin measured only 43cm across.

Soon after, Anne fell ill. Poor Anne had always been asthmatic and delicate. Unlike Emily, Anne cooperated with doctors trying to treat her throughout the final months of her life. They advised removal to a better climate and so on 24th May 1849 Charlotte and Ellen took Anne to the sea-side town of Scarborough. Four days later, Anne died at the age of 29. She was buried in Scarborough, the only one of the Brontë family not in the vault at Haworth. A few days after Anne's funeral, Charlotte wrote: "Papa has now me only – the weakest, puniest, least promising of his six children. Consumption has taken the whole five...".

Tuberculosis went by the names of consumption, phthisis or phthisis pulmonum, asthenia, hectic fever and decline. The symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis include coughing, and often coughing up blood, fatigue, night sweats, loss of appetite, weakness and wasting. (Tuberculosis typically affects the lungs, but can also affect other parts of the body such as bones and joints). In the 19th century, patients survived anywhere from a few months to several years. Laudanum was

used to suppress the cough. Rest and a healthy diet were recommended to help slow the disease. People who could afford it took sea voyages or moved to warm climates. Periods of natural remission sometimes led to false hopes of a cure.

Tuberculosis was then thought to be hereditary as it often struck several members of a family. In 1865, Antoine-Villemin proved that tuberculosis was contagious rather than inherited and in 1882, Robert Koch discovered the microorganism that causes it. About 90% of those infected with tuberculosis will not have symptoms, with only a 10% lifetime chance that the latent infection will progress to overt, active disease. Active disease, if left untreated, kills more than 50% of those infected. Tuberculosis is still prevalent worldwide.

Charlotte was now the last sibling left. She suffered frequent headaches and toothaches. Charlotte kept three small pill boxes in her sewing box, which probably contained medicines for these. Remedies for head ache included “a perpetual blister applied to the head”, “cupping upon the shoulders”, “pills made of aloes and columboroot”, and emetics to induce vomiting (Heberden, 1802). Smelling salts, also



Smelling salt bottles belonging to the Branwell sisters, Maria and Elizabeth.

known as ammonia inhalants or sal volatile, were also recommended for headaches and to revive fainting women. In 1848, Charlotte went to meet her publisher: “I paid for the excitement of the interview by a thundering head-ache and harassing sickness... I took a strong dose of sal volatile – it roused me a little...”. It’s possible that Charlotte’s frequent headaches were a result of her vision problems, though could also have been related to stress.

In 1854, Charlotte became engaged to Arthur Nicholls, Mr Brontë’s curate. They married in Haworth church in June and honeymooned in Ireland. Charlotte’s lavender-coloured hon-
stature. As good nutrition is essential for growth and development, it’s

possible that the deprivations of Cowan Bridge left a lasting legacy in more ways than one.

Charlotte's publisher later commented on the very small waist of the lavender dress: "I have no doubt that tight-lacing shortened Charlotte Brontë's life." Most women of this period would have worn a corset, as it was believed females were fragile and needed assistance to hold them up. Over time, a corset would cause the back muscles to weaken from disuse. The corset would also restrict the rib cage and push the internal abdominal organs up against the diaphragm, reducing the volume of lung expansion and making breathing difficult. No wonder women were prone to fainting! Physicians and feminist dress-reformers highlighted the harmful effects of tight lacing, and by the late 19th century, the corset fell out of favour.

In December 1854, Charlotte was expecting a child. Sadly, Charlotte died the following March. The cause of death entered on Charlotte's death certificate was "Phthisis" (tuberculosis). The same cause of death as recorded for her mother, all four of her sisters, and her brother. According to modern medical opinion, however, Charlotte's death was more likely to have been a result of dehydration and electrolyte imbalance caused by intractable vomiting in the early stages of pregnancy. This condition is called hyperemesis gravidarum.

There were not many ways to interrupt the progress of an illness in the 19th century, and the heroic medicine practiced by some Victorian physicians probably did more harm than good. Many have wondered what the Brontës would have written had they lived longer, but given the health context of the time, it is somewhat miraculous they survived as long as they did. Charlotte, Emily and Anne produced seven complete novels, and through these, their spirit lives on.

References

Alexander, C. & Sellars, J. (1995). *The Art of the Brontës*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Barker, J. (1994). *The Brontës*. London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Brontë *The Collected Novels of the Brontë sisters* (2008). Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

Gardiner, J. (1992). *The world within: the Brontës at Haworth – A life in letters, diaries and writings*. London, England: Collins & Brown.

- Heberden, W.** (1802). *Commentaries of the history and cure of diseases*. (Special ed.). Alabama, United States of America: The Classics of Medicine Library.
- Longmore, M., Wilkinson, I., Turmezei, T. & Cheung, C. K.** (2007). *Oxford handbook of clinical medicine* (7th ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Medscape**, accessed October 2015 from <http://www.medscape.com/>.
- Mitchell, S.** (2009). *Daily life in Victorian England* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Mukherjee, S.** (2011). *The emperor of all maladies – A biography of cancer*. London, England: Fourth Estate.
- O’Neill, J.** (1997). *The world of the Brontës: the lives, times and works of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë*. London, England: Carlton Books Limited.
- Vicary, T.** (2008). *The Brontë story*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Biography

Vasudha is a doctor working in palliative care. She is also a writer and has published articles, short stories and poetry. Vasudha attended PLC Sydney, where her love of writing and literature began. She then completed her medical degree at the University of New South Wales.

Like Emily Brontë, Vasudha loves animals. She has a German shepherd dog named Konan, named for the author-doctor (Arthur Conan Doyle) rather than the barbarian!

THE INFLUENCE OF EMILY BRONTË’S JUVENILIA ON HER NOVEL *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

by **Dr. Ryan Twomey, Macquarie University.**

This talk was based on research undertaken for the monograph: Twomey, Ryan. *'The Child is Father of the Man': Importance of Juvenilia in the Development of the Author*. Netherlands: Hes & De Graaf, 2012

Although the Brontë children grew up in an environment of collegial play, Emily, the second of the three surviving Brontë sisters, was unique in her outlook on life and the production of literature. The three sisters, Charlotte, Anne, and Emily all became novelists and poets. Emily, however, was destined to produce one of the most famous novels in English literature – *Wuthering Heights*. Yet,

importantly, the impetus for the production of her enduring masterpiece was inaugurated in her youth. Emily's juvenilia poetry can be viewed as a vital stepping-stone in her writing career.

Works of juvenilia, generally classified as writing by authors under the age of twenty, can reveal a lot about an author's writing development. A close examination of a writer's juvenilia can clearly illuminate the early experimentation undertaken in the childhood writing, and importantly, the resultant influence on their adult authorship. This is not to say that juvenilia are unimportant in their own right. On the contrary, juvenilia are capable of presenting a microcosm of the world in which the child inhabits. This world is free from the constraints of the adult world, allowing for a freedom in experimentation with theme, form, *and* content, which adult authors are often beholden to.

Emily's introspective personality is well documented in the letters, Diary Papers, and the records of childhood play. It is not surprising then that her juvenilia offered a contemplative insight into her personal world and her life at Haworth. As Caroline Spurgeon has commented:

In Emily Brontë we have an unusual type of mystic. Indeed she is one of the most strange and baffling figures in our literature... She can have read little of philosophy or metaphysics, and probably had never heard of the mystics; she was brought up in a narrow, crude, and harshly material creed; yet her own inner experience, her touch with the secret of life, enabled her to write the remarkable series of poems the peculiar and haunting quality of which has as yet scarcely been recognised. They are strong and free and certain, hampered by no dogma, weighted by no explanation, but containing – in the simplest language – the record of the experience and the vision of a soul.¹

Spurgeon's comment echoes the literary freedom that I attribute to Emily's youthful experimentation with theme, form, and content. This experimentation manifested in numerous youthful poems that are both remarkable in their own right, yet imperative in Emily's apprenticeship as an author. Emily's poetry contains themes of isolation and imprisonment, themes that are later reused and developed in *Wuthering Heights*.

¹ Spurgeon, C. (2009). *Mysticism in English Literature*. Charleston, BiblioLife. p. 81.

One example of this can be found in Emily's youthful poem, 'The night is darkening around me'. In this poem, written in November 1837, when Emily was nineteen, we find the weather providing a frame for the isolation and imprisonment expressed in her dramatic lyricism:

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me,
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow;
The storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me:
I will not, cannot go.

Although a short poem, the reader is made immediately aware of the theme of imprisonment, in this case at the hands of the 'tyrant spell'. This is reinforced by the speaker's inability to leave her location at the end of stanza one. We are also thrust into Emily's personal introspection here, with two of the four lines of the first stanza ending with the personal pronoun 'me'. In the second stanza we find the physical imagery of the tree limbs bending under the weight of snow working as an analogy for the emotional strain placed on the protagonist. In the final stanza, Emily returns to the personal pronouns, this time with the more direct and forceful final line 'I will not, cannot go'. This is suggestive of the speaker's fear of quitting her current situation, even if the opportunity arose. This mesmeric effect captures the protagonist, rendering her unable to free herself, paralysed by an immense power.

The theme of imprisonment can also be witnessed in *Wuthering Heights*. For example the use of Lockwood as the narrator's name is highly suggestive; *Lockwood* is a name originating in Yorkshire meaning 'enclosed wood'. We also witness the difficulty Lockwood

has gaining entry to Thrushcross Grange in the opening few pages of the novel, with prison imagery at every turn. For example, Lockwood narrates:

On that bleak hill top the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb. Being unable to remove the chain, I jumped over, and, running up the flagged causeway bordered with straggling gooseberry bushes, knocked vainly for admittance, till my knuckles tingled, and the dogs howled.

‘Wretched inmates!’ I ejaculated, mentally, ‘you deserve perpetual isolation from your species for your churlish inhospitality. At least, I would not keep my doors barred in the day time – I don’t care – I will get in!’²

Once again we witness Emily’s early interest in the themes of isolation and imprisonment clearly identifiable in her juvenilia. This is witnessed through the chained fence restricting Lockwood’s entry, yet like all good prisons, he finds that admittance is as difficult as escape. The howling dogs, the ‘inmates’ who deserve ‘perpetual isolation’, heighten the confusion and panic one would associate with being trapped, or the frustration of being locked out (or locked in for that matter). Finally, he speaks of ‘barred’ doors during daytime, clearly an unusual situation for a country home according to Lockwood.

It is obvious that many of the poems linking Emily’s juvenilia and *Wuthering Heights* include this mystical element. In her novel Emily wished to equally disrupt the reader’s hold on reality – to achieve poetically and in a novelistic sense the same slippage between lived experience and the imaginative world she herself experienced during her youth. While *Wuthering Heights* has been described as the work of genius, it was Emily’s youthful development of a lyrical style of expression, personal introspection, and the themes of isolation and imprisonment that should be recognised as the starting point of her later success.

² Brontë, E. (2003). *Wuthering Heights*. London, Penguin. p. 9.