SOME CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE BRONTË SISTERS

by Tasarla Harman

A talk given to the ABA on 13th March 2021

This article provides a retrospective account of the infamous Brontë Sisters as they are perceived in 2021. This study poses the question: How has the legend surrounding the Brontë Sisters evolved to create their current image on the global stage? And how might a 21st century spectator interpret their work today? My research discovered the Brontë's image may be viewed as dated or no longer relevant, although the thematic concerns of these sisters remain at the forefront of contemporary popular culture. Further, the structures underpinning the Brontë Sister's success have been refashioned and reimagined to reflect the conditions of the 21st century.

The conclusion was that popular and everyday exposure to the Brontës is minimal. It is interesting to note that throughout my English degree (from 2017 – 2021) I didn't study any of the Brontë's, while I *did* study Shakespeare and Jane Austen to name a few authors from a similarly distant time. The exclusion of the Brontë's from the university syllabus serves as an interesting comment on their positioning in the literary canon. That is to say, they do not occupy a position, according to the UNSW undergraduate syllabus. So, for a literary society perhaps a disappointing introduction to the year, but don't worry, this talk will conclude with how the evolution of the Brontë's image continues to influence us today. In approaching this study from a contemporary perspective, I was conscious to limit my reliance upon academic articles. This sub-methodological practice is perhaps non-academic but that does not mean anti-academic. Instead, this methodology is endeavours to consider how popular media and traditional literature can be brought together to enhance and facilitate a greater understanding of both.

A contemporary study of anything typically begins with typing the subject matter into Google - so that is what I did. The first result was a Wikipedia page for the Brontë Sisters, which is to be expected. Scrolling further down the webpage, google provides a "People Ask" section as a means to filter common questions on the subject. The "People Ask" section is a compilation of most searched phrases that google provides as a shortcut to sorting through the extensive data depositories contained in Google's many pages. The top three questions were "Who is the most famous Brontë sister?" - a bold question, sure to incite a passionate debate.

The drop-down answer cleverly avoids partisanship and instead offers a summary of the members of the Brontë Family. The ranking of this question in the highest position illuminates a growing trend of contemporary approaches to literature. Following a turn towards expanding the literary canon, many people would like the essence of the literary greats, without getting bogged down in the practicalities of actually reading the text. As the scope of the canon drastically increases, it is often easier to acquire an elementary knowledge of many texts than an in-depth study of every significant text. The first finding of this contemporary literary landscape is that the contemporary audience often prefers efficiency over effectiveness. Next, "What age did the Brontës die?", which interestingly states Charlotte as the "most famous Brontë sister" and her age of death. This question attempts to localise the Brontë Sisters in history. As the contemporary audience looks back through history, they are curious to know at what time the Brontë's were writing and the cultural context of this time.

And finally, "What did the Brontës write?" which provides the most popular text of each Brontë sister. The "what" introducing this question may be taken more broadly as a question of genre, again to sketch an introductory picture of who the Brontë's were and what they contributed to literature. This sample of questions from Google is somewhat limited by a required prior knowledge of the Brontë's and therefore, this study does not account for how this contemporary audience was introduced to the Brontë's. We can conclude that people are interested in the fundamentals of who these sisters are, to provide themselves with a working knowledge of literary history, without committing to reading the entirety of their works. This finding remains consistent with wider cultural tendencies towards immediate consumption and general knowledge of many texts, in place of in-depth knowledge of few texts.

Following my research into the Brontës, certain recurring characteristics came to the forefront. I began to get an image of three close-knit sisters, who relied on each other and shared in their family impulse of writing and creating stories. The Brontë's observed the world around them and took these experiences to create their fictive realms. The sisters engaged in symbiotic relationships as they became contributors to the culture they observed. They came from an Irish Father, and Mother from Cornwall, England. Their mother died when they were young, and they were raised by their Mother's sister. Their younger brother sunk into the obscurity of his unhappiness.

They became renowned for their poignant stories that commented on their society as if they were holding up a mirror. It's interesting to observe this structure and the contributing factors of their success from the 21st century where a similar formula created arguably the most famous celebrity family of our time. The Kardashian Sisters are a similarly close-knit trio of sisters sharing in the family business. Although this business has an emphasis on marketing and social

media, the prevalence of *technology* as a medium for content and information creation is comparable to the rise of the novel in the 19th century.

The Kardashians have similarly observed the developing traits of contemporary society such as technology, luxury consumption, and social media and have taken this information to propel their careers. Like the Brontës, the Kardashians have observed the culture that created them and extended these traits to epitomise their time. Parallels have previously been drawn across the Atlantic between the Kardashians and the Windsor's, the British Royal Family by Ian Halperin in his book "Kardashian Dynasty: The Controversial Rise of America's Royal Family". The Kardashians also have a deceased parent, albeit their father, and a mysterious brother whose depression prevented him from participating in the family business. In both instances, the lack of paternal influence and subsequent elevated position of the maternal instinct had a significant impact on the central figures of the family. For the Kardashians, the death of their father created a space in which their mother Kris Jenner took charge and marketed her daughters to create millions. The Brontë's family dynamic is an inversion of this structure.

The death of their mother created an equally large space, but this was never filled. Though Aunt Branwell attempted to fulfill the feminine role in the household at this time, this relationship could not replace the maternal connection with their mother. While Kris Jenner was able to step into the managerial and business side of the family in place of her deceased husband, this shift did not occur in the Brontë family.

This space is seen for example in *Wuthering Heights* and the lack of mother for Heathcliff, Hindley, and Catherine, and the resulting devastating effects. As depicted in *"Motherless Women Writers: The Affect on Plot and Character in the Brontë Sisters' Novels"* by Laci J. Baker[1], and the article *"The Absent Mother in Wuthering Heights"* by Philip K. Wion.[2] Wion notes how the loss of Catherine's mother is only mentioned in passing within a paragraph about Heathcliff's place in the family. This leads him to the conclusion that Heathcliff (like the cuckoo bird he is later compared to) has usurped the position of mother to Catherine and vice versa. This reciprocal relationship renders the pair dependent on each other for the rest of the novel.

[1] Baker, Laci J. (2014) Motherless Women Writers: The Affect on Plot and Character in the Brontë Sisters' Novels, East Tennessee State University Digital Commons, East Tennessee State University

[2] Wion, P. (1985). The Absent Mother in Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights". American Imago, 143-164. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26303631

When Heathcliff runs away, Catherine is forced to find motherly solace from other sources; first Nelly Dean, and later, during her illness, Edgar Linton: “No mother could have nursed an only child more tenderly than Edgar tended her” (129). Catherine is consumed by Heathcliff as she confesses to Nelly, “Nelly, I am Heathcliff’ (88).

The oral imagery surrounding Heathcliff’s return such as drinking tea is paired with drinking in each other’s gazes. As Wion puts it, “[Heathcliff’s] reunion with Catherine is described in terms which derive psychologically from the symbiotic phase of the mother-child development” (368). Therefore, documenting the absence and dependence on the maternal presence, which creates an odd dynamic in which the subject is dependent on something which doesn’t exist so nothing, while at the same time their lives revolve around this negative value.

The residual effects of this illusionary dependence manifest themselves in the actions of both the Brontës and the Kardashians in real life. Both instances result in darker experiences shrouded in mental illness and unhappiness. Therefore, both families exemplify the influence of the mother by demonstrating the impact on quality of life when this figure is present or not present. This comparison between the Brontë and Kardashian sisters is helpful to consider universal familial structures that transcend time as well as the influence of the condition of the 21st century on contemporary famous families.

Both the Kardashians and Brontës are daughters of immigrants - the Kardashian's ancestors originally came from Armenian, and they are third-generation immigrants. The Brontës father came from Ireland. The effects of this movement across the globe are felt differently as a result of the different degrees of separation from their homeland for both families. Despite this, it was the entry of both families into a new culture and society that gave them an outsider’s perspective. Both of their families understood the world through a different cultural lens and this perspective gave both sets of sisters a unique position from which to create their work and comment on this new, strange society. By returning to the inception of both sets of sisters' rise to fame we may see how the facts of their stories differ, while the themes particularly familial structure and history are consistent through the generations.

The Brontë Sisters entered the public realm under the guise of Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell. This trope of the Brontë story continues as they occupy a position on the public stage under a cloak of mystery that still exists today. These pen names were necessary as their adopted names concealed their gender and allowed these women to publish their work in a world where women didn’t write. Likewise, the Kardashians rose to fame in the early 21st century following the tech boom of the 90s and were principal contributors to the increasing construction of the now ubiquitous socialite. Both sets of sisters rose to fame through networks and

connections they already had in the industry. They also both became famous suddenly and with much controversy and gossip. The mystery surrounding the identity of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell and the revelation of Kim Kardashian's leaked sex tape propelled these sisters into infamy. These instances' role undermines the fundamental values of our society and dismantles the threshold between the private and public arena. Yet, they remain famous and influential spoken about constantly by the collective voice of society. In this instance, what remains is significant precisely because what remains undermines. Yet at the same time, the whole of society participates in a kind of cognitive dissonance between what is socially acceptable and what is socially applauded and praised. Regardless of the divide of time, it is interesting to note our treatment of the digressional subject as they subvert our own perceived morals and are subsequently applauded and preserved in infamy. These figures help us reimagine society and expose benefits that are currently being suffocated.

I spent time during this talk comparing the two sets of sisters to demonstrate how both sets of sisters observed their society and took this information to create their own product. We can track this influence through another useful feature with a sub-methodological practice of Google. *Google Trends* is a website that analyses the popularity of top search queries in Google Search across various regions and languages. The website uses graphs to compare the search volume of different queries over time. The structure of the graph runs the time along the X-axis and the Y denotes a value out of 100.100 is always the highest number of searches and you can think of the other numbers as a percentage relative to the highest number of searches out of 100. I set this particular search worldwide, although you can see most searches come from America, England, and Brazil. We can see from this graph that googling the phrase "The Brontës," peaked in 2005. In this time, "*Brontë*" was a 2005 play by British playwright Polly Teale about the lives of the Brontë sisters, their brother Branwell and their father Patrick. In 2006, the mini-series version of Jane Eyre was released. The consistent re-imaging and re-release of Brontë movies, plays, or mini-series are reflected in the graph by spikes, and troughs when nothing is released. There was another peak in 2016, for Charlotte Brontë's Bicentenary and upon the re-release of Wuthering Heights in 2018. Understandably, these trends will occur in the search patterns as new versions are released, there is more advertising, more discussion, and more googling. I then compared the data with the Kardashian Sisters. We can see that from 2006 the Kardashians vastly and consistently outnumber searches for the Brontës. This can be attributed to globalisation, increasing population, and increased avenues through which the Kardashians may market and distribute their brand, not to mention the Kardashian contemporary role.

Google trends give a worldwide insight into the search trends and interest in particular topics. But I wanted to illuminate these data trends on a microcosmic

level and provide a window into a small data set that illuminates the contemporary attitudes towards literature and reading. I produced a survey of eleven questions and asked 23 of my friends to participate in the survey. Firstly, the limits of the survey. As you will see the majority of the participants were female, because I have mostly female friends, and the majority of them attend university, also like me. I only asked friends who are under 30 years old to ensure the reading habits were representative of the gen-z/millennial base. The first question was "How many books did you read in 2020?" As you can see, 65% of my 23 participants read less than 9 books in the year. This is interesting because they are predominantly university educated and literate, so it is not from a lack of ability that they choose not to read. Based on the second question, we can see that the main reason for not reading is a lack of time, followed by being more interested in other hobbies. It is important to remember this is a very small data sample and can't be viewed as statistically significant, but it is useful to use on an individual level. Of the select few that did read, these books were written in the 21st century. So, we can learn that contemporary readers don't read and if they do, they read books from the 21st century. This is the conclusion of the contemporary reading habits of young people.

Now, back to our "People ask question," to the fourth question, which I find the most interesting and is the first "Why?" question of the series. "Why are the Brontë sisters important?" After asking the who, what and how questions, what remains is "Why?". Why are they important? And why should the 21st-century searcher care? Even the fact that this question is asked, suggests people don't know. So, what answer does google provide? "Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë are sisters of great literary skill. All three are still published authors over 100 years after their deaths. The novels they produced explore the intricacy of human nature and the effect one person can have on others." For me, the first two sentences in this answer, provided by the blog.bookstellyouwhy.com, capitalise on the ambiguous tendency of the chicken and the egg scenario. They are important because they have a great skill and the great skill is important because it's a great skill. The reciprocal nature of the relationship between the definitions of important and great could continue forever with little to no content. This continues, they are published 100 years after their death because they're important. Or are they important because they are published? Finally, we reach an insight, "the intricacy of human nature" and "the effect one person can have on others." I think this assertion speaks not only to the impact of the Brontës but the propelling factor of literary studies.

The ability of a text to exemplify and dissect human relationships and their interactions with the world. The Brontës, facilitate the exploration and reflection upon this state of being, quite specifically, the features of their Victorian ontology. The textual form has the unique ability to reveal while telling. What I

mean by this is the textual form is received at the pace of the reader and is retold from the omnipresent narrator voice as it is constructed by the author. The current mode of entertainment and story sharing as constructed by the Kardashians omits the third party of the author. Therefore, the “omnipresent narrator” becomes the individual viewer or society’s collective consciousness as people gossip and headlines decide. I believe it is this reason that has led to the continual revival reconfiguration of the Brontë story. The Brontës format facilitates reconfiguration and reformatting as a result of the interpretations and richness of the text that may be continually reimagined. Further, they are untarnished by the restrictions of the media machine. Although, they don’t receive the positive exposure of this media machine either and they remain bound by their ossification in history.

There is a plethora of young-adult and youth-fiction novels circulating that used Brontë's stories as inspiration. Wuthering Heights was originally published in 1847 and then close to 200 years later it is used as the protagonist's favourite book in the Twilight series. Bella Swan’s copy is said to be worn out because she has read it many times and lays flat to mark her page. The Twilight saga constantly mentions Wuthering Heights. During Eclipse after kissing Jacob, Bella mentions how she is just like Cathy, who is mean and selfish, only she has better options. Edward says that he sympathizes with Heathcliff in more ways than he thought he could after rereading the novel. Characters in the series have similarities to those in Wuthering Heights, including Bella (Cathy), Edward (Heathcliff), and Jacob (Edgar). Edward can't figure out why Bella loves the book so much. Edward quotes WH and tells Bella, "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!". The irony of this quotation is that Edward is a vampire, the undead and he doesn’t have a life or soul. However, the reader's knowledge of the dynamic of Catherine and Heathcliff in comparison to Bella and Edward here can enhance both sets of relationships being explored. In this way, the Bronte’s expressed perennial themes and engaged with love triangles in a way that is still relevant today.

In response to why the Bronte legacy has endured into the 21st-century novelist Tracy Chevalier, says of the Bronte’s importance, “I think a lot of it is that we’re fascinated by the idea that these three women living in a cold, cramped house in Yorkshire wrote these extraordinary novels about the most intense human experiences.” Author and playwright Samantha Ellis says, “There’s something very appealing about the idea that they pushed back against the limits of their world. There are lots of neater, better-planned books, but the Brontë novels work because they’re open-ended. We don’t know what Anne, Emily, and Charlotte really wanted us to think and that means we take away something new each time.”

[3]And this end remains open to be discussed and learned from my 21st-century audiences. Even as the original texts notice a reduction in their audience the thematic concerns of the Bronte's prove universal as they remain across and despite ever-evolving mediums. Amber Pouliot Teaching fellow, British Studies at Harlaxton College attributes the open-ended nature of the Bronte's work to their "air of mystery that envelops the author and her work. Who was Emily Brontë? What does her famous novel, Wuthering Heights, mean? And how could a reclusive curate's daughter, living on the edge of the Yorkshire moors, have written this mysterious tale of passion and revenge?"[4] We have considered how the 21st-century audience engages with the Bronte's and wider literary trends. We have revealed an expanding canon and subsequent reduction in in-depth, focussed studies. We have also seen a permeation of the spectre of the Bronte's as their writing on love and loss continues to teach and inspire contemporary audiences through various mediums. Now, looking to the future, we know the medium may change, but the universal message cultivated by the Bronte's will inevitably endure.

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THE BRONTËS AND FOOD

By Michelle Cavanagh

A talk given to the ABA on 11th September

We all have to eat and some of us certainly enjoy the pastime more than others. But, of course, there is more to eating than just sitting down and putting food into our mouths. Inspired by a Yorkshire grandmother who made the best Yorkshire Pudding imaginable I decided to explore the Brontës and their relationship to food. So I wonder, 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 came hereby leaving left-over meat to make further dishes during the week. Yorkshire Pudding just like Grandma used to make

THE WHOLE
DUTY of a WOMAN:
Or, an infallible
GUIDE to the FAIR SEX.
CONTAINING,
Rules, Directions, and Observations, for their Conduct and Behaviour through all Ages and Circumstances of Life,
As
VIRGINS, WIVES, or WIDOWS.
WITH
DIRECTIONS, how to obtain all USEful and Fashionable
ACCOMPLISHMENTS suitable to the SEX. To which are compiled all Forms of Love Letters, particularly Rules and Receipts in every Kind of COOKERY.
1. Making all Sorts of Soups and Sauces.
2. Dressing Fish, Fish, and Fowl; also all Manner of Sauces proper to each Sort; With or Without Wine, as to be used for the Table; Likewise all other Kind of Cookery.
3. Making above 40 different Sorts of Puddings.
4. The whole Art of Pastry in making Pies, Tarts, and Paste.
5. Receipts for all Manner of Pickling, Collaring, &c.
6. For Preserving, making Cordials, Jellies, and all Manner of Confectionary.
7. Rules and Directions for Setting and Dressing, Supper, and Grand Entertainments.
To which is added,
BILLS of FARE for every Month in the Year, curiously engraven on Copper Plates, with the Forms of Tables and Dishes, and the Shape of Pies, Tarts, and Paste. With Directions for Marketing.
ALSO
Several Receipts for making all the choicest Cordials for the Cholic, Stoning Raisins, &c. Making all Sorts of Anglo Wine, Cyder, Mead, Metheglin, Vinegar, Pickles, Catchup, &c. With some few Perfumes, Pomatums, Cosmetics and other Ornaments.
LONDON: Printed for T. Read, at Aristotle's Head, Bible and Sun, Aldermary Church-Yard.

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***. *"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."*

Well, who would have believed it, in the year 1737 a book was written outlining how a woman should behave and which includes *The Duty of a Virgin, a Wife and a Widow* as well as cookery recipes, modesty, religion and '*a wife's behaviour to a drunkard*'?

Ten years later, following publication in ***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 mother of the modern dinner party - Yorkshire Puddings became the nation's favourite dish as Hannah Glasse re-invented Dripping Pudding by calling it Yorkshire Pudding.

"It is an exceedingly good Pudding, the Gravy of the Meat eats well with it," she wrote. *"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 Brontë Kitchen - Recipes from the home of the Brontës.*** The final instructions telling the reader to *"serve it straight away with gravy, before the meat*".

So my grandma was carrying on a tradition which was no doubt part of the Brontë household. Although by all accounts Tabitha Aykroyd – known as Tabby – who went to work for the Brontës in 1824 was not the greatest cook. 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 in the 19th century is somewhat different to the way we cook food today.While Haworth was a poverty-stricken little town in the Brontë days with no running water in the houses 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 mothers final illness the Greenwoods of Bridge House occasionally had the children over for tea. This suggests that the Brontë children would have been taught the good manners and etiquette which were 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 Brontës failed efforts to find a new wife after his wife Maria's death, and with the responsibility of his six children to educate, initially Maria and Elizabeth were sent 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 – advertised for Clergymen's daughters, it must have seemed the ideal solution for hm. In Charlotte Brontë's novel ***Jane Eyre*** published in 1847 the school *Lowood* is based on her experiences at Cowan Bridge.

The Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge; the classroom and dormitory were in a converted mill which stood at right angles to this building which has since been demolished.

While it seems that no records remain as to what sort of food was served at Crofton Hall, 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 *"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"*. 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 is 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 which the under-nourished Brontë children had to take and which must have further exacerbated their poor health. Then 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 school's 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. So it's not surprising that Patrick Brontë took his four daughters out of the school at that time. 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.

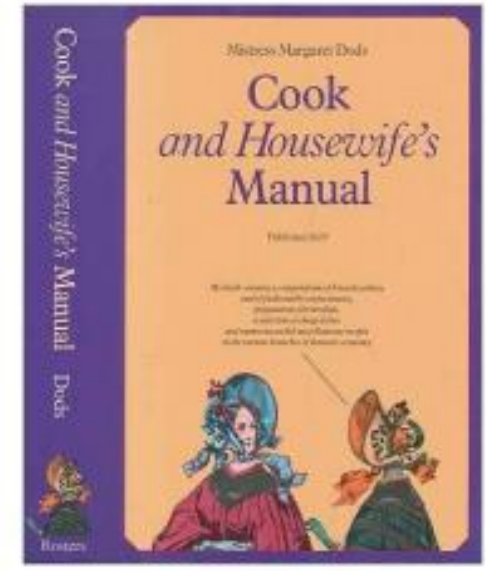
It was a year earlier that Tabitha Akroyd (Tabby) had been hired as a cook/ housekeeper for the Parsonage. The small kitchen was Tabby's domain where, following the deaths of the two eldest Brontë children, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne would gather; lured by the smell of vegetables - such as potatoes and turnips – baking, and the sweet smell 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 following the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth. And what better way to help ease the sadness which must have been felt by the whole household than helping in the kitchen with some cookery lessons?

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."*

The sort of cooking which 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 no doubt 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 to note 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, who by that stage were 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 worst, one could simply refuse to eat."* 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 Mistress 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."

It 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, believe me, it's a mighty tome! While it's hard to say how much of the advice offered in ***Modern Domestic Medicine*** was followed by the Brontë household I imagine that, 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."

He then goes on to say that:

"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."

From this you can begin to 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 5 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 the novel 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"*, something which Charlotte herself no doubt did in the kitchen at Haworth before enjoying Christmas dinner around the dining room table.

The Dining Room table, Brontë Parsonage, Haworth

Unlike those 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. But rather than mince pies the Brontës were more likely to make a Yorkshire Spice Cake – usually served with a slice of cheese – which Charlotte took to the homes of the father's parishioners. In *Wuthering Heights* we learn that the grumpy servant Joseph left *"his cake and cheese for the fairies"*.

Without food of course 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, amount of food and the ways in which it's presented. In the paper *The Dialects of Food: Negotiating Social Bodies and Sexual Desire in Jane Eyre* the writer concludes by saying 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."*

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 vegetables, 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."* Nevertheless that statement differs from what we learn about meals at the Parsonage as related in Juliet Barker's *The Brontës.*

During her time working as a governess Charlotte would have been very familiar with the structured social habits expected of such a position with regards 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"*.

While it took place fourteen 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 24th, 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."

It has been stated 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 Brontë 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; she states 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. To quote: *"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."*

Ellen Nussey in her *Reminiscences* states 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.

Drawing of Roe Head School by Anne Brontë (c 1835 - 1837)

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 preoccupied 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 ascertains 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."*

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.

"Even more importantly," Frank asks, *"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 contracted tuberculosis from Branwell who died three months prior to his sister, she hardly ate anything at all. Finally dying on 19th December 1848, 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. I've not been able to ascertain too

much about Branwell's eating habits; suffice to say 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 can't help wondering what part of the character of the Reverend Michael Millward in the novel 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." A great success on publication, less than a year later its author Anne Brontë was dead.

A Sketch of Woods Lodgings where Anne died which is now the site of the Grand Hotel

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 the seaside town 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 their father's 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."*

While life expectancy in Haworth, during the Brontës' times, was around 30 years of age, death is death no matter at what age it occurs. So, 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 27th 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."*

Since the subject of this talk is 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 of course 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 Michael 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. The notes which Patrick Brontë wrote on the fly-leaf of his 1826 copy of Grahams *Modern Domestic Medicine* reveal the high esteem he held of the book which he followed during his life and the lives of his family. I'll finish with a quote from the book.

"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."

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ANIMALS AND THE BRONTËS: LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS

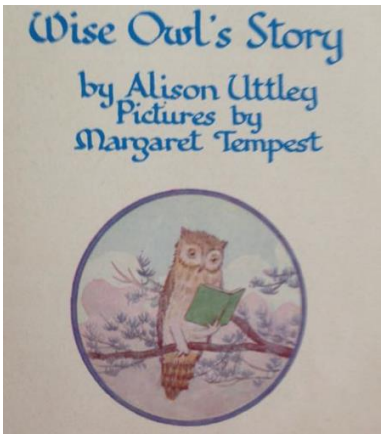
by Graham Harman

A talk given on ZOOM (Brontë Matters)

This talk explores *Agnes Grey* by looking at animals in the novel, and in the works of the Brontës generally. It's sub-titled **lions and tigers and bears**, because we find each of those animals across multiple Brontë novels. When I began my research I was expecting the animals of the Yorkshire moors.

So where are all the hedgehogs, squirrels, owls and otters?

Mr. Linton and his daughter would frequently walk out among the reapers; at the carrying of the last sheaves they stayed till dusk.



When Mr Linton and his daughter in *Wuthering Heights* walk out among the reapers, they report seeing zero animals. But I grew up on a English wheat farm, and I can tell you for a fact that that countryside is jam-packed with English animals, and when the blades are hitting the cornstalks, the stubble absolutely swarms with voles and with harvest mice and with field mice and with stoats. It's just, basic.

But not one of these ubiquitous animals, or for that matter hedgehogs or squirrels or otters or owls, is mentioned anywhere in Wuthering Heights, anywhere in Agnes Grey, or anywhere in the other five novels or in any of the poems.

So my initial reaction to the question of animals and the Brontës is, that I would be far better off with Alison Uttley's *Little Grey Rabbit* books or, for that matter, with *The Wind in the Willows*.

So let's deal with what we have. **There's a tiger in every Brontë novel.** And there are leopards and lynxes and sphynxes. And mammoths and scorpions and gazelles and cockroaches and elephants and ostriches. And an extraordinary

amount of ***camels*** – there are camels in five of the seven Brontë novels, including three wandering across the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, and a camel tableau in Mr Rochester's loungeroom.






I have two general points to make about the Brontës in this session, or at least, two personal views about them to express and the first is that, as least as far as the animals go, the Brontës are dislocated and disoriented in a spatial sense. These are foreign and exotic animals.

How many different animals do you think are mentioned in the works of the Brontës? And including repeats, how many references are there to animals altogether?

Here's a picture of Emily Brontë winding up a fist at her famous bull-mastiff, Keeper. Where I'm going with this presentation is, I'm going to say something about my view of how people in general view animals, then my view about how the Brontës as a whole viewed animals and then thirdly my view about how the portrayal of animals by Anne Brontë, particularly in *Agnes Grey*, differs from the portrayal by Emily and by Charlotte.

The biographer Elizabeth Gaskell tells the story of how a cross-bred bull mastiff of very uncertain temper was presented to the Brontë parsonage, and terrorised everyone, until the diminutive Emily beat it up and established herself as Top Dog.

In the West, there has been a stark shift, in attitudes to animals, over the last 200 years.

In what year, did the following three things happen:

- Charlotte (as a teacher) and Emily (as a student) went to Roe Head
- Branwell applied to the Royal Academy
- Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* – the work in which he argues that the Earth goes round the Sun – was removed from the Vatican's list of banned books.

Great work if you can get the exact year, but the immediate point is that they all happened at the same time. Like – of all the incredible unbelievable bad luck. What are the chances. The education system and the textbook had been ***unchanged*** for 2,000 years – first Aristotle, with a view that the Earth was at the centre of things, and that the Moon divided the material sublunary animal world from the spiritual world of the human heavenly aether; and then, the Christianisation of Aristotle by St Aquinas around 1250. The Sun continued to orbit the Earth.

And then on her **very first day on the job** as a teacher, the new Galileo textbook is finally made available, and Charlotte's world is turned on its head. And spare a thought for poor old Branwell, because as soon as he mailed off his drawings of the world, that world, transformed. No wonder he turned to drink and to drugs.

Here's the standard, authoritative characterisation of the world where the Moon was all-important. The great man himself, Dante Alighieri. In the centre of the picture is the mountain of Purgatory, which is tall enough to ascend to the sphere of the Moon, here and to get people, but not animals, over the line to having a redeemable Soul.

That's why, in Agnes Grey, Anne Brontë uses the term 'lower creation' to refer to animals. Agnes emphasises the 'creation' part of that, and claims that animals ***are*** morally valuable and Mr Robson emphasises the 'lower' part of that and believes that animals are ***not***, morally valuable. Anne Brontë portrays ***both*** sides of that debate.

The Sweep of History: Do animals have moral worth?

World view	Representative	Machines	Animals	Humans	Robots
Classical / Aristotelian	Aristotle	✗	✗	✓	✗
Aristotelean / Christian	Aquinas	✗	✗	✓	✗
Christian / Romantic	Coleridge	✗	✓	✓	✗
Romantic / Transcendental	Emerson; Thoreau	✗	✓	✓	✗
Humanism	Erasmus	✗	✗	✓	✗
Romantic / Modern	Shelley; Walt Whitman	✗	✓	✓	✓
Modernism	James Joyce	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multiculturalism	Sony; Honda	✓	✓	✓	✓

Why did it seem OK to Mrs Gaskell, at the time, that Emily beat up a dog? and why does that now horrify present day bloggers? And why and how is Agnes Grey in many ways a dramatised debate between progressives and conservatives, about the treatment of animals in particular? and about life and world views, in general?

The Brontës were plugged into current affairs, and Blackwood Magazines, and newspapers and to cities like Edinburgh and London and Brussells and so on; but the latest news about Galileo and the Vatican had not yet made it as far as rural Wellwood, where the Bloomfields lived, in Agnes Grey.

So, in the diagram, first up, for 2,000 years, it's got a green box around it, Aristotle and Aquinas were central, and authoritative. And on that basis, in the mind of Mrs Bloomfield, animals are soulless brutes and their welfare, if welfare for material automata is even a meaningful concept, counts for nothing against the amusement of a human child. When I announce that I'm going to tell you about "Animals in the works of the Brontës", you don't expect me to include all the ***people*** in the novels, this isn't about people as primates. I'm implicitly making medieval assumptions about what "animals", are. The columns in my diagram are clear for the first two rows, and the colours are clear. Good green ticks for aethereal humans for whom Jesus laid down his life, and bad red crosses for sublunary brutes for whom Jesus did not, lay down his life.

I mentioned earlier that I was going to say two things about my personal response to the Brontës' treatment of animals; and recall that the first was that the Brontës leave me feeling dislocated and disoriented in ***physical*** space. Their animals have a tendency to the foreign and to the exotic and they don't give me ***any*** hedgehogs or owls or squirrels. Boo. Bad Brontës. And my second point now is that the Brontës leave me feeling dislocated and disoriented in ***moral*** space.

Whatever you think of the medieval world, at least it was stable and clear. No-one was in any doubt, that the Sun was going to rise in the morning. The Brontës, and others, had by 1845, been plucking recklessly at the loose threads of the Aristotle-Aquinas fabric for some time though. They had started to doubt, that the Sun ***was*** going to rise in the morning and they started to suspect, that it was their earth that was moving, every morning. And that's disorienting, and we move from moral clarity, pre-Brontës, to moral muddles, post-Brontës.

The Romantics like Coleridge were channelling their inner Francis of Assisi, in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner – "He liveth best who loveth best, all creatures great and small; for the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all". That makes animals valuable, as well as humans. Agnes Grey has the temerity to quote the Bible at Mrs Bloomfield, in support of that view.

Just for reference, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed in 1824 when Anne Bronte was 4, and it became the RSPCA in 1840 when she was 20.

Things also get messier with the Humanists, and I've had to start colouring my crosses an ambiguous grey or even a jarring green. On the face of it, you might think that Humanists were locked in behind Aristotle and Dante, in privileging humans over animals. HUMANism, right? The label's on the tin. But I don't think that that was the humanists' main point. It's like "black lives matter" – their main point is not that white lives ***don't*** matter. Their eventual point is that all lives matter, and they are starting with black lives because that needs the most work, first. So Humanism actually opens up a path for animals to also be morally valuable and, for that matter, robots and trees and stars and whatever.

As Modernism rapidly faded from the bright scientific optimism of the mid-19th Century to the horrors and the alienation of the first half of the 20th Century, and as attempts were made to make absolutely everything equally valuable, with ticks ***in*** every column and a blurring of the lines ***between*** the columns, you get into murky questions of identity politics, and the green ticks fade to grey.

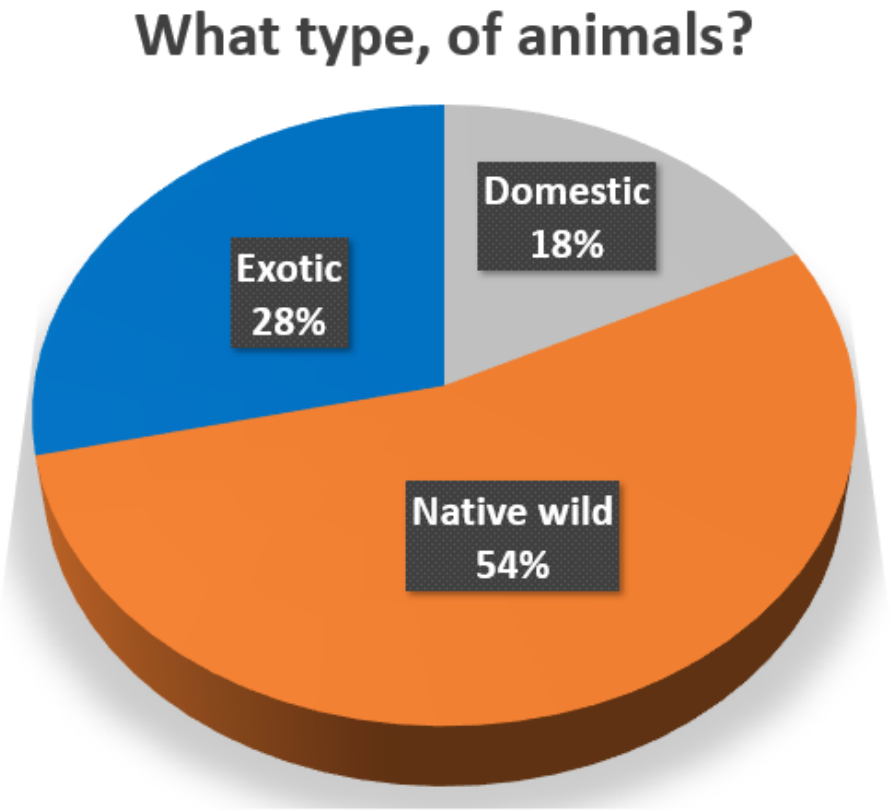
In the immortal words of Mr and Mrs Incredible, in the movies: **"If everyone is special, then no-one is special".**

Here's a word cloud of all the animal words in the seven novels, and in the poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. The size of the word corresponds to the frequency of appearance – and animals that only appear a single time, like spanieless and ladyclock and dunnock and centipede and leech, are not displayed. You can see some of the exotics in there; but far and away the most common animals are going to be horses and dogs, and words like pony and pointer also make a really good showing in their own right. After that, it's birds, sheep, cows, cats and doves. And then beyond that in order of frequency, you hit the lions and tigers and wolves. And there's a lot of bees and fish and larks and pigeons and mice.

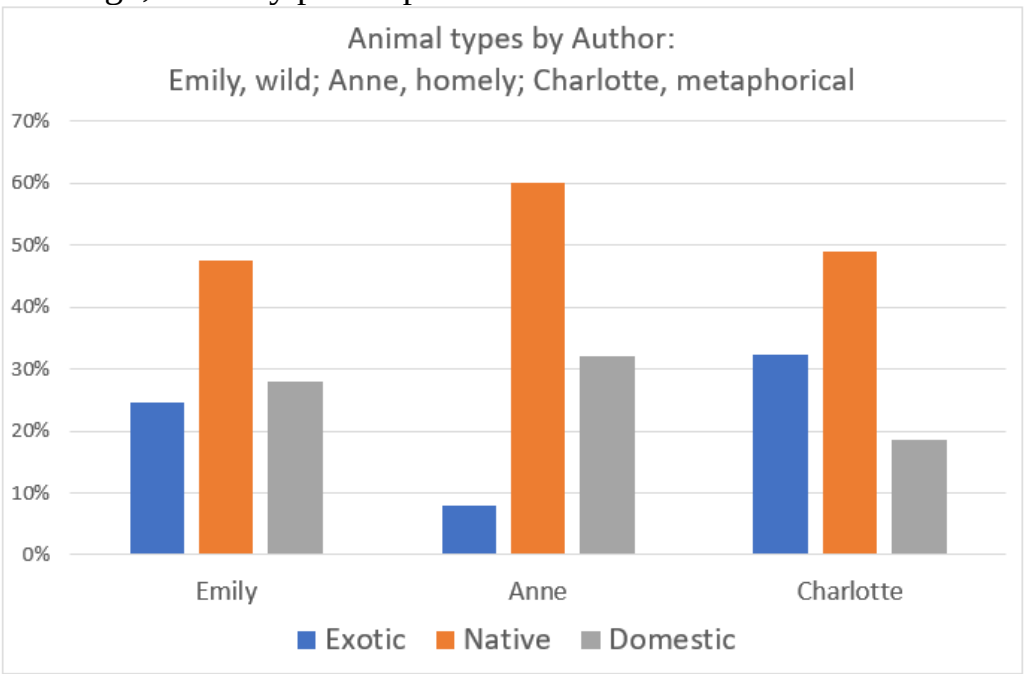
What animal appears in ***every*** Brontë novel ***and*** the poems, but ***none*** of the Jane Austen novels? This is a tricky one.

Here are the animals again. This is like multiple choice, in the sense that the answer is a very common animal and it's staring you in the face. I noted previously that every Brontë novel has at least one tiger in it, which is a fascinating snippet of Brontë trivia which I could not have told you before I researched this talk, and tigers are elusive in Jane Austen. But that's not the answer. So go do your head in on that.

Still on the subject of animals and the Brontës overall, here's a pie chart of what ***types*** of animal make an appearance. Unlike the word cloud, this chart is ***unweighted*** by frequency.



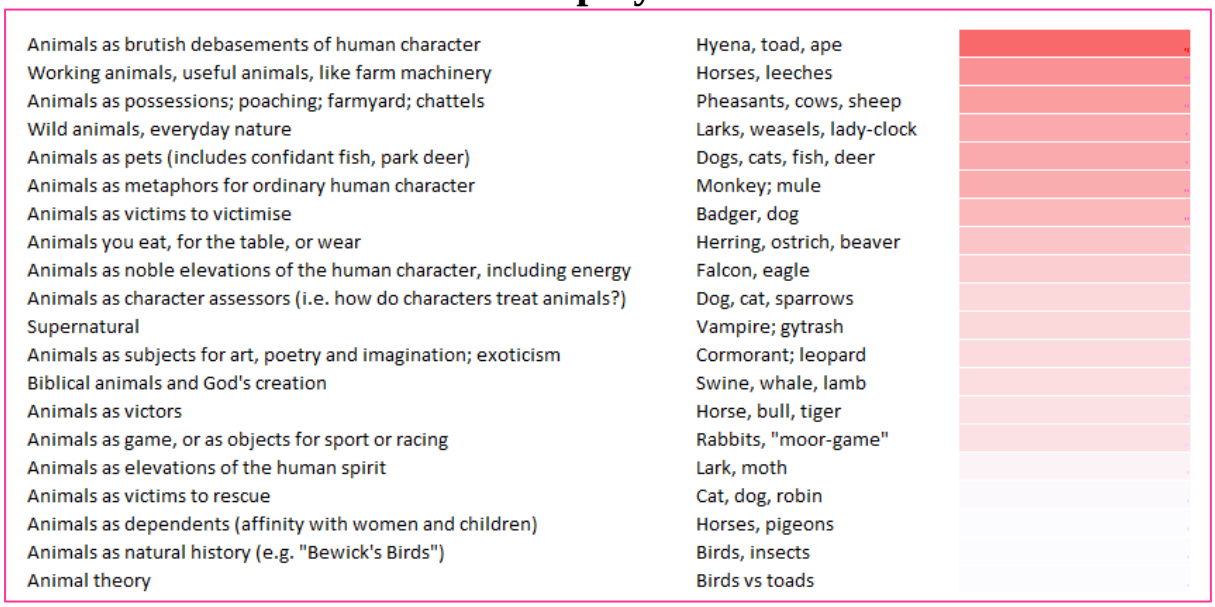
This perspective suggests that I may have been a little harsh, previously, in suggesting that Little Grey Rabbit and the Wind in the Willows do a better job regarding native wild animals than the Brontë novels do. That's still a lot of exotics though, and they pack a punch.



When we ***compare*** the sisters, it's actually Anne who has the highest proportion of native wild animals and also, the highest proportion of domestic and farm animals. For reasons that we'll see shortly, it's Charlotte that provides most of the exotics – all those mammoths and gazelles and hyenas and leopards and elephants and cicatrixes that we met previously – that's all Charlotte.

This next slide is a heat-map, showing how the Brontës, overall, treated animals. Regardless of their domesticity or exoticism, what ***role*** do the animals play? Far and away most common rôle is the use of animals as a demeaning term for people, whether that's Heathcliff being a wolf or Cathy being a vixen or Isabella being a centipede of Linton being a puling chicken or Bertha Mason being a hyena, or whatever.

What roles do animals play in the Brontë novels?



Then there's working animals on the farms and estates, and animals as chattels and property, and animals you can trade or poach and so on. Wild animals only come fourth, and even that is only because the Brontës keep going on about lions and tigers and bears. There's quite a dearth of actual real live English moorland animals in the novels, as I mentioned before.

And then there's animals that reveal the disposition of Brontë characters, based on the way they treat the animals, and animals you eat, like herrings and turkey, and animals you wear like ostriches and beavers and there's quite a few supernatural animals and there's Biblical animals and so on.

My personal view is that Anne Brontë wrote *Agnes Grey* the wrong way round. She feels that governesses are not being treated properly, which I agree with, and she feels that animals are not being treated properly, which I also agree with, but she responds by forming an affinity and an alliance between governesses and animals, muddying the boundaries between them, and staging a united uprising by that unholy coalition of the downtrodden.

If it had been me, just saying, I would have done the ***opposite*** – I would have ***sharpened*** the boundaries between humans and animals, not blurred them, all the more so because yes, the literal truth is, that those boundaries are an arbitrary construct. I would have showcased ***humanity***, I would have stood up to Mrs Bloomfield and ***I*** would have said, listen lady, governesses are human like you, and you would not treat even a soulless dog, like this.

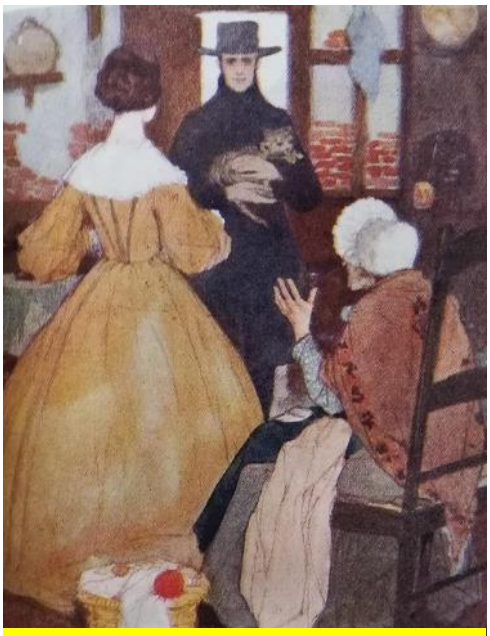
The "**humane treatment of animals**" – this is still just my personal view – is a self-defeating oxymoron because it undercuts the very definition of human on which it relied, in the first place.

"If everyone is special, then no-one is". And if animal species are part of the human species, well you no longer ***have*** a human species.

Now we can turn to the last of my three points which is, what was ***idiosyncratic*** about how the ***individual*** Brontës thought about animals.

I've tried to summarise each sister in one word, in the interests of time, and for Emily, as we saw in a previous slide, it's "wild". *Wuthering Heights* commences with a feisty horse breasting the gate of the Heights, and forcing even Heathcliff to yield; and in the final ***sentence*** of the novel it's the moths that prevail above the graves.

You can see that there are lots of farm animals, working animals, animals as possessions, and animal terminology as degrading descriptors of people. And there's a fair showing of supernatural animals, but nothing much in the way of literary animals or art or poetry, or animal theory.



Anne: "Homely"

"Mr Weston with the identical cat in his arms"

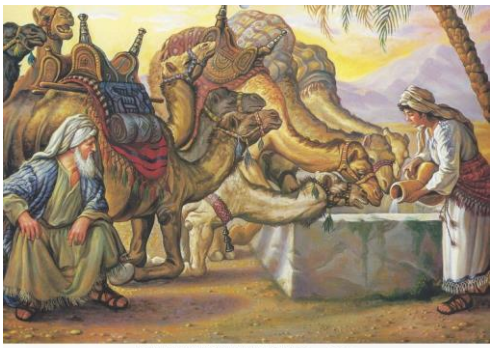
Anne I have characterised as ***homely*** in her treatment of animals – and here's a picture of the nice Mr Weston having successfully rescued Nancy Brown's cat from the cat-murdering gamekeepers. Lots more ***pets*** than Emily or Charlotte.

There's actually much ***less*** of a tendency to think of people in animal terms, either in a degrading sense or in an ennobling sense. ***Very little*** in the way of artistic and literary animals, supernatural animals, even Biblical animals.

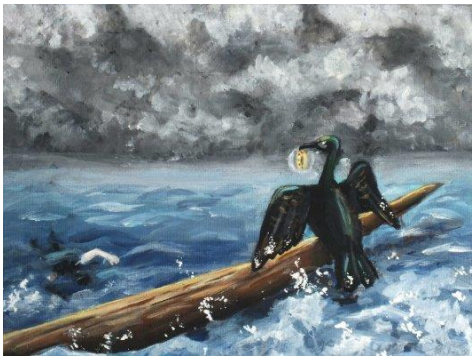
A noticeably ***greater*** tendency than either of her sisters to depict character via the manner in which various people treat, animals. Also, a much greater willingness to explore animal theory.

And here's a standout – it's Anne that has the real "victim" mentality, the animal rights manifesto. Overwhelmingly, she portrays animals as victims, and ***not*** as victors. That's a stark contrast both to Emily and to Charlotte, where you're as likely as not to get trampled by a horse or gored by a bull or savaged by a dog or lectured by a querulous cat or spitted on the horns of a mad cow.

Which brings us to Charlotte – rich, spirited, powerful, exotic, metaphorical animals. Vict***ors*** as well as vict***ims***. Biblical animals like the camels from Genesis. Animals in art, like the famous *Jane Eyre* painting of a cormorant. Gothic and supernatural and mythical animals.



REBEKAH WATERS ELIEZER'S CAMELS—GENESIS 24:1-27.



And animals as aspects of humans – here's a picture of Bertha Mason channelling, in Charlotte Brontë's famous analogy, her inner hyena.

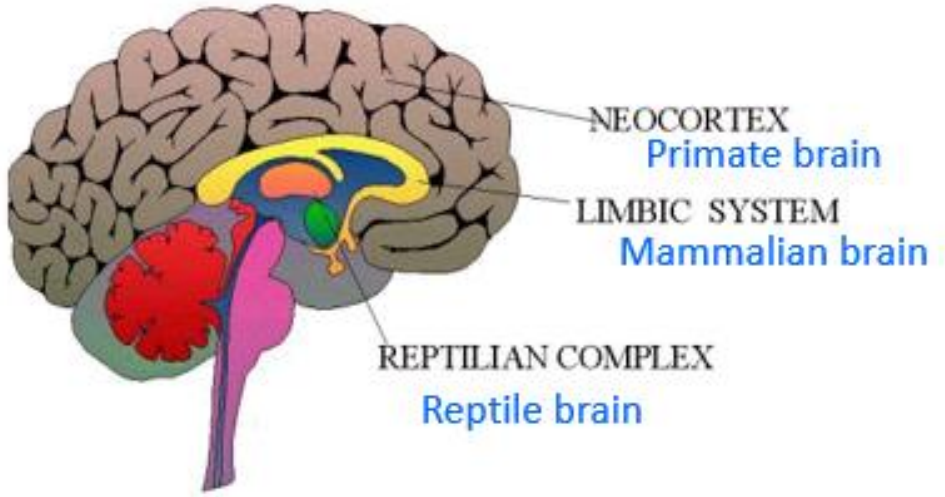
This is a thoroughly researched Brontë-matters zoom event by the way, and I did read up on the proclivities of female hyenas. And I regret doing that. Suffice to say that it is stomach-churning stuff.

This metaphorical and Biblical and mythological bias of Charlotte is what I was referring to earlier, when I said that her animals pack a punch.

The Brontës pivot us away from the well-defined medieval world that I described earlier, and propel us into a fragmented and contested modern world. The binding theme here is that, in my opinion, things were much better ***organised*** under Aristotle and Aquinas, and I completely fail to see what the problem was, with the Sun orbiting the Earth. First up, there's a long-running debate about what it is, to be human, as opposed to animal.

Bear in mind that as humans evolved, we started out reptilian, and then became mammalian, and finally became primate. But as shown on the right there, each stage was plastered over the top of the previous stage, it didn't integrate and upgrade the previous stage. Our skulls now contain a reptilian brain, or amygdala,

like the head of a golf club; which is encased in a mammalian brain, or limbic system, like a football sock on the golf club; and a primate brain, or neo-cortex, like a bicycle helmet over the football sock.



A bunch of thinkers from Socrates and Plato through to modern psychologists like Turiel and Kohlberg believe that human reason should govern the passions; and another bunch of thinkers including William Blake and David Hume believe that imagination and the passions do and should govern reason.

Charlotte Brontë, in this animal quote from *The Professor*, has a view on this important question. "There are impulses we can control; but there are others which control us, because they attain us with a tiger-leap".

Lions and tigers and bears. Not only is there a tiger in every Brontë novel, there's a tiger in every human head. And that's why the Age of Reason, has been such an epic fail. (Sorry. That was just a personal editorial comment there).

There are divisions between animals and humans, but they are blurring, in the mid-1800s

"Birds have feelings, and think"; (a tenet of PETA and the animal rights movement); and
"When Master Bloomfield's amusements consist in injuring sentient creatures,"
I answered, "I think it my duty to interfere."

· Blurring the lines between ***humans and animals***, opens up divisions ***within the category of humans***.

Blurring the lines between humans and animals, also opens up divisions within the category of humans. For example, still from *Agnes Grey*:

As an animal, Matilda was all ***right***, full of life, vigour, and activity; as an intelligent being, she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless and irrational.

And divisions *within the category of animals*.

Divisions within the category of animals are also opening up and getting muddled, both for Mrs Bloomfield AND for Agnes Grey:

A little girl loves her bird — Why? Because it lives and feels; because it is helpless and harmless? A toad, likewise, lives and feels, and is equally helpless and harmless; but though she would not hurt a toad, she cannot love it like the bird.

So – those are some examples of what I referred to as "Animal Theory", in my earlier pink heat-maps. There's just one final animal quiz question that the Agnes Grey novel poses, and I don't feel I can close without acknowledging this momentous dilemma. And the question is … "Is it acceptable to kiss your cat?"

"I kissed the cat — to the great scandal of Sally, the maid"
(*Agnes Grey*, Ch. 1)

"It's ok [to kiss your cat] as long as both owner and cat are medically healthy and the cat is well socialised and used to this level of contact from you," said Nicky Trevorrow, behaviour manager at Cats Protection. However, she cautioned, kissing a cat on **the lips is not recommended for hygiene reasons**. 22 June 2018

I hadn't realised what a big issue this one was, until I read *Agnes Grey*, but you can definitely read the novel as a manifesto on kissing animals. Agnes Grey kisses the fantail pigeons in Chapter 1, she kisses the cat, in Chapter 1 and then, in the second last chapter, she repeatedly kisses the dog.

Agnes herself clearly seems to have no reservations at all about the acceptability of kissing cats, and when I typed the question into Google, Google didn't have too many concerns either. Although as evidence of my erstwhile

underappreciation of the importance of this question, Google gave me 108 million opinions on the subject in 0.51 seconds.

From the point of view of the left wing Google, and from the point of view of a progressive and individualistic Agnes Grey, the answer's "Yes. It is OK". You just need to make sure that neither you nor the cat have any diseases, so that you're taking ***care***, and there's no ***harm*** done, and you need to ensure that you obtain the ***consent*** of the cat. Fortunately – and this is something that I had also not previously realised – but apparently there's an enormous library of youtube videos available, that enable you to assess consent. "*Do cats like kisses? Discover the truth!*"

Anne Brontë the ***novelist***, however is, like, not so fast. She ***also*** recognises the opinion of Sally the Maid, who is lower class, more rurally oriented, less educated, less individualistic, and much more conservative. And Sally's strong view on the question is, like, nooooo! For Sally, it's a "great scandal", and that is likely because it violates the conservative moral value of sanctity.

There's a vast literature on moral foundations and politics, and a moral psychologist by the name of Jonathan Haidt has made it his life's work polling 132,000 people on questions like whether or not it is acceptable to kiss your cat, and mapping that to voting intentions. For our purposes here we can see that liberal progressives value caring for cats and not harming them and individual freedom very highly; but they regard sanctity as religious bunkum. So if you want to kiss the cat well, that's a matter for you and the cat.

But for conservatives, both care ***and*** sanctity are moral virtues. Kissing cats is a degradation of humanity, and it is ***not***, an individual choice between you and the cat. Hence the "great scandal". Haidt takes his survey to regions like Yorkshire and Arkansas and Queensland and so on, and the responses he elicits in those conservative areas are, like: "On what ***PLANET***, would anyone think that it is ***imaginably OK***, to kiss the cat??"

"I kissed the cat — to the great scandal of Sally, the maid" (*Agnes Grey*, Ch. 1)

Here's Agnes, representing the 2-dimensional, reductive, modern liberal world view, and here's Sally and Mrs Bloomfield, representing a 5-dimensional, moral, traditional view.

So – Anne Brontë is keeping Agnes honest, by constantly critiquing her with contrasting world views and competing syllabuses. Incidentally, if you've had a look at the novel, you'll have noticed that Anne Brontë calls out Agnes on the question of whether it's OK, or not, to beat children.

Surely, Tom, you would not strike your sister! I hope I shall *never* see you do that."“You will sometimes: I'm obliged to do it now and then to keep her in order." "But it is not your business to keep her in order, you know—that is for—

OK – so, Agnes cannot finish her sentence. It turns out that her objection to Tom striking his sister is ***not***, that she has any problem with his sister being struck. It's that she wants the ear-boxing and the birch-wielding rights, for ***herself***.

On the criterion of "authority", the red line in the middle there, which progressives regard as a bad and which conservatives view as a good, *Agnes Grey* is kinda stranded and muddled, between the old world, and the new.

My conclusion from all this, is that the Progressives have been merrily progressing, but they're only playing with 2 of the 5 cards in the moral virtues deck, so they keep bumping up against Conservative reality.

Agnes Grey doesn't ***want*** to beat children, under the "care" imperative, but she can't ***function*** as a governess, without the "authority" imperative. She clearly thought that her caring and sensitive post-Galileo syllabus was a giant improvement on Mr Robson's callous pre-Galileo syllabus; but it was Mr Robson's syllabus, and not hers, that prepared the "in real life" version of Tom Bloomfield, that is, Cunliffe Ingham, to become a Captain in the 57th Regiment, serving with distinction in the Crimean War, and subsequently to take over the management of the Ingham Pit at Thornhill, 20 miles from Haworth.

I also find it very interesting that in Agnes Grey's moral code, it's ***despicable*** for Mr Hatfield the mean Rector to whack a dog on the head with a cane. But she's sympathetic, it's ***commendable*** that Betty the nice nurse belts Harriet, who's a two year old girl. Sorry Agnes. But – nooo.

Fast forward with these confusions, the animal rights movement, epitomised by *Agnes Grey*'s strident denunciation of the victimisation of animals, elevates animals to the level of humanity, and treats humans as naked apes. From that egalitarian point of view, it's discomfiting when animals start abusing each other. If animals are sentient beings fit for inclusion in the moral sphere well, it's pretty galling when with rank ingratitude, they start killing their fellow endangered species.

So I would see that as another confusion of the modern world. As the lower class Nancy Brown correctly reminds the educated Agnes:

You can't expect a cat to know manners like a Christian you know, Miss Grey.

It's also telling that 200 years later, everyone still talks about lovely Sun Rises in the morning, and beautiful Sun Sets, at night. No-one in their ***senses*** ever says "Hey, we're having a barbecue on the beach at the time when the Earth's rotation hides the sun behind the horizon – bring beer!" Ultimately, it was Mr Robson's syllabus, that prevailed, because the fierce tiger of passion trumps the dead skeleton of reason.

So there you have it. I'll finish by linking Anne Brontë's cat back to Charlotte Brontë's brain tiger, in a present day context.

The progressive Senator Penny Wong had a debate at the National Press Club recently with the conservative Senator Cory Bernardi. Penny Wong was making a rational argument for Same Sex Marriage, on the basis that it's not harmful, it's a caring relationship, and it's consensual.

But it turns out that William Blake and David Hume and Charlotte Brontë are correct about how our brains work, and Socrates and Kant and Agnes Grey are wrong.

Cory Bernardi asked Penny whether she was prepared to allow kissing cats on the same caring reasoning as same sex marriage. But even though on her own logic kissing cats is OK, Penny deferred to her brain's tiger impulse, in the language of Charlotte. And, in the light of her emotional ***revulsion*** to the idea of kissing cats, she inconsistently offered to support Australian legislation to prohibit that. So the *Agnes Grey* / Galileo syllabus of **1837** turns out to be a complete shemozzle.

Dorothy Gale was correct. There's no place like Yorkshire. The glittering palace of science and of modern liberalism, is a ***fraud***. Agnes Grey, as a novel, lacks the stature of Dante's Divine Comedy, notwithstanding the fact that, and indeed, ***because*** of the fact that, ***he*** had the Sun orbitting around the Earth, and that ***she'd*** read Blackwood's Magazine. The Brontës, in my view, should have written about squirrels and hedgehogs.

A MAN'S MIND: EMILY BRONTË

By Christopher Cooper

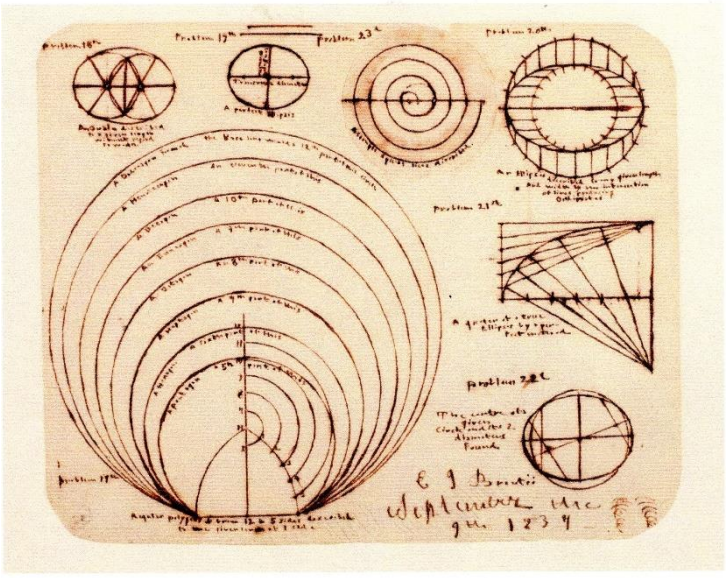
A talk given to the ABA on 13th November 2021

When Emily Brontë accompanied Charlotte to Brussels at the Pensionnat Heger, Monsieur Heger said of Emily, "she has a man's mind." Of course, today that would be a very sexist comment to make, but what he meant was that she had a very *logical* mind. In those days it was considered that men were logical and women were imaginative. How things have changed.

Indeed Emily did have a much more logical approach to her work than either of her sisters. I'm in a special position to notice this, being a mathematician, and I'd prefer to rephrase Monsieur Heger's remark by saying that Emily *had the mind of a mathematician*.

This is not to say that she *was* a mathematician, or had more than a rudimentary knowledge of the subject. She never had the opportunity, but I'm sure that, if she had, she would have taken to it like the proverbial duck to water.

For a start, Emily was the only one of the girls who learnt Latin. She sat in on her father's lessons to Branwell. Of course Latin isn't Mathematics, but it does have the sort of logical structure that used to be considered to be inappropriate for girls.



When Aunt Branwell died and left the family a sum of money, it was Emily who took on the responsibility of investing it. Again, finance isn't Mathematics but it *does* involve some of the skills that underlie Mathematics.

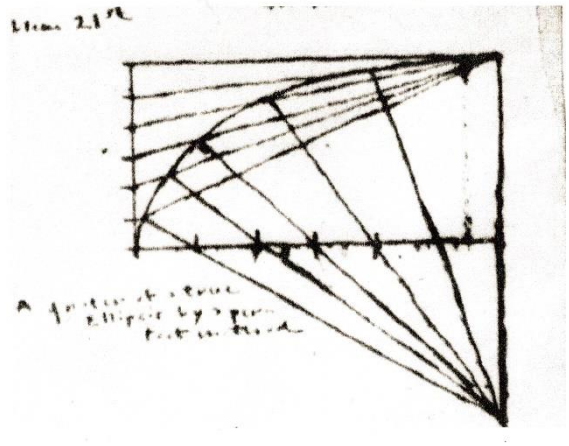
Very little remains of manuscripts by Emily – things in her own hand. Apart from a few diary papers the only item is a single page of geometrical drawings. These were taken from a drawing manual and Emily wasn't interested in them from a geometrical perspective, but rather for practical purposes in

drawing certain shapes. Chief among these is the technique for drawing perfect ellipses. Now a circle is a shape that occurs frequently in nature, and circles can be easily drawn with a pair of compasses. But a circle in perspective, that is observed at an angle, is an ellipse, and these are much harder to draw. Emily tried out some of the exercises in the drawing manual and this page is the result of her efforts.

A colleague of mine, Douglas Rogers from the University of Hawaii, has identified the book as the work of Charles Hayter. He was born in London in 1761 and died there in 1835. He was the son of an architect and exhibited, mainly portrait miniatures, at the Royal Academy. He taught perspective to Princess Charlotte, the daughter of King George IV. In 1813 he published *An Introduction to Perspective, Practical Geometry, Drawing and Painting*.

Subsequent editions were published in 1815, 1820, 1825, 1832, 1845 and 1872/3. The 6th edition was published after the date that Emily inscribed on her work and the 4th edition didn't contain the problems she illustrates. So that would make it almost certain that she possessed, or had access to, the 5th edition of 1832.

An example is one method for drawing a quarter of an ellipse. Emily's description reads *A quarter of a true Ellipsis by a perfect method*." Indeed a theorem of projective geometry guarantees that this produces an ellipse.



But the greatest evidence for Emily's 'man's mind' can be found in her novel *Wuthering Heights*. Most people read this novel as an outpouring of wild imagination, unfettered by any sort of logic. Indeed she's often thought of being "off with the fairies". The novel is also considered to be set in the great outdoors – on the moors. Film versions have greatly overstated this side of things. Many people have concluded that she loved, perhaps even worshipped, the god of Nature.

In fact *Wuthering Heights* is an *indoors* novel, with almost no description of the moors. There's no evidence that she took more than a usual interest in the plants and creatures that she'd come across on her regular walks across the moors. It's undeniable that she loved the moors, but I believe it was the fact that it was a wide open space that provided few distractions from her imagination. I believe that when she walked, often in borrowed male trousers, she didn't stop to examine the flora and fauna that she came across. No, she was in Gondal, dreaming of

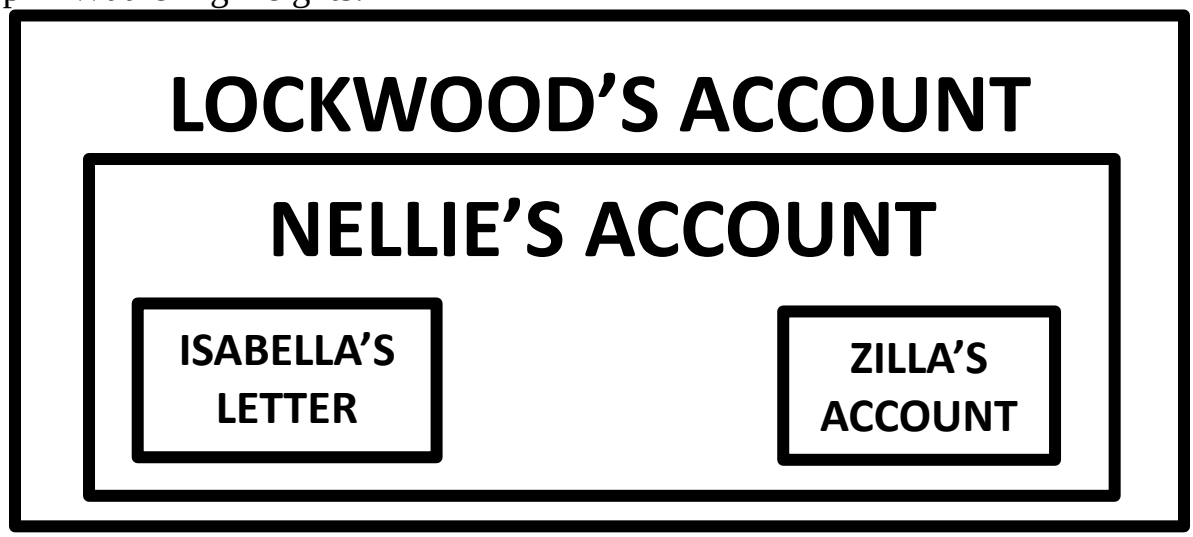
events in her imaginative world. I believe that she would have been just as happy if she had been brought up on the Nullabor, or the Arabian desert.

I also believe that Emily carefully engineered her novel, using many of the fundamental ideas of Mathematics. Many people think of Mathematics as being just about numbers but, apart from a few dates, Emily's novel contains very few numbers, although it is one of very few novels that begin with a number, 1801. However higher mathematics has very little to do with numbers. It has more to do with ideas such as complicated structure, nested objects, symmetry and puzzles.

Let's take structure, for example. One of the themes of structure is the idea of nested structures. Not just objects nested simply like Russian dolls but structures nested in more complex ways. Consider the narration of *Wuthering Heights*. It's written in the first person, by Lockwood. Now he's one of the least important characters in the whole story. He's absent for most of the action and, apart from a couple of scenes, he merely reports what is told to him by Nelly Dean.

Within his account you have the narration of Nelly. She's present throughout most of the action, but she plays a very passive role. She is simply an observer. I know that a few people consider her to be the main character of the novel and see her as a manipulator, but I can't see this.

Within Nelly's narrative there are some things she doesn't witness herself and she reports third-hand accounts, such as Isabella's description of her marriage with Heathcliff and Zillah's narrative of what happened while Nelly was locked up in Wuthering Heights.



By contrast, Charlotte's first-person narrative in *Jane Eyre*, or Dickens' first-person narrative in *David Copperfield*, are simple accounts that follow a simple time-line. In Emily's book the complex narrative structure leads to a complex temporal structure.

The book begins more than three quarters of the way through the story. In a giant flashback that occupies a good part of the novel, Lockwood is told of the events that have led up to that point. He goes back to London and on his return, some months later, we get a second flash-back as he's brought up to date with the more recent events.

The technique of flash-back is widely used in films today. In fact the story is often hard to follow as the past and the present are interleaved like shuffling a pack of cards. In one episode of the Crown, we see Prince Charles at school in Gordonstowe interleaved with scenes of his father at the same school, with a constant jumping backwards and forwards.

With Emily there's no confusion. In talking about it we sometimes have to use the term 'young Cathy' to distinguish her from her mother, but reading the novel there's no confusion because their lives hardly overlap.

Now I know of very few novels prior to *Wuthering Heights* where flash-back is used, and even fewer where it's presented in such a complex nested way. In fact the only example I can think of is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which also has a complex narrative structure. Was Emily influenced by that book? There is a strong case that she was – but more of that another time.

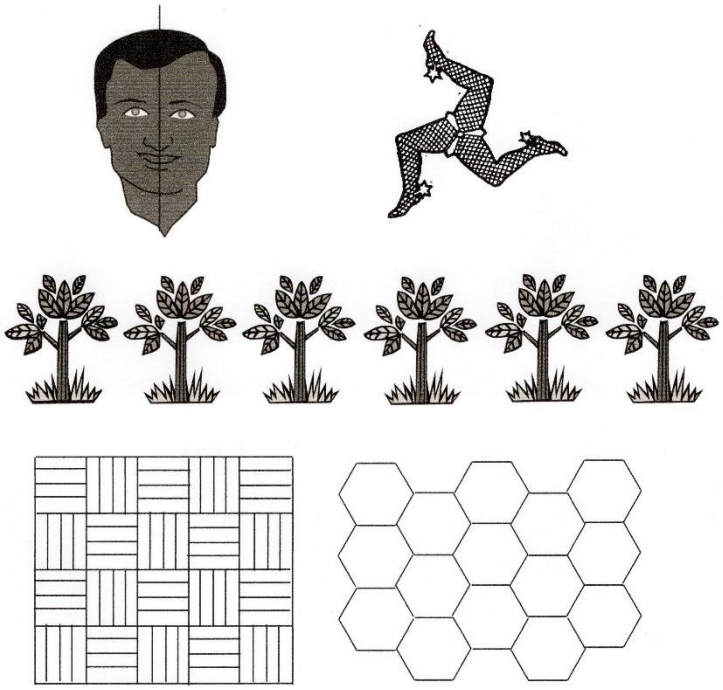
Then we come to the chronology. *Wuthering Heights* is one of very few novels that have inspired people to try to reconstruct the chronology of events. The novel begins with a date 1801. It occurs as the very first word, if you can call it a word. There are very few other years given. In chapter 7 we have Nelly explaining that what she is about to tell Lockwood, in chapter 8, occurred 'in the summer of 1778, that is nearly twenty-three years ago'.

Most of the chronological references are *relative*, like this one. Of course this one contains redundant information. We could work out that it was twenty-three years ago simply by subtracting 1778 from 1801. But in countless other places we get new information. Many other references mention the age of one of the characters at the time of an incident.

Quite a number of years ago I was inspired to reconstruct the chronology of *Wuthering Heights* from these many clues scattered throughout the novel. I soon discovered that I wasn't the first to attempt this. Several people had already constructed chronologies and all our chronologies are substantially the same.

I firmly believe that Emily deliberately planted a puzzle in her novel. I can imagine her saying to herself, "I'll pepper the novel with little clues so that the reader, if he or she is so disposed, can solve the puzzle of the chronology." I read somewhere that she worked with some Almanacks beside her and that, in addition to assisting her in making her dates consistent, she was able to be accurate about weather and phases of the moon.

SYMMETRY



Let's move on to symmetry. There's more to symmetry than the simple left-right symmetry that is supposed to exist in the human face. There's the rotational symmetry of the starfish, the translational symmetry of the machicolations of a castle. There's the complicated symmetry in a piece of brickwork, or a tiled floor. In three dimensions chemists have classified various substances according to the symmetry of their crystal structure.

Symmetry is a powerful concept in many branches of Mathematics, not just geometric symmetry. Before the advent of free verse, symmetry occurred in poetry in terms of the different rhyming schemes.

There's a famous type of poetic symmetry called the 'sestina'. It consists of six stanzas of six lines, followed by one stanza of three lines. There's no rhyme *within* the stanzas. Instead the sestina is structured through a recurrent pattern of the words that end each line, a technique known as 'lexical repetition'.

If the first stanza is represented by their end words as 123456, the next stanza becomes 615243. This pattern of permutations continues from one stanza to the next.

The pattern is generated as follows:

(1) Divide the 6 lines into 2 blocks of 3.

(2) Reverse the bottom block but leave the top block the same.

(3) Swap the blocks

(4) Interleave the two blocks

The last three lines repeat the end words of the last three lines of the last six-line stanza.

same					
1	1	6	6		6
2	2	5		1	1
3	3	4	5		5
4	6	1		2	2
5	5	2	4		4
6	4	3		3	3
	reverse	swap		interleave	

Rudyard Kipling once used this form in his *Sestina of the Tramp-Royal*.

Sestina of the Tramp-Royal
by Rudyard Kipling

Speakin' in general, I 'ave tried 'em all—
The 'appy roads that take you o'er the world.
Speakin' in general, I 'ave found them good
For such as cannot use one bed too long,
But must get 'ence, the same as I 'ave done,
An' go observin' matters till they die.

What do it matter where or 'ow we die,
So long as we've our 'ealth to watch it all—
The different ways that different things are done,
An' men an' women lovin' in this world;
Takin' our chances as they come along,
An' when they ain't, pretendin' they are good?

In cash or credit—no, it aren't no good;
You 'ave to 'ave the 'abit or you'd die,
Unless you lived your life but one day long,
Nor didn't prophesy nor fret at all,
But drew your tucker some'ow from the world,
An' never bothered what you might ha' done.

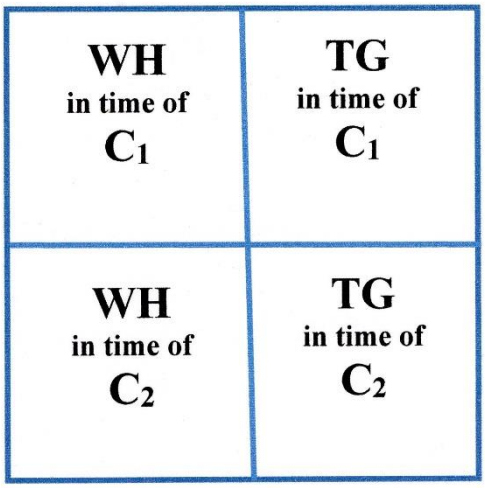
But, Gawd, what things are they I 'aven't done?
I've turned my 'and to most, an' turned it good,
In various situations round the world—
For 'im that doth not work must surely die;
But that's no reason man should labour all
'Is life on one same shift—life's none so long.

Therefore, from job to job I've moved along.
Pay couldn't 'old me when my time was done,
For something in my 'ead upset it all,
Till I 'ad dropped whatever 'twas for good,
An', out at sea, be'eld the dock-lights die,
An' met my mate—the wind that tramps the world!

It's like a book, I think, this bloomin' world,
Which you can read and care for just so long,
But presently you feel that you will die
Unless you get the page you're readin' done,
An' turn another—likely not so good;
But what you're after is to turn 'em all.

Gawd bless this world! Whatever she 'ath done—
Excep' when awful long I've found it good.
So write, before I die, ''E liked it all!'

Well that was a bit of a 'rabbit-hole' because none of the Brontës ever wrote a sestina. But I included this form as an example of symmetry that is not geometric. Well, what sort of symmetry can we find in *Wuthering Heights*?



The obvious symmetry in *Wuthering Heights* is the *vertical symmetry* of the two generations. The transitional point is where the first Cathy dies and the second is born. It occurs almost exactly half-way through the novel. It's also, almost exactly half-way between 1765, the time when all the first generation have been born, and the end of the novel in 1802.

Added to this is the *horizontal symmetry*. There are two houses, four miles apart. Virtually all of the action takes place in one or other of these two houses. What little happens out of doors takes place between the houses. We hear of the moors and Penistone Crag, and the film versions make a lot of this outdoor scenery. Yet in the book we never actually see Cathy and Heathcliff on the moors.

Now it has been said that the real heroes of Emily's novel are the two houses themselves rather than the humans who lived in them. If so, then I guess that Wuthering Heights is the eponymous hero of the novel and Thrushcross Grange is the heroine. Practically everything that's chronicled in the novel was observed by one or other of these two houses.

I remember this horizontal symmetry being brought out really well by a stage version of *Wuthering Heights*. On the left of the stage was part of a room at Wuthering Heights and on the right of the stage was part of the more genteel

Thrushcross Grange. Whatever action took place occurred at the appropriate side of the stage.

This worked really well for one big reason. Anything that didn't occur within one or other house, or in its vicinity, almost didn't exist. Think about it. If the characters go off stage they cease to exist until they return to one or other of the houses. We never follow them. This made it really easy for the set designer.

Mr Earnshaw goes to Liverpool and returns with young Heathcliff under his cloak. What happens on his journey, how he comes to find Heathcliff – even *why* he made the journey in the first place – are all unanswered questions. The houses never get to see what happens in Liverpool and so nor do we. Heathcliff runs away as an uneducated urchin and returns three years later as a gentleman of means. Where does he go? How does he make his money? How has he become a gentleman? Again Emily chooses not to tell us. He has gone off stage and we're not permitted to follow him. The intricacies of the family relationships take a bit of work to follow. It's an incestuous community with only two people coming from outside of the two houses – Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. But there's a huge amount of symmetry that can only have been planned in advance.

There are seven marriages in all. The first two create the original households. They are the marriages of Mr & Mrs Earnshaw and Mr & Mrs Linton. The third marriage of the first Cathy and Edgar unite these two houses.

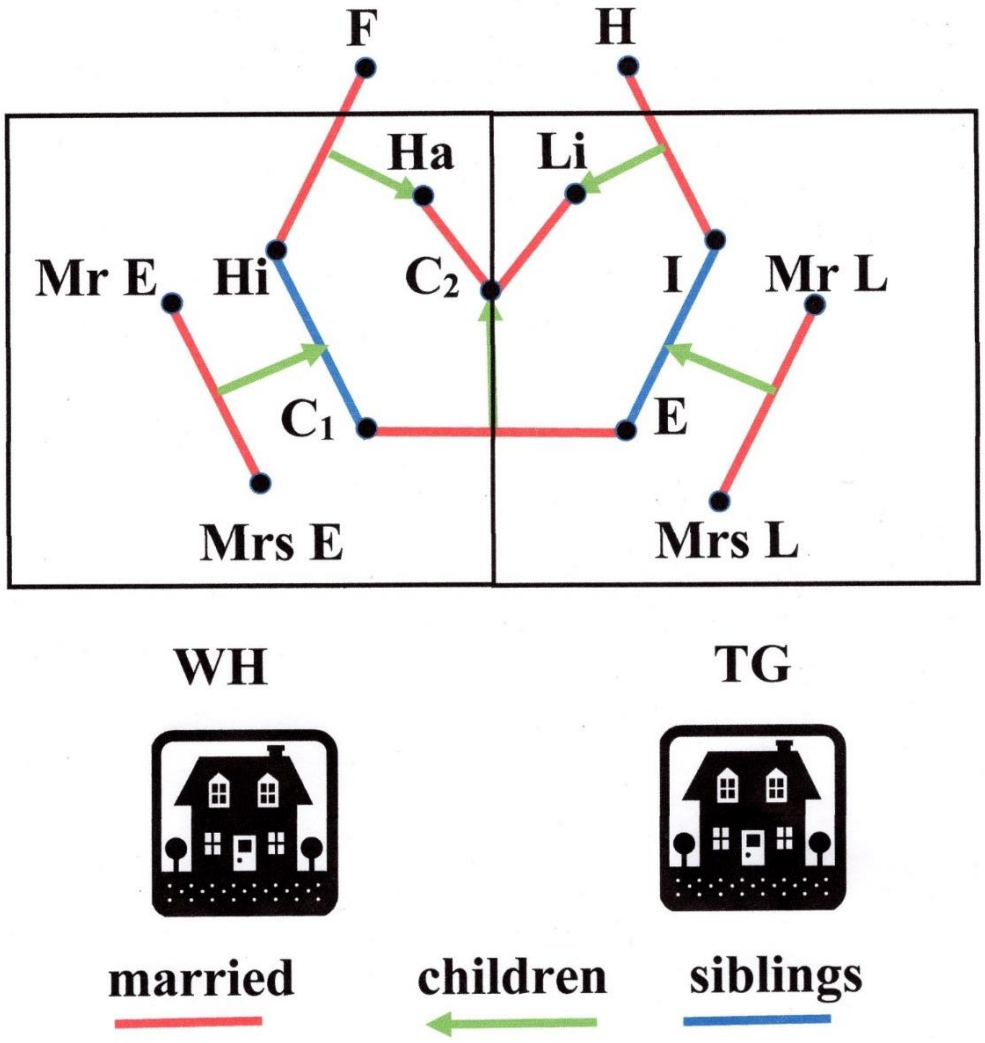
It has been said that with Heathcliff being a sort of step-brother to Cathy there's a hint of incest in their relationship. Of course there was no common blood between them, but they were brought up as siblings.

However despite their relationship going much further than is normal for a brother and sister there's never any indication of any sexual involvement. It was, in fact, far deeper than that.

It's often the case that when a brother and sister are very close there's some suggestion by others that the relationship may be incestuous. Indeed there are those who suggest that there may have been an unhealthy intimacy between Branwell and Emily! While I reject that, I do think that when she created the characters of Cathy and Heathcliff there may have been, at the back of her mind, and with creative exaggeration, the relationship she had with Branwell.

In any case the Cathy-Heathcliff alliance was never one of the seven marriages. The fourth and fifth marriages involved partners who were from outside the community – Hareton with Frances and Heathcliff with Isabella. The sixth marriage was between the young Cathy and her cousins, Linton. There are those who consider the marriage of cousins being mildly incestuous. Finally, at the end of the novel, we look forward to the seventh marriage, this time between the young Cathy and her other cousin.

GENEALOGICAL SYMMETRY OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS



I believe that Emily planned her novel very precisely. We don't have her notes that would prove this. But my strongly held belief is that Emily wrote her novel somewhat as follows:

(1) She began by conceiving of the idea of Heathcliff. Some people have suggested that she took her inspiration from Branwell. This may be partly true, but although Branwell was flawed he was hardly a monster. I suggest that Emily also drew upon Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like Heathcliff, the creature became a monster because of the ill-treatment of others. And partly she drew upon the story of Welsh in her own Irish ancestry.

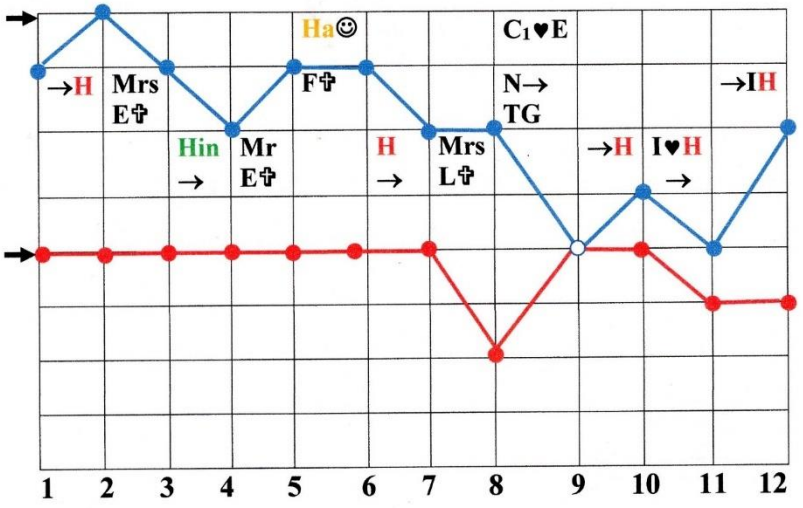
(2) At this point she switched from her imaginative brain to her logical one. Here she planned the other characters and their relationships. It is my opinion that the

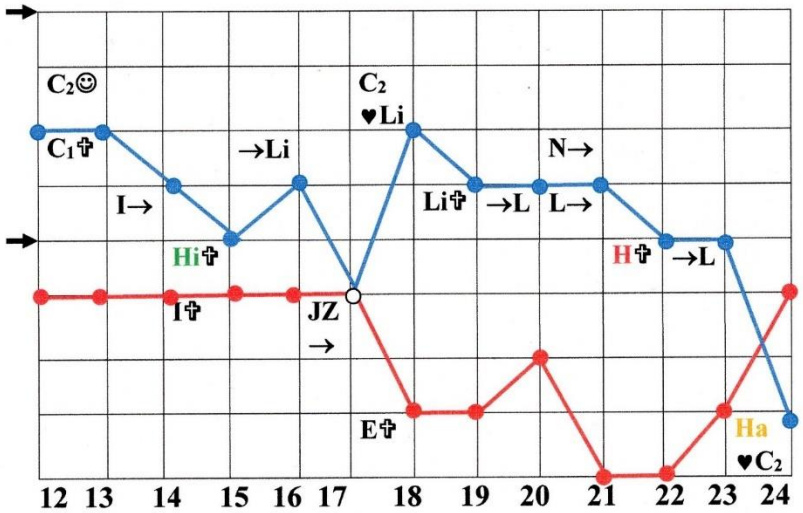
symmetry is too perfect for it to have originated by chance. She also constructed a chronology that would form the skeleton of the novel.

(3) Only then did she begin to write, putting flesh on the bones, and here she used the imaginative side of her brain again.

Of course I can't prove it conclusively. But the more I examine the structure of the novel the more convinced I've become that, consciously or unconsciously, she must have worked in this way.

The complexity of the plot naturally led to a complexity in the ebb and flow between the two houses. Here I've mapped the ebb and flow of the numerous migration between the two houses.





So, are the two houses really the main characters of the story? I believe that on one level that is indeed the case and that Emily intended it to be so, which is why she named the book after one of these houses instead of after one of the characters. Charlotte called her novel *Jane Eyre*, not *Thornfield Hall*. Emily called her novel *Wuthering Heights*, not *Heathcliff*. Anne managed to include both the house and its tenant.

Of course *Wuthering Heights* is many faceted and the focus on the houses is just one facet. But it's a very real one. I've scoured the book for architectural references and have found that it contains vastly more architectural detail than any other novel I've ever read. It's full of casement windows and hasps and staples.

Here are some of the architectural terms in the novel.

ARCHITECTURAL WORDS IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Architect, apartment, entrance, threshold, garret, attic, house, kitchen, nook, parlour, porch, penetralium, lobby, den, cellar, wash-house, chamber, lodge, lumber-hole, barn, pigeon-cot, banister, chimney, door, window, skylight, lattice, casement, flagstone, gable, hearthstone, laith, ledge, gate, postern, rafter, roof, slate, underdrawn, ceiling, stair, step, panelled, dresser, chair, table, bench, bolt, hasp, staple, lock, key, handle, hinge, hook, latch.

Just the references to windows could make a whole talk. There many more references to windows than any other novel I know of. There are 74 windows, 17 lattices, 5 casements, 3 skylights and 4 panes in the novel. But it's not the total number of mentions of windows that's exceptional – it's the huge variety on the way they are used.

This is where we come to puzzles. It seems to me that Emily has gone out of her way to include as many different uses for windows as she could think of. It is almost as if, before she began the novel, she wrote down a long list of possible uses for windows and, in writing the novel, she contrived to include an example of each. This was not so much a puzzle for the reader but rather it was a puzzle she set herself. "How many uses can I come up with for windows?".

Let's conduct an exercise. Tell me what a window can be used for and we'll see how many of Emily's list you can come up with. Most are uses intended by the characters, but one or two are accidental.

USES FOR WINDOWS

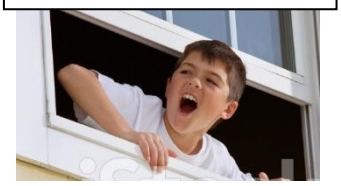
see the scenery

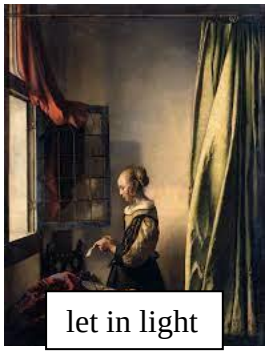
see who's coming

see who's inside

communicate

call for help or warn people outside





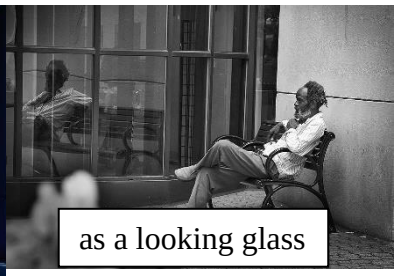
let in light

let in heat

let in cool air

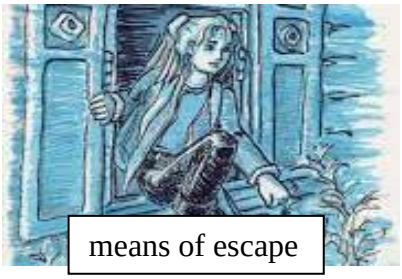
let in scents from garden

let in sounds



as a looking glass

means of climbing in



means of escape

provides forensic clues

find out the weather

find out when it's morning

see if anyone is home at night

see if house is abandoned

window seat

rest one's head

use ledge as a table

use as bookshelf

use as a memorial

use as a canvas

use as a weapon

use as a means of suicide

metaphor for one's beloved

metaphor for eyes

provide excuse for staying in

Now let me finish by returning to the idea that Emily deliberately omitted any detail of events that took place beyond the two houses and their intervening territory. I have undertaken a writing project called *The Lost Chapters of Wuthering Heights* in which I fantasise that Thomas Newby decided to delete the 'off-stage' chapters so that the novel would fit into two volumes, allowing it to

be published alongside of Anne's one volume *Agnes Grey*, to make a three volume set.

Of course I don't believe that he did this. Nor do I imagine that Emily ever wrote these missing chapters. I believe that it was her deliberate plan *not* to write about these off-stage events. It is as if she was determined to depict the story as witnessed by the two houses.

Here's my list of missing chapters that I propose to write:

- Lockwood in Brighton
- Earnshaw in Liverpool
- Hindley at school
- Cathy learns to be a lady
- Heathcliff in America
- Heathcliff and Isabella on honeymoon
- Isabella in London
- Lockwood returns to London
- Lockwood visits the young Earnshaw family

APPENDIX

The following gives the number of instances of window-related words in Wuthering Heights.

WINDOW = 74 instances
LATTICE = 17 instances
CURTAIN = 9 instances
PANE = 4 instances
SKYLIGHT = 3 instances
SHUTTERS = 3 instances

USES FOR WINDOWS

(1) to look out to see the scenery [Ch 10, 18, 25]
(2) to look out of to see who's outside/who's coming
[Ch 8, 10, 11, 19, 21, 24, 29, 34]
(3) to look in to see who's inside [Ch 3, 6, 11, 31]
(4) to carry out a conversation between inside and outside
[Ch 2 Joseph and Lockwood]
(5) to warn someone outside [Ch 10, 17]
(6) to call for help [Ch 27 Nelly]
(7) to overhear a conversation [Ch 32]
(8) to let in light [Ch 8 almanack, 9, 28 cut on cheek]
(9) to let in heat [Ch 13]
(10) to let in cool air [Ch 12]
(11) to let in scents [Ch 9]

(12) to transfer sound [Ch 6,12,17]
(13) as a looking glass [Ch 9 reflections of moons]
(14) to enter a house [Ch 3 Cathy's ghost, 6, 16, 17 Heathcliff, 24 Cathy]
(15) to exit/escape from a house [Ch 7, 21, 34 Heathcliff, 27, 28 Cathy]
(16) to see if anyone has climbed in or out (footprints) [Chapter 34]
(17) to see the weather [Chapter 2]
(18) to tell the time [Chapter 27]
(19) to see if anyone is home at night [Ch 9]
(20) to see if house is unlived in (broken panes) [Ch 34]
(21) to sit in (window-seat) [Ch 14, 15, 24, 32]
(22) to rest one's head [Ch 3]
(23) to use window ledge as a table [Ch 3]
(24) to use window ledge as a bookshelf [Ch 3]
(25) to use the window ledge as a memorial (carved name) [Ch 3]
(26) to use the panes to draw on [Ch 32]
(27) causing an injury [Ch 3 Cathy's wrists, 34 Heathcliff's hand]
(28) as a means of suicide [Ch 9, 12 Cathy]
(29) as a symbol of one's loved one [Ch 15 Heathcliff outside Cathy's window]
(30) as a metaphor for eyes [Ch 7, 17 Heathcliff's]
(31) as an excuse for remaining in a room [Ch 23]

The references given as [ ] refer to the above list of uses.

Chapter 1:
- narrow **windows** deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended by large jutting stones

Chapter 2:
- Joseph projected his head from a round **window** of the barn [4]
- I approached a **window** to examine the weather [17]

Chapter 3:
- large oak case, with squares cut out near the top resembling coach **windows**
- the ledge of a **window** which it enclosed, served as a table [23]
- The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner [24]
- leant my head against the **window** [22]
- a child's face looking through the **window** [3]
- if the little fiend had got in at the **window**, she would probably have strangled me [14]
- name scratched on that **window** ledge [25]
- branch of a fir-tree touched my **lattice**

- wrenched open the **lattice** … Cathy do come [14]
- endeavoured to unhasp the **casement**
- rattled its dry cones against the **panes**
- pulled its wrist on the broken **pane** [27]

Chapter 6:
- The light came from the drawing-room **window** – both of us were able to look in [3], [19]
- very like the robbers were for putting him through the **window** [14]
- opened my **lattice** and put my head out to hearken, though it rained [12]
- I intended shattering their great glass **panes**

Chapter 7:
- your eyes … black fiends so deeply buried, who never open their **windows** boldly [30]
- he ran to the **window** and I to the door
- [Heathcliff] had crept by the **skylight** of one garret … into the **skylight** of the other [15]

Chapter 8:
- almanack … hanging near the **window** [8]
- looked askance through the **window** [at Heathcliff] [2]

Chapter 9:
- light entered from its un**curtain**ed **windows** [8]
- I threw back the **lattice** and … the room filled with sweet scents from the garden [11]
- take care she did not throw herself … out of the **window** [28]
- the **windows** reflected … glittering moons, but showed no light from within [13], [19]

Chapter 10:
- they sat together in a **window**, whose **lattice** lay back … and displayed … the valley [1]
- Mr Linton walked to a **window** … he leant out and exclaimed [5]
- she saw Heathcliff pass the **window** [2]

Chapter 11:
- I was standing by the kitchen **window** but drew out of sight [3]
- Heathcliff had moved to a **window**, and hung his head
- watching from the parlour **windows** [2]

Chapter 12:
- raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the **windows** [10]
- dimly discerning the grey square of the **window** … I was … in the oak-panelled at home
- open the **window** again wide; fasten it open
- shut the **window**
- mention that name and I end the matter by a spring from the **window** [28]
- wind sounding in the fir tree by the **lattice** [12]
- I could not trust her alone by the gaping **lattice** [28]
- I held the **casement** ajar for a few seconds. A cold blast [10]

Chapter 13:
- set an easy-chair in the sunshine by the **window** … enjoying the genial heat [9]

Chapter 14:
- returned to her seat in the **window** [21]

Chapter 15:
- Mrs Linton sat … in the recess of the open **window** [21]
- I won't stray five yards from your **window** [Heathcliff] [29]

Chapter 16:
- I went and opened one of the **windows** [to allow Heathcliff to enter] [14]

Chapter 17:
- driving flakes build up the **uncurtained window**
- moaning wind, which shook the **windows** [12]
- I shut the **window** [Nelly talking to Heathcliff]
- struck down the division between two **windows** and sprang in [14]
- the clouded **windows** flashed a moment towards me [30]
- the only resource left me was to run to a **lattice** and warn [5]
- the **casement** behind me was banged onto the floor by a blow [14]

Chapter 18:
- surveying the country from her nursery **window** [1]
- Charlie [dog] lying under a **window**

Chapter 19:
- she caught her father's face looking from the **window** [2]

Chapter 20:
- he surveyed the carved front and low-browed **lattices**

Chapter 21:
- if I leave the **window** open a bit late in the evening
- watched the couple walking past the **window** [2]
- glances wandering to the **window**
- I, on purpose, had sought a bit of work in some unripped fringe of the **window-curtain** [31]
- the **lattice** was open and he stepped out [15]

Chapter 24:
- extinguished my candle and seated myself in the **window** [21]
- Cathy entered by the **casement** of the dining room [14]
- we sat down in the **window-seat** [21]
- I was forced to pass the front **windows** to get to the court: it was no use trying to conceal my presence [2]

Chapter 25:
- Edgar … walking past my **window**, looked out towards Gimmerton Kirk [1]

Chapter 27:
- we looked at the **windows**: they were too narrow for even Cathy's little figure [15]
- perhaps we might content to get through the **window** there, or into the garret and out by its **skylight** [15]
- the **window**, however, was narrow [15]
- you should have opened a **lattice** and called out [6]
- Catherine took her station by a **lattice** and watched anxiously for morning [18]

Chapter 28:
- she made me come to the **window** and showed me her cheek, cut on the inside [8]
- examined the **windows** … she got easily out of its **lattice** [15]

Chapter 29:
- the same moon shone through the **window**
- she was either outside the **window**
- I watched them from the **window** [2]

Chapter 31:

- a stool by the **window**
- perceiving him through the **window** [3]

Chapter 32:

- inmates … stationed themselves not far from one of the **windows**. I could both see them and hear them talk before I entered [3], [7]
- drawing pictures on the **window-panes** [26]
- retreated to the **window-seat** [21]
- she took her former station by the **window**
- both doors and **lattices** were open

Chapter 34:

- looked eagerly towards the **window**
- the panelled bed: its **window** … is wide enough for anybody to get through [15]
- ascertain if there were any footmarks under his **window** [16]
- I observed the master's **window** swinging open
- I hasped the **window**
- affirms he has seen the two of them looking out of his chamber **window** [2]
- many a **window** showed black gaps deprived of glass [20]
- leaning against the ledge of an open **lattice**, but not looking out
- the **lattice**, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill [27]

ADÉLE VARENS AND THE DEPICTION OF INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN *JANE EYRE*

by Christine Trimingham Jack

A talk given to the ABA on 10th July 2021

In a previous paper on the depiction of trauma in the Brontë fiction in this journal, Patrick Morris wrote that 'issues of trauma in the form of child abuse and domestic violence' are 'prominent themes' in the writing of the Brontë sisters and that all of the Brontës' works contain the 'ability to describe graphically the emotional content of human interaction', revealing 'profound psychological insight'.[i] *Jane Eyre* is identified as one of 'three critical works' the writers produced that 'deal with traumatic experiences'.[ii] Morris argues that the novel is 'successful … in depicting the abuse of the child' in the various situations, as well as depicting the 'resilience' Jane Eyre shows in making 'important, self-affirming life decisions about her life course' which is 'powerfully portrayed'.[iii] Charlotte Brontë's capacity for such understanding came from her ability 'to analyse' her 'moods' and 'observation of her own experiences'.[iv]

When *Jane Eyre*[v]*: An autobiography* was published in 1847, it was the first book to be written from 'the oppressed child's point of view'.[vi] Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850) was the second. Claire Harman writes that 'Between them, these two great novels … showed adult psychology being forged from childhood experience.'[vii] Readers of *Jane Eyre* are given access to Jane's complex inner life and in the process are allowed to eventually come to understand both Rochester's and even Jane's abusive aunt Mrs Reed's reasons for their behaviour. Adèle Varens is a subsidiary character, someone required to push the narrative forward, in this case the need for a governess at Thornfield Hall, so that Jane can meet Rochester. It is not unusual for secondary characters to receive less character development, however, the case of Adèle casts a tantalising shadow that is worth exploration.

The first aim of this paper is to examine Adèle Varens and her interactions with Jane and Rochester as an example of intergenerational trauma. This refers to 'repeated patterns within the family' in which trauma is transmitted through 'certain behaviour patterns, symptoms, roles and values'.[viii] In the ground-breaking work of Selma Fraiberg, 'the phenomenon of the intergenerational transmission' of trauma is described by applying the metaphor of 'ghosts in the nursery', referring to the repetition in the interactions between the primary care

giver and child of the 'conflicted past' of the adult.[ix] Prophecy Coles uses a similar metaphor in the title of her book *The Uninvited Guest from the Unremembered Past* (2011).[x] A second aim is to explore possible explanations for the construction of the character from the viewpoint of Charlotte Brontë.

There is a belief that there is a self-perpetuating pattern in which the abused child becomes an abusing parent, but that is generally not the case. Rather, as parents, they are likely to strive to protect their children from what happened to them. However, in extreme cases, they may also attack or 'fail to protect' their children.[xi] There is also research that reveals that those who are 'victims of unresolved childhood trauma' 'curtail their conscious attention to the child's signals of need in order to protect themselves from re-experiencing their early traumatic responses'.[xii] Without their experience of a nurturing parent, in adulthood the person struggles to find their own capacity to recognise and respond to a child in their care, thereby establishing a pattern of intergenerational trauma.[xiii]

Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre and Rochester all experienced childhood trauma and abuse. Charlotte's mother died when she was five, after eight months of suffering during which she refused to see her children, even though she slept in the room next to the girls.[xiv] The horror of what happened to Charlotte and her sisters when they boarded at The Clergy Daughters' School, especially the abuse inflicted on her older sister Maria also haunted Charlotte through her life.[xv] She believed that 'the origin' of the illnesses her sisters suffered which led to their deaths was brought about by the terrible conditions at the school.[xvi] She was a child at the time but realised that both her older sisters were ill but she was powerless to do anything about it. A statement she made as an adult reveals her trauma: 'I suffered to see my sisters perishing.' [xvii] Jane Eyre's parents died when she was a young child and she was abused in the home of her aunt and later at boarding school. Rochester too was abused. He shares with Jane that his father (there is no mention of the mother) 'was an avaricious, grasping man' who, in order to avoid 'dividing the estate' (JE, p. 351), plotted with his eldest son to marry Rochester (the second son) off to a wealthy woman. After the marriage, Rochester discovered that his wife's madness had been hidden from him (JE, p. 352).

As will be shown, in spite of her wishing well for Adèle, Jane does not intervene to stop the abuse Rochester directs towards Adèle and she is significantly influenced by Rochester's view of the child. The first meeting between Jane and Adèle establishes Jane's thoughts about her charge: 'I found my pupil to be sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply: she had not been used to regular occupation of any kind' (JE, pp. 121-123). Yet there is a discrepancy here between this statement and what Jane discovers as she probes Adèle about her early life, discovering that the child had 'been carefully trained' to entertain by

singing, dancing and reciting poetry for her mother's guests (JE, p. 122). Adèle demonstrates her skills to Jane which includes an operatic song of love and loss of a 'forsaken lady'. Jane denigrates the choice of song as being 'in very bad taste' (JE, p. 121). Unlike Jane, a reader can ascertain that Adèle has indeed applied herself well to the occupation of entertaining her mother's friends, including sitting in their laps and adopting a tone and behaviour intended to entice her audience whom we assume to be men.

When Rochester finally returns to Thornfield Hall after a long absence he rarely calls for Adèle leading Jane to conclude that the child 'was not wanted' by him. (JE, p. 139)
When he finally has time to see Jane and his ward together Adèle asks about a present for herself and one for 'Mademoiselle Eyre'. Rochester 'gruffly' deflects asking Jane if she expects a present and she responds that while Adèle 'has the right . . . of custom' to ask for one being that he has been in 'the habit of giving her playthings' she is not entitled to one being 'a stranger' (JE, pp. 142-143). It is a subtle challenge but Rochester will have none of it telling Jane, in full hearing the child, that she 'is not bright' and has 'no talents'. He attributes any success in learning to Jane and not to the pupil. During this discussion, Adèle seeks to sit on Jane's lap but is ordered 'to amuse herself' with the dog (JE, p. 143). While Adèle is rejected Jane is given significant attention as Rochester thoughtfully examines some of her sketches. When the evening ends and Adèle seeks to kiss him goodnight, Jane observes that 'he endured the caress, but scarcely seemed to relish it more than Pilot [his dog] would have done, nor so much' (JE, p. 149).

The second meeting between the three characters is some time later when Adèle is filled with excitement because a promised present has finally arrived. Rochester's response to her eagerness is to say she is a 'genuine daughter or Paris'. He then tells her in a 'sarcastic voice' to undertake 'disembowelling the present box in a corner' and in silence: '*tiens-toi tranquille, enfant; comprends-tu*?' (JE, p. 152) (Translation: Keep quiet child; do you understand? (JE, p. 549) He then turns to Jane telling her how unpleasant he would find it to have to spend 'a whole evening *tête-à- tête* with a brat' (JE, p. 152). Jane does nothing to ameliorate his treatment of the child but is rescued from the need for it when Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper is sent for to sit with Adèle as she unpacks her present (JE, p. 153). Yet, while Jane does not contest this treatment she challenges Rochester on her own behalf stating that while she may accept 'informality' in his conversation with her she would not accept 'insolence . . . even for a salary'. Her retort attracts his respect (JE, p. 158). Later in the conversation she challenges him that his acceptance of his sins and lack of repentance could easily be turned around with 'resolution' leading his to think differently about himself (JE, p. 161).

A ‘pink silk frock’ is one of the gifts for Adèle and later in the evening, assisted by her nurse, she returns to the room wearing it complete with silk stockings, satin sandals and flowers in her hair. After she has ‘*chasséed* across the room’, turned on tiptoes before Rochester and ‘dropped on one knee at his feet’ thanking him for the present and asking him if her performance is not as her mother would do it. His response is damning. He affirms that yes she does behave like her mother who ‘charmed’ him out of his money leaving him with ‘the French floweret’ (referring to Adèle). He continues that he ‘would fain be rid of’ her due to his ‘not valuing now the root [referring to the mother] whence it sprang’. He concludes that only ‘gold dust could manure’ thereby changing the nature of Adèle for whom he has little value. His reason for keeping her, he tells Jane, is about ‘expiating numerous sins … by one good work’ (JE, pp. 163-164), unconsciously acknowledging that it is not about the interests of the child rather it is about his psychological need for reparation. All this is spoken in front of Adèle. While his words contain complex metaphors there is little doubt that Adèle would understand the denigration of her mother and ultimately of herself.

In these meetings Jane offers only a very slight challenge to Rochester about his treatment of the child nor does she question them in her retelling of the events in her autobiography. In so doing she may be positioned as a ‘bystander’, someone who witnesses ‘something that demands intervention on their part’ but chooses ‘not to get involved’.[xviii] Some factors that contribute to a person intervening are recognition of the seriousness of the situation, feeling that they have some responsibility to intervene, having ‘the requisite skills and resources to act’ and believing that the benefit to the victim from intervention ‘outweighs potential’ cost to themselves.[xix] There is also research that shows that when witnessing a parent abusing a child the possible intervener has to believe ‘that how parents treat their children “is my business”’.[xx] Consideration of these factors offer an explanation as to why Jane did not intervene. Rochester is Adèle’s guardian and as an employee it is unlikely she would consider it her business to intervene. She also has a history of both being abused and witnessing abuse especially in the early stages at Lowood School where there was little direct challenge of abuse offering her little opportunity for skill development. Finally, Jane needs employment and to challenge Rochester especially on the matter of a child whom he obviously holds in low esteem puts her livelihood in jeopardy.

Later, in a private conversation, Rochester explains to Jane the relationship of *’grande passion’* (JE, p. 163) he had with Adèle’s mother, until he discovered she has betrayed him but not before in his view ‘unluckily’ she had given birth to Adèle, claiming her to be his child, although he disowns paternity (JE, p. 169). His explanation leads Jane to become more sympathetic to the child and she tells him she will ‘cling closer to her than before’, leading her to be more engaged with

the child. However, she reveals a lack of insight into Adèle expressing a xenophobic belief that the child has a 'superficiality of character, inherited probably from her [French] mother, hardly congenial to an English mind' (JE, p. 170). Later Jane notes that there 'was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress' (JE, p. 198). It is the closest Jane comes to acknowledging what probably drives Adèle—a desire to please in the way she and many women have been trained to do.

There is one event which breaks the construction of Adèle as a shallow creature. It occurs when Jane and Rochester have declared their love for each other and Rochester is expressing his intention to 'claim' Jane in every way with hyperbolic references to taking her to the moon (JE, p. 307). His plan for Adèle is to send her away to school. Adèle resists his scheme, declaring that Jane would soon tire of living on the moon finally stating: 'If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you' (JE, p. 307). Her motivations may be mixed, including wanting to avoid being sent away, but it is also the voice of wisdom—a breaking of the construction of her as unintelligent and superficial. Adèle infers that Rochester is not a man to be trusted and this is an instance in which the author moves towards the child's inner life which is beyond the previous construction of her as a superficial person.

After Jane discovers that Rochester is already married, she leaves Thornfield Hall. Her silent farewell to the child reveals that she has formed a significant bond: 'Farewell, my darling Adèle!' (JE, p. 368). She eventually returns after many events which contribute to her own psychological growth and she is finally reunited with a blind and penitent Rochester at Ferndean. Jane discovers that Rochester has placed Adèle in the boarding school and visits her there where she is moved by the child's 'pale and thin' appearance and her unhappiness (JE, p. 518). She realises that Adèle is not flourishing under the strict school regime and takes her home, intending to again become her teacher. However, when the demands of caring for her blind husband are too much, she sends Adèle away again, only this time to a school closer to home (which allows for holidays) and with 'a more indulgent system' (JE, p. 518). The story ends with Jane declaring Adèle made 'fair progress' via 'a sound English education' that 'corrected in a great measure her French defects' so that she becomes 'a pleasing and obliging companion – docile, good-tempered, and well-principled' (JE, p. 519). Margaret Thormählen, in her study of education and the Brontës, notes that the meaning of the word 'docile' in that period refers to being 'teachable' rather than merely submissive as one might use it today.[xxi] It is a subtle shift away from Jane's early view that Adèle was not given to applying herself to study, although the perspective is from the view of the teacher who teaches rather than the child who learns. At the end of the story, Jane reveals her ongoing commitment to Adèle valuing her companionship but there is no evidence that Rochester, in spite of

experiencing ‘remorse, repentance, the wish for reconciliation’ to God (JE, pp. 514-515) expresses any regret about his treatment of Adèle. The relationship that matters is the one between Jane and Rochester: ‘I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine’ (JE, p. 519).

Adèle begins her life serving the needs of her mother to earn a living by entertaining men. This could be considered to be the initial abuse suffered by Adèle—a situation that encourages her to engage in inappropriate adult behaviour which is implicit in Jane’s rejection of the song Adèle sings at her their first meeting. Rochester begrudgingly takes her on, just as Jane is taken on by Mrs Reed, and both children are abused, neglected, rejected and denigrated. Again, Rochester’s motivations are more about his own needs, including expiating his sins, rather than the needs of the child. Jane believes that she had ‘a conscientious solicitude for Adèle’s welfare and progress, and a quiet liking to her little self’ (JE, p. 128). When she does eventually become an advocate for her she offers little resistance to Rochester’s view of the child while privately she is sympathetic and grows to love her. Eventually, Adèle serves Jane’s needs by becoming ‘an obliging companion’ (JE, p. 519). In summary, Adèle is described as a character who has no personal agency and is there to serve the needs of others.

A first reading of Charlotte’s construction of Jane and her attitude to Rochester’s behaviour towards Adèle is that it is ‘an ethical blind spot’ on the part of Jane. ‘Ethical bind spot’ actions arise as part of those ‘automatic processes’ in which the person, often driven by ‘self-interest’, does not recognise that what they are doing is at least problematic and at worst harmful. Such actions stand in contrast to actions that are founded on ‘choice-based, conscious, and deliberate decisions’.[xxii] Jane does not recognise the deep trauma being done to Adèle by Rochester because she is largely driven by her ‘self-interest’. At the beginning of her time as a governess, she hopes, as do most teachers, for ‘a smooth career’ (JE, p. 128). Jane’s hope is realised by Adèle’s ability to make ‘reasonable progress’ under her care, the child’s ‘efforts to please’ and ‘a degree of attachment’ between teacher and pupil, all satisfying Jane’s self-interest. Even so, she decides to send Adèle away to boarding school again to meet her husband’s needs. This decision may also be thought about as an ‘automated response’ because all the characters subscribe to the British discourse that boarding schools are acceptable places for children.

Recent research has revealed the psychological damage that can occur as a result of the breaking of the primary bond between parent and child when young children are sent to live the majority of their lives in such settings where some may also experience abuse.[xxiii] Jane had a traumatic early boarding school experience as did Charlotte, especially at The Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge. Her experience moves Jane to seek a school with a more benign regime

when she returns to Rochester but not to reject the practice. Patrick Brontë, Charlotte's father, did the same by later sending Charlotte to Roe Head School which took 'older girls who were taught and looked after by well-intentioned women of some academic ability'.[xxiv] Although Charlotte had a positive boarding school experience at Roe Head, it still caused her great distress at leaving home although this was ameliorated by the kindness of the school principal and the formation of close friendships.[xxv] She is like many other boarding school girls across the centuries who have discovered that: 'Separation from family, painful though it was, brought the compensation of an early lesson in the value of real friendship and loyalty' forming 'a lifelong bond.[xxvi] However, when a child has experienced trauma, any reminder of it 'can trigger a more attenuated version of the strong negative emotions evoked by the original event'.[xxvii] So it was for Charlotte at Roe Head because being at boarding school again reminded her so much of her sisters Maria and Elizabeth, with her attributing their deaths to what happened at the Clergy Daughters School. While she was at Roe Head, she often wept as she spoke to her friend Ellen about them, emphasising how much she adored and admired them.[xxviii]

Charlotte suffered great trauma as a result of the death of her mother and her older sisters and the traumatic experiences at The Clergy Daughters' School. 'The legacy' of a traumatic childhood 'becomes increasingly burdensome' in adulthood.[xxix] A child cannot process such grief and loss. Trauma is 'preverbal', existing outside language, but our bodies 'reexperience terror, rage and helplessness … feelings that are almost impossible to articulate': 'Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or imagined past'.[xxx] Charlotte told her school friend, Mary Taylor, that she 'had never played and could not play' when Mary sought to include her in games. She preferred to be alone, enjoying what she saw in nature[xxxi]—that place of unconflicted safety for the traumatised child.[xxxii] It is easier for those who have experienced abuse and trauma to speak about what has been done, about 'victimization', than to find words to express the inner reality of the event.[xxxiii] The ongoing impact of such events 'repeatedly interrupts' normal life, as though 'time stops at the moment of trauma',[xxxiv] interrupting aspects of normal development.

When Charlotte realised that the publication of *Jane Eyre* had caused distress to the family of Reverend Carus Wilson who was the key driver of establishing the Clergy Daughter School and one of its trustees, her immediate sympathy was with his family rather than with her own child self who had suffered such a deep wounding. Still, she reiterated that what she wrote was true, telling her friend and first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, that 'the conditions' at the school 'were even worse' than what was in the book.[xxxv] Harman states that 'Charlotte Brontë's anger at the harm done to herself and her sisters [at the school] bursts forth in

Jane Eyre …'[xxxvi] Charlotte's positioning seems to oscillate between sympathy informed by the religious discourse of forgiveness towards those involved in the Clergy Daughters school and the anger she felt as a child about the abuse inflicted on Maria, the deaths of both girls and what she witnessed being done to other students there.

Alice Miller, who has written extensively about childhood trauma, warns that trying to see the situation from the abuser's perspective leads the survivor into compassion for the abuser at the cost of compassion for themselves. She advises that: 'The path to adulthood lies not in tolerance for the cruelties we have been exposed to but in the realization of our own truth and the development of empathy for the maltreated child.'[xxxvii] Psychiatrist and trauma expert Judith Lewis Herman similarly argues that for those who suffered in childhood there is a need to realise that what 'was stolen from them was irreplaceable'.[xxxviii] It seems that this is not a journey undertaken by Charlotte.

Social and cultural historian Carolyn Steedman argues that: 'The modern self is being imagined as being *inside*, and it is this spatial sense that the term "interiority" seeks to describe: the self *within* created by layering down an accretion of our childhood experiences, our own history, in a place inside'.[xxxix] There is little doubt that the Brontë novels, including *Jane Eyre*, have made a significant contribution to this process. However, there is a need to problematise the depiction of Adèle Varens through the modern lens of abuse and intergenerational trauma in order to avoid acceptance of Rochester and Jane's behaviour toward the child, thereby contributing to a blind spot in readers. It may be that the construction of the character arose from a blind spot in Charlotte Brontë's consciousness that is related to her own childhood trauma and lack of compassion towards her own young self.

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[i] Patrick Morris, 'The depiction of trauma and its effect on character development in the Brontë fiction', *Brontë Studies',* 38: 2, (2013), 167.
[ii] Morris, 157.
[iii] Morris, 162.
[iv] Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës: Anniversary Edition,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 83.
[v] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. by Stevie Davies (London: Penguin Books, 2006); hereafter JE. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[vi] Claire Harman, *Charlotte Brontë: A fiery heart* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2016), 323.
[vii] Harman, 323.
[viii] Yael Danieli, 'Introduction: History and conceptual foundations' in *International Handbook of Multigeneration Legacies of Trauma,* ed. by Yael Danieli, *(*New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 1988), 2.

[ix] Selma Fraiberg, Edna Adelson and Vivian Shapiro (1975) cited in Alicia F. Lieberman, Ann Chu, Patricia Van Horn and William W. Harris (2011), 'Trauma in early childhood: Empirical evidence and clinical implications', *Development and Psychopathology*, 23:2, (2011), 400.

[x] Prophecy Coles, *The Uninvited Guest from the Unrememered Past: An exploration of the unconscious transmission of trauma across generations,* (London: Karnac Books Ltd 2011). She offers in-depth discussion of the place of the wet nurse in a child's life, the lack of her in 'cultural history' and the 'mourning' a child can go through when that bond is suddenly broken, pp. 55-69.

[xi] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From domestic abuse to political terror* (London: Pandora, 2001), pp. 113-114.

[xii] Karlen Lyons-Ruth, Elisa Bronfman and Gwendolyn Atwood (1999) cited in Lieberman, 401.

[xiii] Terry Marks-Turlow, 'I am an avator of myself', *American Journal of Play,* 9:1, (2017), 177.

[xiv] Lyndall Gordon, *Charlotte Brontë: A passionate life,* (London: Virago Press, 2008), 15.

[xv] Gaskell, pp. 56-57.

[xvi] Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: Evolution of a genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.

[xvii] Harman, 54.

[xviii] Suzanne So Hoo 'We change the world by doing nothing', *Teacher Education Quarterly,* 13: 1, (2004), 200.

[xix] Cathryn A. Christy and Harrison Voigt, 'Bystander responses to public episodes of child abuse', Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 24:9, (1994), 842

[xx] Christy and Voigt, 484.

[xxi] Margaret Thormählen, *The Brontës and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.

[xxii] Dolly Chugh, Max H. Bazerman and Mahzarin R. Banaji (2005) and Max H. Bazerman and Ann E. Tenbrunsel, (2011) cited in Yuval Feldman and Eliran Halali 'Regulating ''good'' people in subtle conflict of interest situations', *Journal of Business Ethics,* (2019),154: 1, 66.

[xxiii] Nick Duffell, *The Making of Them: The British attitude to children and the boarding school system* (London: Lone Arrow Press, 2000); Joy Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome: The psychological trauma of the 'privileged child,* (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2015); Nick Duffell and Thurstine Basset, *Trauma, Abandonment and Privilege: A Guide to Therapeutic Work with Boarding School Survivors* (New York: Routledge, 2016): Christine Jack, *Recovering Boarding School Trauma Narratives: Christopher Robin Milne as a psychological companion on the journey to healing* (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2020).

[xxiv] Thormählen, 65.

[xxv] Harman, 73.

[xxvi] Ysenda Maxtone Graham, *Terms and Conditions: Life in girls' boarding schools 1939-1979* (London: Abacus, 2016), 278

[xxvii] Robert S. Pynoos, Alan M. Steinber and John Carl Piacentini, J.C. (1999) cited in Leiberman, 399.

[xxviii] Mary Taylor (no date) cited in Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* ed. by Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 81.

[xxix] Herman, 114.

[xxx] Bessel Van de Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma* (St Ives, UK: Penguin Random House, 2014), pp. 43-44.

[xxxi] Taylor, 79.

[xxxii] Alice Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood: The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self* translated by Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 10.
[xxxiii] Van de Kolk, 47.
[xxxiv] Herman, 37.
[xxxv] Gérin, 11.
[xxxvi] Harman, 54.
[xxxvii] Alice Miller, *The Body Never Lies: The lingering effects of hurtful parenting,* translated by Andrew Jenkins (New York: Norton & Company, 2004), 155.
[xxxviii] Herman, 193.
[xxxix] Carol Steedman, C. (1995) cited in Elizabeth Marshall (2006) 'Borderline girlhoods: Mental illness, adolescence, and femininity in *Girl, Interrupted', The Lion and the Unicorn,* 30:1, (2006), 121.