SHIRLEY AND THE LUDDITE MOVEMENT

A talk given by Dr Andrew Shields on 2nd April 2016

This paper will explore the ways in which Charlotte Brontë approached the history of the Luddite agitation of 1811 to 1813, in her novel, *Shirley*, first published in 1839. In the first part of the paper, we explore the historical context from which that movement emerged. More broadly speaking, we also consider the extent to which Brontë intended the novel to have a contemporary resonance, particularly in the light of the emergence of the Chartist movement in the United Kingdom in the period in which the novel was written. In this context, we also look at some of the complex interconnections and interactions that exist in *Shirley* between Brontë's treatment of the Luddite agitation and her pioneering dissection of what is sometimes described as the 'woman question' in Nineteenth century England.

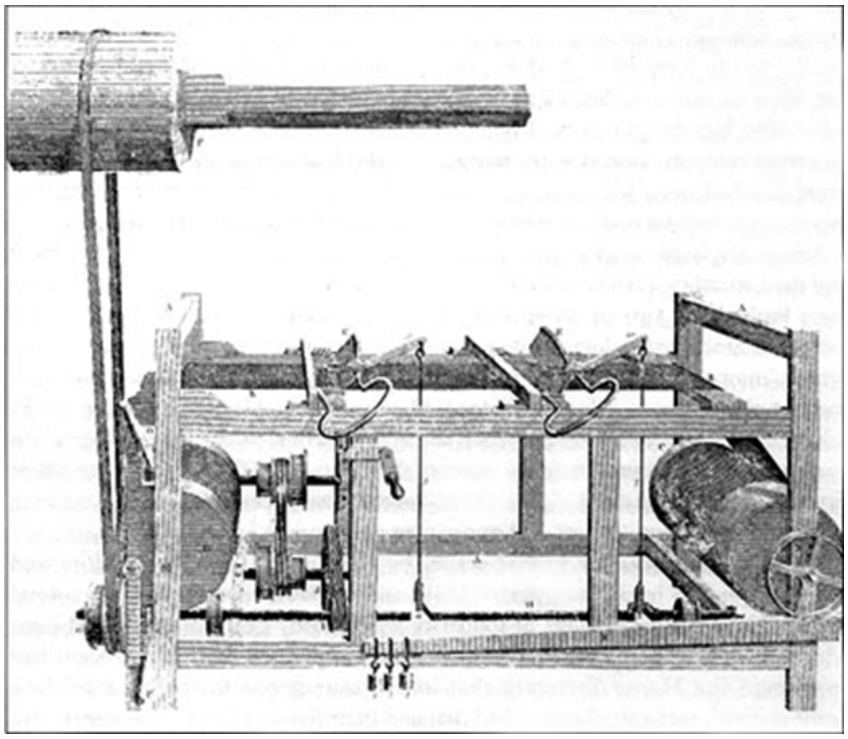
As a novel, *Shirley* has always stood out from Charlotte Brontë's other writings, in its treatment of contemporary (or near contemporary) social and political problems**.** It is also unique in its depiction of one of the earliest industrial protest movements of the Nineteenth Century – that is the Luddite movement.

Because the Luddite movement plays such an important role in *Shirley*, it may be useful at this point to look more closely at the main causes of its agitation. Central to these was the advance of mechanisation within the textiles industry in the course of the early Nineteenth Century. The movement was principally a response to the introduction of new machinery (or more advanced forms of old machinery) into the industry. These technological innovations included the improved 'gig-mill', a device which raised the nap on cloth before it was cut, a task that had previously been done by hand and which had taken a good deal of time.

The Luddites were also strongly opposed to the introduction of the shearing frame, a device which, in the words of the historian, E. P. Thompson, allowed cloth to be cut 'with a simplicity which dispensed with the need for skilled craftsmen'. Early in *Shirley* itself, the mill-

owner, Robert Moore, is shown as a keen advocate of the introduction of such frames and he is strongly opposed to the attempts made by his workers to dissuade him from employing them.

It has been estimated that these frames could cut cloth up to seven or eight times as quickly as could an individual shearman. The introduction of these new machines also enabled employers to hire unskilled workers to do these tasks, which had previously only been done by skilled workers. Generally speaking, the period of the Napoleonic wars had seen a dramatic decline in the position of textile workers and handloom weavers, right across Britain.



This decline was a result of a number of factors: among the most important of these were the economic fluctuations brought about by the war itself. In its early years, for example, such workers had been able to count on receiving relatively high wages for their products. However, these high prices also led to an inrush of unskilled persons, including small farmers, agricultural labourers and some artisans into the industry.

Many of these new recruits to the industry worked from home and they finished the yarn produced in the new manufactories. However, in the course of the war years, the prices that their employers received for their products fell dramatically, partly as a result of the disruption to the industry caused by the war itself. Their employers responded to this fall in prices by cutting wages and, as there was now a surplus of labour in the industry, wages within it were gradually cut lower and lower**.**

Thus, a parliamentary committee, which reported in 1835, estimated that the wages for handloom weavers had fallen from 26

shillings, 8 pence per week in the period 1797 to 1804, to only 14 shillings, 6 pence per week in the period between 1811 and 1818. The influx of large number of unskilled workers in the industry also gave employers the opportunity to undermine the position of the more skilled workers within it. Also, generally speaking, given the increased economic pressures on their employers, textile workers were now expected to work ever-longer hours, while earning less.

As a result of such wage reductions, the more skilled weavers began to campaign for the introduction of a legal minimum wage in the industry. However, in 1808, a mass petition to parliament designed to achieve this objective was completely ignored by it. In the following year, the more skilled weavers' attempts to secure the implementation of earlier legislation that had restricted entry into their profession and prohibited the use of certain machines in their workplaces also proved ineffective. Indeed, the government's response to their campaign was to repeal the Statute (the Statute of Artificers) originally introduced in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First on which the textile workers had based their claim.

As a result of this, it had, by this point, become clear to many of those employed in the textiles industry that they had very little hope of gaining any improvement in their working or their living conditions either from parliament or through the legal system as it then existed.

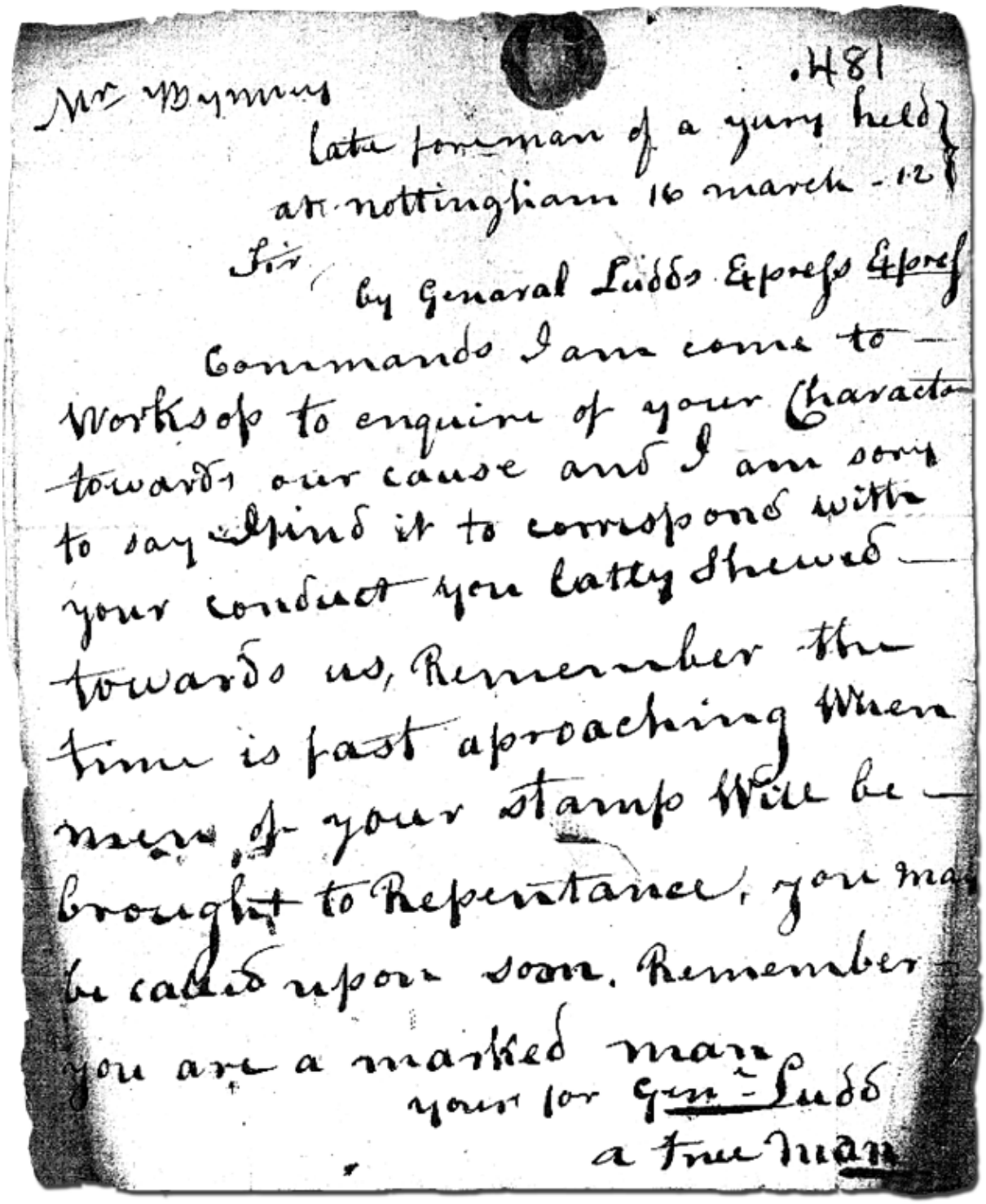
The Luddite agitation first began among the textile workers in Nottingham, whose position had steadily worsened in the course of the Napoleonic wars. As a result, their employers there had already subjected them to a series of significant wage cuts**.**

It should also be noted here that the Luddite agitation took place at a time of high food prices and of poor harvests. Thus, for example, in some parts of Britain, the average price of wheat had reached 95 shillings a quarter in 1811. This price can be contrasted, with the average price in 1798 which was 51 shillings a quarter. In 1812, the average price was to reach even higher levels at 126 shillings a quarter and this was to be the highest level it ever reached there.

In the early days of their agitation, the Luddites in Nottingham pioneered methods, which were later to be utilised by their counterparts elsewhere in the country. For example, their attacks were often

preceded by threatening letters to the employers from the mythical 'General Ned Ludd', warning them of the consequences of continuing those practises to which the Luddites were opposed. If these demands were not met, then, the employers' premises would be attacked and the frames in them would be broken.

Although the Luddites used similar methods in all of those areas in which they operated, the grievances which caused their activities



Mr Wynns .481

late foreman of a yarn held at nottingham 16 march - 12

Sir

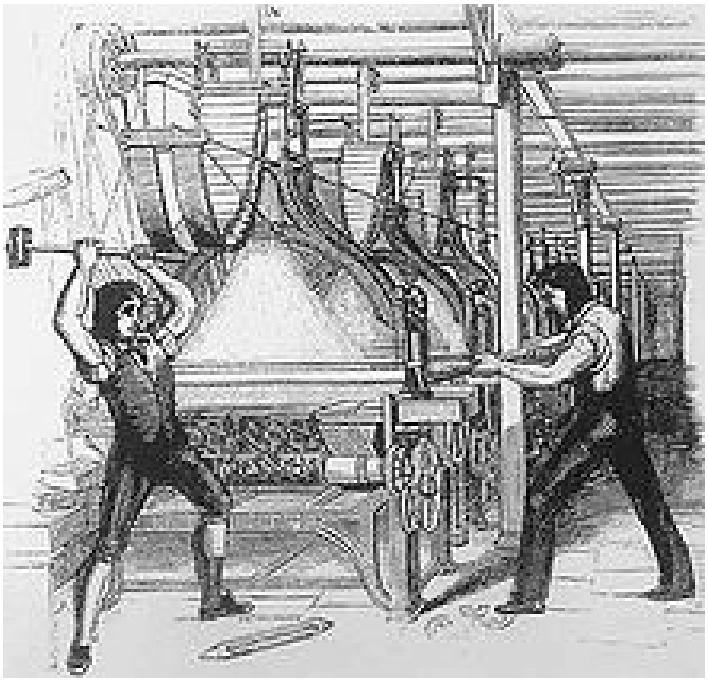
by General Ludds Express Express Commands I am come to — Works of to enquire of your Charact towards our cause and I am sorry to say find it to correspond with your conduct you lately shewed — towards us, Remember the time is fast aproaching When mens of your stamp Will be — brought to Repentance, you may be called upon soon. Remember — you are a marked man

your for Gen - Ludd

a true man

differed from area to area. The Luddite outbreak in the woollen industry in Yorkshire in 1811-12 (which is when and where *Shirley* is set) was much more directly a result of opposition to machinery than was its counterpart in Lancashire. The machine breaking there was far more directly related to the skilled weavers there (the 'croppers' as they were known) fears that the introduction of new machinery would destroy the privileged position that they had previously enjoyed in the industry.

In *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë refers to the way in which the introduction of 'certain new inventions into the staple industries of the North' had 'by greatly reducing the number of hands necessary to be employed' thrown 'thousands out of work and left them without any legitimate means of sustaining life.' From early 1812 onwards, the Luddites in Yorkshire regularly attacked those mills there in which frames were in use. For example, one employer in Huddersfield received a threatening letter at around this time, giving him warning to remove the 'shearing frames' from his factory.

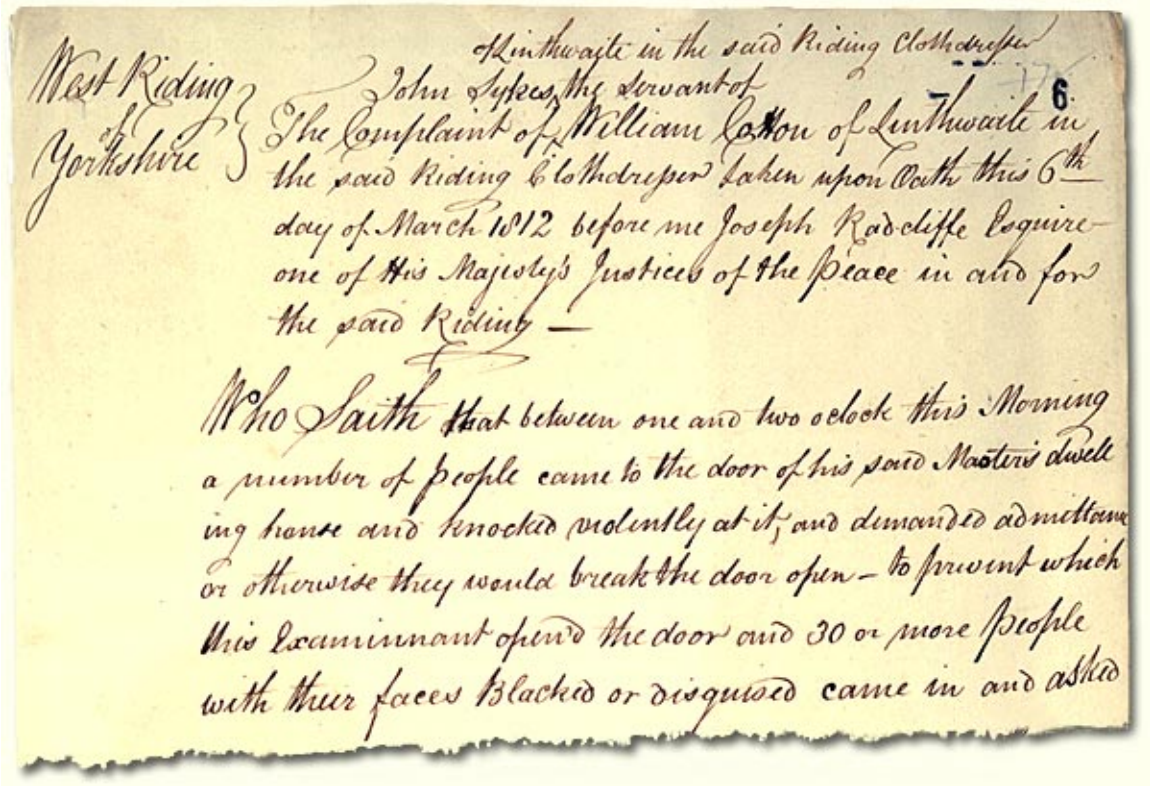


If not, the author of the letter warned, he would send one of his 'lieutenants with at least 300 men to destroy them'. If the employer were to make any attempt to resist this, the letter went on, the Luddite group had orders to 'burn all of his housing' and if he fired on them, the letter warned, they would murder him. In *Shirley* itself, the woollen manufacturer, Robert Moore receives a very similar warning early in the book and is actually shot at and wounded near its end.

As their agitation progressed, the Luddites in Yorkshire also began to attack some of the larger mills in towns like Leeds and Wakefield. Such attacks involved very large groups, with some 300 men being involved in one attack on a mill near Wakefield on 9th April

1812. These types of attacks also required a high level of organisation and of discipline.

In *Shirley*, Charlotte Bronte also links the progress of the Luddite agitation in Yorkshire to the deleterious effects that the 'Orders in Council', introduced by the British government late 1807, had on the Yorkshire woollen trade. In this context, it is important to remember that *Shirley* is set against the historical backdrop of the Napoleonic wars – that is the series of military conflicts between Britain along with a number of other European powers and the French Regime led by Napoleon which lasted, off and on, from 1803 to 1815. The Orders in Council had proved particularly controversial among contemporaries as


West Riding of Yorkshire } The Complaint of William Lofthouse of Linthwaite in the said Riding Clothdresser Taken upon Oath this 6th day of March 1812 before me Joseph Radcliffe Esquire one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the said Riding —

of Linthwaite in the said Riding Clothdresser

John Sykes the Servant of

6.

Who Saith that between one and two o'clock this Morning a number of people came to the door of his said Masters dwelling house and knocked violently at it, and demanded admittance or otherwise they would break the door open — to prevent which this Examinant opened the door and 30 or more people with their faces Blacked or disguised came in and asked

they had been introduced using the royal prerogative and had not been passed by parliament.

In effect, they were designed as a response to Napoleon's attempts to prevent Britain from trading with the European continent. To undermine this 'continental blockade', as it was known, the British government declared its own retaliatory blockade on any harbours on the continent that excluded British commerce. The Orders were particularly aimed at preventing the French trade with North America and, as a result, they were very unpopular with the government of the United States.

Taken in combination, the restrictions on commercial trading, which were imposed by the 'continental blockade' and by the Orders in Council, had disastrous effects for British manufacturers. The Orders in Council also, as *Shirley* repeatedly points out, led to severe tensions between the aristocratic ruling elite in Britain, at that time and their middle class counterparts. Indeed, this leads Robert Moore, the leading male character in the novel, who himself is a woollen manufacturer, to favour the reaching of a compromise peace with France. This, he believes, is the only course which can prevent the ruin of his business. As Moore points out early in the book, America has, in the past, been the main market for his woollen cloth. However the Orders in Council have had the effect of cutting him off from that market.

In his own words, the Orders 'ruin' him; they 'stand in his way'. As a result of them he 'cannot get on… [as he] cannot execute… [his] plans for his business.' Indeed, Moore goes on, he has found himself 'baffled at every turn by their untoward effect.'

Furthermore, Moore is also a keen advocate of 'progress' and is anxious to introduce the newest technological innovations into his woollen mill. In the early part of the novel, this enthusiasm for technological progress on Moore's part is combined with a seeming indifference for the fate of those whom it will displace.

Along with this, Moore is also an outsider in the area in which he has settled. His mother was Belgian and he is portrayed as being something of 'a hybrid in nature', who is inclined to 'isolate his individual person from any community in which his lot might temporarily be thrown.' Indeed, throughout, the book, Moore is portrayed in rather ambivalent terms. As one of Charlotte Brontë's recent biographers, Lyndall Gordon, has put it, at times he is depicted as being 'unpleasantly hard' both on his workmen and on those in his immediate circle.

Indeed, early in the novel, the narrator claims that Moore did 'not sufficiently care when the new inventions [he introduced in his factory] threw the old work-people out of employ [and] he never asked himself where those to whom he no longer paid weekly wages found daily bread'. However, in this negligence, the narrator goes on, 'he only resembled thousands of others, on whom the starving poor of Yorkshire seemed to have a closer claim.'

Perhaps the most famous episode in the history of Luddism in Yorkshire was the assault on the property of William Cartwright, of Rawfolds in the Spen Valley in April 1812. This attack is particularly well known as a result of the detailed (if somewhat fictionalised**)** description of it in *Shirley*. In the novel, Rawfolds Mill becomes Hollows' Mill and the character of Robert Moore is based, in part at least, on Cartwright himself. It has been estimated that about 150 Luddites took part in the attack on Rawfolds Mill. Aware that his mill might be attacked, Cartwright had secured it, with the aid of soldiers.

Cartwright's Mill, Rawfolds.

He had also armed a number of his own employees. In the course of the attack, a number of the Luddites were wounded while two were killed, before the party finally retreated. As in *Shirley*, the attack on Rawfolds Mill helped to bring about what the English historian, E.P. Thompson, has described as a 'profound emotional reconciliation between the mill-owners and the local authorities.' Up to that point, they had been divided by their attitudes towards the war with France and towards the Orders in Council, in particular.

However**,** the two groups were to become reconciled through their shared hostility to the Luddites**.** Indeed, the Luddites' militancy posed a threat to the social and economic power of both the aristocracy and of the middle class, who lived in the locality of Rawfolds Mill. These middle class people also included Patrick Brontë, who was then living near the epicentre of the agitation at Hartshead in Yorkshire.

This new alliance between the middle class and the aristocracy is symbolised in the novel by the bond of mutual respect that is forged, at the time of the attack, between Robert Moore, a manufacturer and supporter of the Whig party, and the local Church of England cleric and 'high Tory' defender of the privileges of the Established Church and of the aristocracy, the Reverend Matthewson Helstone (who, is in

many respects based on Patrick Brontë's friend, the militant and militaristic Church of England cleric, Hammond Robertson).

Previously in the novel, both men had been deeply distrustful of each other and had taken completely opposed positions on the question of the continuance of the war with France. Indeed, at one point in the book, Helstone describes Moore's attitude towards the war as that 'of a tradesman, narrow, selfish and unpatriotic'. In real life, in the aftermath of the attack on Rawfolds Mill, the authorities found it immensely difficult to find anybody in the neighbourhood who would give any information on the identities of the attackers. Indeed, in general, the Luddites had a great deal of popular support in the areas in which they operated.

Following the attack, Cartwright himself incurred a great deal of unpopularity in the district, an unpopularity which is not reflected in the novel. This dislike of Cartwright in the local area was largely due the belief there that he had delayed far too long in sending for medical aid for the Luddites injured in the attack on the mill. In consequence, he was held to be at least partly responsible for their deaths. Despite this, in *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë consistently downplays the extent of the popular support which the Luddites attracted. Thus, while she displays considerable sympathy for the problems faced by individual people, who are poor or oppressed (one example being the workingman, William Farren) she appears essentially hostile to any organised and coherent movement, initiated by the working class itself.

In essence, her position in the book is largely that of a paternalistic Conservative. In this sense, she is not completely opposed to gradual social reform provided that this is initiated by benevolent members of the upper and middle classes rather than demanded from below by the poor themselves. Indeed, at the time that *Shirley* itself was written, the Chartist movement was having considerable success in organising working class people in Britain.

As a result, it has been argued by some subsequent commentators, that the novel itself was intended as a response to the threat posed by that movement and as a reminder of the need for a renewal of the alliance between the aristocracy and the middle class to repel the threat that it posed to both of their privileges.

Indeed, in her new biography of Charlotte Brontë, Claire Harman has put forward important new evidence that Charlotte Brontë had

originally intended to set the novel in contemporary times and to use it to explore the character and significance of the Chartist movement. In this respect, it is significant that the defence of Hollows Mill is presented in heroic terms in the novel. This heroic view of Cartwright's defence of the mill was first established in the local newspaper, the *Leeds Mercury*, in its initial accounts of the incident.

As the principal paper of the Yorkshire middle class and one broadly favourable to the commercial interests there, it was keen to present the actions of the defenders of the mill in the most favourable light possible. In its first detailed account of the events there, published on 18 April 1812, the paper alluded to the remarkable 'heroism of the little band that [had] guarded the premises. It also expressed its admiration for the cool 'intrepidity' with which they had repulsed the Luddite attack. In *Shirley* itself, Brontë also points to Robert Moore's involvement in the defence of Hollows Mill as representing an important stage in his development away from the selfishness, which had characterised him in the early part of the novel.

WHEREAS,

Several EVIL-MINDED PERSONS have assembled together in a riotous Manner, and DESTROYED a NUMBER of

FRAMES,

In different Parts of the Country:

THIS IS

TO GIVE NOTICE,

That any Person who will give Information of any Person or Persons thus wickedly

BREAKING THE FRAMES,

Shall, upon CONVICTION, receive

50 GUINEAS

REWARD.

And any Person who was actively engaged in RIOTING, who will impeach his Accomplices, shall, upon CONVICTION, receive the same Reward, and every Effort made to procure his Pardon.

☞ Information to be given to Messrs. COLDHAM and ENFIELD.

Nottingham, March 16, 1811.

By contrast, and like many other Conservatives of her time, Brontë attributes the Luddite agitation primarily to the influence of outside agitators, such as the drunken Methodist preacher, Moses Barraclough. This perceived connection between radicalism and drinking is stressed throughout book. For example, the Luddite in it who shoots at Moore himself is described as having died 'of delirium tremens, a year after' that event. Robert Moore himself also considers the leaders of the agitation to be 'downdraughts, bankrupts, men

always in debt and often in drink – men who had nothing to lose, and much – in the way of character, cash and cleanliness – to gain.' This characterisation of the Luddite leadership is, however, belied by the fact that it took the sending of a force of some four thousand troops to Yorkshire to bring an end to the disturbances there.

Indeed, by the summer of 1812, there were some 12,000 troops stationed in the disturbed districts. As has been pointed out by many historians, this army, as it has been pointed out, which was larger than the army that the Duke of Wellington had had under his command at the time of the Peninsular War. Eventually, however, the Luddite movement was to gradually die out, partly as a result of government repression, and partly through the activities of those informers and spies that infiltrated it.

In *Shirley* Charlotte Brontë also examines another area of human relations, which she believes to be in great need of reform; that is, the relationship between the sexes and the related question of what role women should play in British society. Brontë is particularly concerned with the plight of those single middle class women who, she believed, had no proper outlet for exercising their abilities. Her strong belief was that those positions which were open to single such women at that time including those of schoolteacher and governess (both of which she had worked at herself), were far too constricting to be truly satisfying.

This lack of a proper outlet for women's intellectual capacities is the subject of one of the most impassioned passages in the book. In it,

Caroline Helstone argues that she believes that:
Single women should have more to do – [and should have] better chances of interesting and profitable occupation that they possess now... Look [she goes on] at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood: the Armitages, the Birtwhisties, the Sykeses. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters [however] have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness.

Indeed, in the novel Caroline herself is prevented, at great cost to both her mental and her physical health, from taking on any occupation by her tyrannical uncle, the clergyman Matthewson Helstone. As the English literary critic, Lyndall Gordon has put it, Caroline thus serves to represent 'all [of those Victorian] women whose energies were unused by a society that relegated them by law and custom, to ineffectual positions.' In this respect, their treatment by the patriarchal elite which then governed Britain has similarities to the way in which this group treated the unemployed poor.

At the opposite pole to Caroline Helstone, in terms of her experiences as a woman, stands the character after whom the novel is named, Shirley Keeldar. By contrast to Caroline, she is independently wealthy, highly intelligent and assertive, and she refuses to accept the secondary position to which women have been relegated in Victorian society. Again, in Lyndall Gordon's words, given the constraints of the times, Shirley can, perhaps, best be seen as 'a theoretic possibility' rather than as a realistic character. She is, as Gordon points out, 'what a woman might be if she combined independence and means of her own with intellect.'

Shirley herself points out, at one point in the novel, that as a landowner, she holds 'the position of a man.' Indeed, she is particularly forceful in her defence of Moore's conduct at the time of the attack on the mill. Also, later in the novel, she tells Caroline Helstone that 'if once the poor [were to] gather [together] and rise in the form of the mob'; she would turn against them 'as an aristocrat.' In

this respect, *Shirley* reflects Charlotte Brontë's own Conservative politics. Indeed, there is an ongoing tension in the novel between her desire for female emancipation and her advocacy of the maintenance of a paternalist position towards the working class and the poor.

Ultimately, however, *Shirley* can be seen, in many respects, as a less coherently structured work than is, for example, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. However, its very diffuseness can be seen, in part at least, as a product of its ambitions. Thus, it seeks to address a very wide variety of questions, ranging from an analysis of the relationships between the rich and the poor, between Anglicans and dissenters, between the landed aristocracy and the rising middle class, between factory owners and their employees, and between men and women.

While the book is undoubtedly heavily influenced by Charlotte Brontë's conservative politics, nevertheless its consistent questioning of contemporary social mores, particularly in relation to the roles played by women often have surprisingly radical implications. It is this ambivalence in Charlotte Brontë's attitude, which give *Shirley* much of its power and which also make it, despite its limitations, a very important and intriguing historical document.

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WAS CHARLOTTE BRONTË A ‘CLOSET CATHOLIC’?

A talk given by Dr Christopher Cooper on 4th June 2016

Prejudice, and often persecution, against people whose religious beliefs are different to one’s own, has been part of the human story for thousands of years. But why does religion cause so much social upheaval? The answer lies partly in the fact that religion touches on the deepest aspects of the human psyche and partly because, very often, national and political divisions seem to become identified with religious differences.

These days in the west we have the fear of Islam. With many of us there is a vague uneasiness – with some it’s more outspoken. But this isn’t based on the theological differences between Christianity and Islam. No, it’s more to do with political and ideological differences between the two cultures. We fear the radical Islamists who seem to be fixated on violence. Although most of us acknowledge that such extremists form a tiny fraction of the world of practising Muslims, we still have an underlying fear that in some way our way of life and our culture is under threat.

Most of us remember many decades ago when there was a great divide between Catholics and Protestants. In this country we didn’t fear being blown up by those on the other side of the fence, but we were often warned not to associate too much with them.

Ever since Henry the Eighth broke with Rome there was tension between Protestants and Catholics. At times it resulted in acts of violence on both sides.

Many great houses had their priest’s holes – secret rooms where a Catholic priest could be hidden if the authorities came to check on a rumour that mass was being performed in secret.

I remember staying in the Haworth Old Hall, at the bottom of Main Street, and our room had the remnants of a Priest's Hole which had now become a dressing room off the bedroom.

By the end of the eighteenth century this tension had abated to some extent. Catholics were tolerated, though they weren't permitted to participate in public life and they certainly weren't allowed to vote. But in the first half of the nineteenth century anti-Catholic feeling began to increase again and became a major topic of public discussion. Newspapers reported stories that fuelled this debate. Numerous anti Popery pamphlets were widely published and well-attended public meetings were held throughout the country which fanned anti Catholic sentiments.

Now my intention today is not to take sides. Was the Catholic Church the great danger to the British way of life that it was claimed to be, or was the controversy a well-orchestrated attack on Mother Church? My personal view, for what it's worth, is that, like a lot of prejudices, there were sufficient abuses for the anti Catholic prejudice to take hold – on the 'no smoke without fire' principle – but that there was a large amount of exaggeration and unjustified fear. The majority of Catholics went quietly about their business, alarmed at the bad press they were getting – just as the moderate Muslims in Australia are alarmed about the prejudice that their extremist brothers are producing. In other words there was probably truth on both sides, but to decide which side was more in the right is not my task.

Since there are no doubt many Catholics in the audience I should warn you that some of you might be offended in my reporting of what was said and written at the time. But my role is not to enter into the debate but rather to describe the context of anti Catholic feeling in which Charlotte Brontë grew up. Then I will move on to Charlotte's position in the debate and to examine what she wrote in her letters and her novels that may give some clue as to her own ideas on the subject.

As I've said, by the end of the eighteenth Century the tension between Catholics and Protestants had largely subsided. There were certain legal restrictions placed on Catholics but Catholicism was not seen, at that time, as a threat. This was partly because the Catholics were only a small minority of the population and partly because the legal restrictions kept them under control. They could practise their

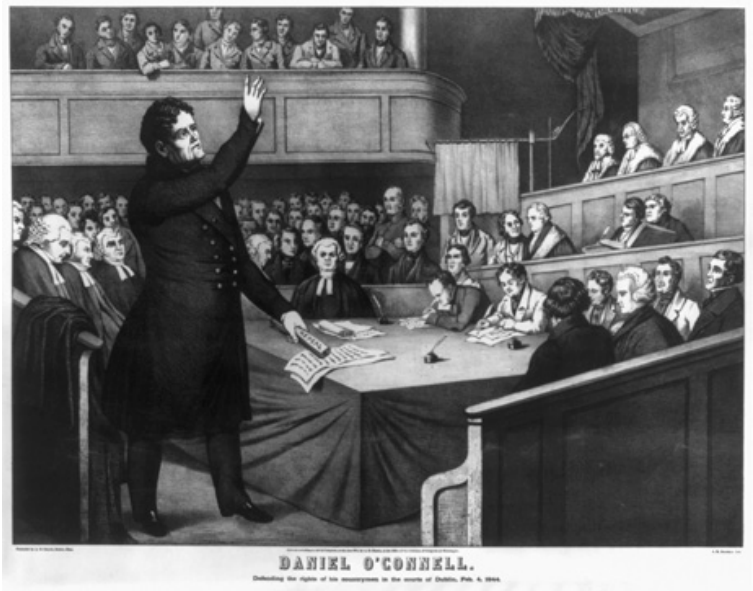
religion without fear of persecution but there were laws that prevented the Catholic hierarchy from gaining too much power. Moreover Catholics couldn't take a seat in Parliament, nor could they even vote. Mind you the same restriction applied to every woman, be she Protestant or Catholic. And Protestant men, if they weren't landowners, were also unable to vote.

Banning Catholics from taking an active role in politics was considered to be a very necessary precaution, because the Church of England was the state church. Parliament passed laws regulating the operation of the established Church and it wouldn't do, for example, for Roman Catholics to have a say in the appointment of the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

A similar situation still exists today in relation to the monarch. If Prince Charles had been a Catholic he would never be able to become King, because the monarch is the titular head of the Church of England.

So, as I said, the status quo was accepted by all up to the end of the eighteenth century. To the majority of the population Catholicism was seen as something foreign and exotic. The Gothic novel displayed what were seen as the dark activities of the Catholic clerics in exotic places like Italy and Spain. The reading public of England thrilled to the excitement of wicked monks incarcerating innocent young girls in dark, dank dungeons for their pleasure with novels such as Mrs Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* and Lewis's *The Monk*. Of course there was no possibility of such things happening in civilised England. Local Catholics were not seen as a threat in that sense.

Then, during Charlotte's lifetime, there was a rapid increase in Irish immigration. The potato famine sent Irish Catholics across the sea. Most went to America, or Canada or Australia, but a considerable number went to England.


DANIEL O'CONNELL.

For example, in the decade from 1841 to 1851 the Irish population of

England almost doubled, from about 290,000 to 520,000. And while a tiny minority is willing to accept civil restrictions, a large minority usually demands to have equal rights.

In 1823 Daniel O'Connell founded the Catholic Association to campaign for the removal of discrimination against Catholics. In 1828 he was elected an MP for County Clare. But, being a Catholic, he wasn't permitted to take his seat in the House of Commons.

This caused a lot of disquiet among the Catholic population and the protests were so extreme that the authorities feared that it would develop into civil unrest, or even worse. Pressure was put on Parliament to change the law and in 1829 the Catholic Relief Act was passed allowing Catholics to vote – provided they were male and owned land, of course.

And so Catholics were now allowed to sit in the House of Commons, and O'Connell was able to take his seat.

The family in the Haworth Parsonage watched these developments closely and were very pleased with the outcome. Although he was an Evangelical Anglican, Patrick Brontë was quite

ecumenical and believed strongly in Catholic emancipation, as did his children.

Patrick was born and grew up as a Protestant in Northern Ireland. But he had neighbours and relatives who were Catholic. There's no record of Patrick interacting with the Catholics at Haworth – if there were any. At that time there was no Catholic Church in the village. But he was on friendly relations with the non conformists – the Methodists and the Baptists.

Patrick attended the opening of the Hall Green Baptist Church, at the bottom of High Street, as the chairman of the Parish Council and his signature was affixed to certain official documents relating to the setting up of the church. I remember seeing one of these documents proudly on display in the entrance foyer of the church.

By 1850 the Catholics in England were so numerous that the Catholic Church re-established the full church hierarchy. Thirteen sees were established, as was the archdiocese of Westminster. For the first time in several centuries, there was a Catholic archbishop in England, Cardinal Wiseman.

Unfortunately Cardinal Wise man failed to live up to his name. Rather than quietly re-establishing the Catholic hierarchy, he acted as if he was the primate of all England. He sent out a Pastoral Letter in which he spoke of "governing" the various counties of England. This inappropriate language inflamed the general population and fuelled the anti Catholic feeling. Windows were broken in many Catholic churches, and Queen Victoria was not amused. "Am I no longer Queen of England?" she is reported to have asked.

As I said, Patrick Brontë was born in Northern Ireland as a Protestant, but was surrounded by Catholics. His wife, Maria, was a Methodist, as was Aunt Branwell who helped to raise the children after Maria died.

Children of a minister are often strongly influenced by religion in one way or another. Sometimes they react violently against religion and reject it altogether. Sometimes they become very pious. Or they may develop an attitude somewhere in between the two extremes.

Charlotte, Emily and Anne had quite different attitudes to one another when it came to religion. Emily is sometimes considered to

have been an agnostic, or a believer in some sort of pantheistic nature worship. But I don't believe that she rejected Christianity. She simply adapted it to suit her rather individual personality.

Anne was attracted to the Moravian teachings and sometimes struggled with certain theological questions, such as predestination. Charlotte's faith centred round the established Church of England and its formal structure. Though she often ridiculed her father's curates she eventually married one and found fulfilment in being a minister's wife.

The anti Catholic mood was added to by the rise of the Oxford Movement which led to the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England. The movement began with a small group at the University of Oxford. They argued against what they perceived to be the increasing secularisation of the Church. They wanted to return to the doctrines of the early Church Fathers.

They felt that the Church of England, in rejecting what they saw as the abuses of the Catholic Church – such as the sale of indulgences – also rejected much that was good.

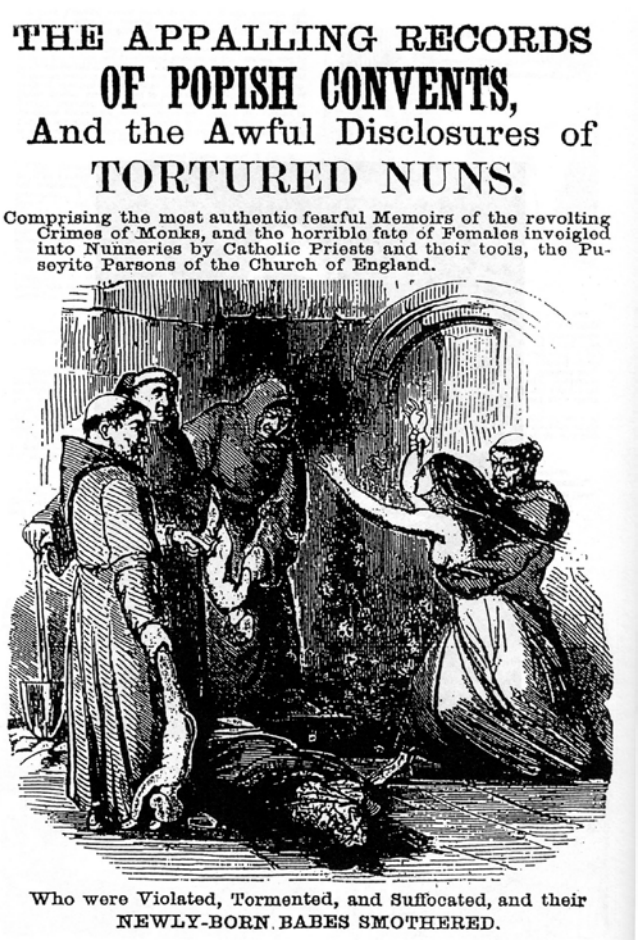
John Keble at Oriel College was the main leader of this movement at its beginning. After Keble retired from Oxford the leadership was taken over by John Henry Newman the Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin. The movement published a series of tracts called *Tracts for the Times* and the members of the Oxford Movement were often called Tractarians.

Over a period of eight years they published ninety tracts. One was on the subject of Transubstantiation – *What does Consecration of the Eucharistic Elements Signify?* Tract number ninety was particularly controversial. It was written by Newman in 1841 in which he argued that nothing in the 39 articles, the foundation stone of the Church of England contradicted the edicts of the Catholic Council of Trent.

In 1841 Edward Pusey, a fellow of Oriel College, joined the group. When Newman converted to Catholicism Pusey became the leader of the Oxford Movement and his followers became known as the Puseyites. Pusey championed the idea of re-establishing religious orders within the Church of England and in 1841 he presided over the ordination of the first Church of England nun for over three hundred years.

The Puseyites reinstated some of the ancient rituals in the parish of St Saviours in Leeds. The sign of the cross was brought back, vestments were worn, thuribles were swung and genuflecting was encouraged. Pusey brought back confession and holy anointing. The rest of the Church of England were alarmed that England was becoming Catholic from within.

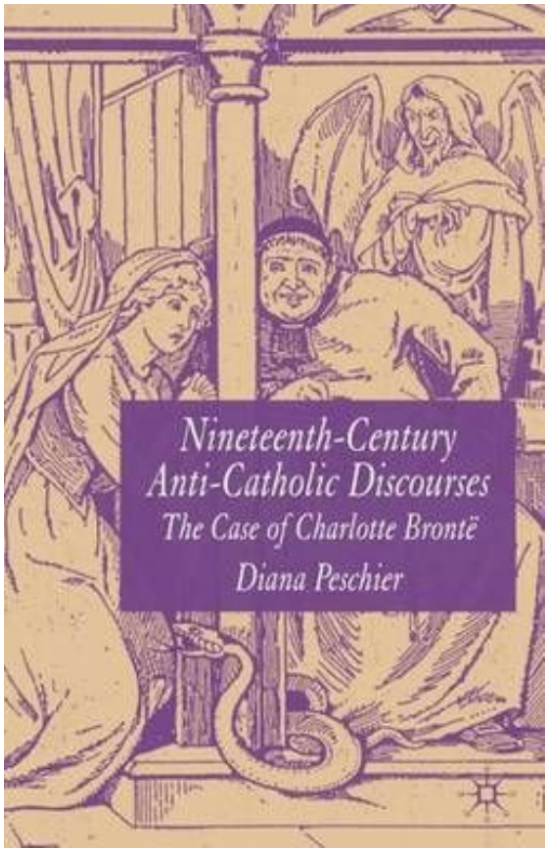
Numerous anti-Catholic pamphlets and books were published during this period and were widely read and discussed. Here are some of the more extreme examples.



In the novels portrayed convents as virtual prisons with young, innocent, and of course beautiful, girls being imprisoned against their will. In 1847, Frances Trollope wrote *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* which tells of priestly intrigue and deception.

Although it comes much later, Wilkie Collins' novel *The Black Robe* fits right into the anti-Catholic mould with tales of a priest seeking to regain Vange Abbey, broken up by Henry VIII and now in the hands of Romayne, a Protestant. Father Benwell goes to great lengths, and tries all sorts of deception, to make a Catholic of Romayne and hence induce him to sign the abbey over to the Church.

Much of my talk is based on *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses : The Case of Charlotte Brontë*, by Diana Peschier. In it she writes:



> It is important to place Charlotte Brontë's writing within its historical context and to note her various expressions of sarcastic intolerance of the Roman church; an intolerance that, according to her biographer Lyndall Gordon, she reserved for Catholicism alone. However it is also interesting to note that the literature of the sub-genre of anti-Catholicism that grew up in the first half of the nineteenth century created a particular climate – a climate within which Brontë would express herself through the popular images of this particularly Protestant writing, even she did not intend her text to be directed against the Catholic Church.

In other words, even when Charlotte wasn't intentionally having a go at the Catholic Church she promoted anti-Catholic views unconsciously, because of the pervading ideas of society around her.

So was this fear of Catholicism based on fact? To some extent it was. For example the *Times* reported the following story. In 1844 the Dutch ambassador at Turin was recalled but his return to Holland was delayed. On the 8th of June there was a fireworks display in honour of the birth of an heir to the Duke of Savoy. The ambassador and his family were expected to attend. But their young teenage daughter complained of feeling unwell and asked to be allowed to stay home. Reluctantly they left her behind. But when they got home they found that she had gone.

Subsequent investigations revealed that for some weeks she had been secretly in contact with a Catholic priest who had been schooling her in the Catholic faith. The Archbishop of Turin said that he had reason to believe that she had sought refuge in a convent, but he was unable to say where. Despite extensive enquiries they were never able to locate their daughter. Every attempt to find her was resisted by the Catholic hierarchy. Her father might have had more success if he'd still been an ambassador, but he was now just an ordinary citizen.

On appealing to the King he was told that the King sympathised but he dared not interfere for fear of being excommunicated.

The attitude of the Catholic Church at the time was that any young girl over the age of 12 had the right to religious independence from her parents and could be permitted to seek refuge in a convent, even against the parents' wishes. Whether this principle was legally valid, depended on the laws of the relevant country. But even if it wasn't legal, secrecy and deception could be employed.

Catholics on the other side of the Atlantic were also getting a bad press. There was also the case of Maria Monk in Canada who, in 1837, wrote a book called *Awful Disclosures*.

In it she claims to have been lured from home to serve as a novice and then as a black nun. She claimed to have been raped by priests, as a result of which she gave birth to a baby.

To avoid having the baby murdered, which seemed to her to be a real possibility, she managed to escape. Her story talks of torture in damp underground cells and sexual slavery.

In England there were many stories of young Protestant girls, and also young boys but principally girls, being seduced by young priests into embracing the Catholic faith. They were told that

their Protestant parents were putting their souls in jeopardy and the priests urged the need for secrecy. Then at an opportune moment they were whisked off into the protection of a convent or monastery. This was with their consent, though not their parents', but there were stories of children being kept against their will if they later changed their mind.

Such practices weren't widespread, at least in England, but enough cases were reported to suggest that there could be a problem. In 1852 a collection of intercepted letters, supposedly from a Romish priest to a Protestant youth, was published. In these letters the youth is cautioned that his father's opposition to his embracing the "one true faith" put his soul in peril and assured him that he was fully justified in acting against his parent's authority. He was reminded of Christ's injunction that "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me".

Whether or not these letters were genuine they certainly stirred up anti-Catholic feelings. Another accusation was that those young people who came from rich families were particularly targeted. It was claimed that their money was even more important to the church than their souls.

A famous court case of this period was one involving Augusta Talbot. She was daughter of the Honourable Henry Talbot, half brother of the Earl of Shrewsbury. As a child she became an orphan and was placed by her guardian in a convent. In 1850, at the age of 19, she inherited £60,000 and her stepfather believed that she was being pressured into becoming a nun and breaking with her past life. He took the matter to court.

The *Times* in 1851 reported the case and heard the following allegation:

> A priestly influence had been exercised over the mind of Miss Talbot from her earliest infancy, with a view of inducing her to embrace a conventual life, and therefore secure her large fortune for the Roman Catholic Church.

Such stories were propagated in anti-Catholic pamphlets and public lectures. The Reverend M. Hobart Seymour gave a lecture in 1852 at the invitation of 'The Ladies of Bath'. The invitation may

have come from the ladies but the lecture was for men only. There were 15,000 men in the audience.

With no ladies present Reverend Seymour could go into great detail about the sexual practices that were purported to go on inside the convent walls. I'm sure that many in the audience may have been genuinely concerned and fearful that their daughters may be seduced but there is no doubt that a large number of the men who attended were simply attracted by the racy stories, just as in more modern times men have admitted reading *Playboy*, "but only for the articles"!

Of course such accusations were refuted by the Catholics. In 1851 Cardinal Newman wrote:

> A Protestant is at liberty to bring a charge against us, and challenge us to refute, not any proof he brings, for he brings none, but his simple assumption or assertion. And perhaps we accept his challenge, and then we find we have to deal with matters so vague or so minute, so general or so particular, that we are at our wit's end to know how to grapple with them.

Another very important issue that was raised by the anti-Catholics was the practice of confession. This was of particular concern in the case of mixed marriages – where the father was a Protestant and the mother, and hence all the children, were a Catholics.

It was claimed that such a wife had two husbands. Her spouse had possession of her body but her priest had possession of her soul. The priest, it was claimed, knew all the innermost secrets of his wife – things that her husband had no knowledge of. Not only would the priest know her secret thoughts, but he even discovered her secret temptations. She might be a faithful wife, but if she was sexually attracted to another man she was encouraged to confess this to the priest – or so it was claimed.

The accusations were that the priest was not merely a neutral listener, but that he encouraged her to go into great detail about her intimate life with her husband in order to gratify his lust.

It was said that she would be asked to go into great detail about what she and her husband got up to in the bedroom and she would be told that certain of their sexual practices were sinful. The fact that what was revealed in the confessional was a holy secret meant that it was difficult to know whether such abuse was widespread.

Jules Michelet wrote in 1846 that women, and in particular wives, confess not to "the black oak of the confessional" but to a man of flesh and blood". This man knows more of the woman than her husband. The priest is viewed as dangerous because he "has her secret". Michelet believed that women, because of their modesty, are at first unwilling to speak to the priest and yet they speak in spite of themselves because they are "fascinated like the bird by the serpent".

The image of the priest being a serpent, echoing the temptation of Eve, is one that is widespread in anti-Popery literature of the time. Not only does the priest know all the wife's deepest secrets, but she is also encouraged to tell the priest her husband's secrets. Moreover she is told that it is her holy duty to spy on her husband and report it to her confessor.

In *Priests, Women and Families* Michelet wrote:

He speaks in a whisper, but every secret word is caught up. If he writes his most secret thoughts, they are read – by whom? Nobody knows. What he dreams of when he lays on his pillow, he is much astonished to hear next day, cried about in public thoroughfares.

This was the picture painted by the anti-Catholic pamphleteers and public speakers. Even without hard evidence that such practices were widespread it is easy to see how mistrust and jealousy might fester.

Daughters were even more vulnerable in the confessional than their mothers, it was claimed. Take the case of a young girl receiving her first confession. She is of an age when she begins to experience a sexual awakening. Imagine her vulnerability if her confessor priest is unscrupulous. He can explore and awaken her sexual feelings and discuss things that she would not dream of talking about to her mother, let alone her father. No doubt such unscrupulous priests did exist. The anti-Catholics claimed that many, or even most, priests were like this.

There are stories that the evils of the confessional went beyond mere titillating talk. Assignations were made, with mothers or daughters, for secret meetings that culminated in a rather more physical interaction. One pamphlet describes how the Protestant father might entertain his wife's confessor to tea, not knowing that he has had intimate relations with his wife or daughter or even that one of the children, playing at his feet, was not his own.

Villette is considered to be Charlotte Brontës most anti-Catholic novel. Certainly, of all her novels, the theme of Catholicism is most pervasive. We must not be too quick in attributing Lucy Snowe's views to Charlotte, especially as Charlotte is reported to have said that she didn't like Lucy at all. Yet, from what we know of her own experiences in Brussels, as well as her letters, Lucy's views on Catholicism seem to run parallel to Charlotte's own.

Lucy is a poor orphan who went to Brussels, or Villette in the novel, to try to earn a crust. She ends up in a girls' boarding school, or Pensionnat, and eventually finds employment as an English teacher in the school. Her experiences run parallel, to some extent, to Charlotte's own, as a pupil and then a teacher in a similar school in Brussels. Charlotte and Emily went there to learn French so that all three sisters could start their own school. But after nearly a year they had to return home for Aunt Branwell's funeral and only Charlotte returned.

The fear of Protestant girls being abducted doesn't seem to have bothered Lucy. True, the legend of the black nun that was supposed to haunt the school involved a "girl whom the monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had her buried alive for some sin against her vow", but that was all in the long past.

And when Lucy wanders into a confessional box she doesn't seem to be worried about the possible moral danger. What concerned

Lucy most about Catholicism was the surveillance and the secrecy that she sees as being a key part of the way the Catholic faith operated.

Madame Beck, who ran the school, administered it using silent surveillance. She was based on Madame Heger who ran the school that Charlotte and Emily attended.

At one stage Madame Beck admits that she would rather not have to have her network of spies but said that continental girls, being what they are, she can't do otherwise. But Lucy admires the humane way she ran the school and appears to accept that, under the circumstances, this was appropriate.

In chapter 8 Lucy first experienced the skilful way in which Madame Beck carried out her secret enquiries.

> I was a light sleeper; in the dead of night I suddenly awoke. All was hushed but a white figure stood in the room – Madam in her night-dress. Moving without perceptible sound, she visited the three children in the three beds; she approached me: I feigned sleep, and she studied me long. A small pantomime ensued, curious enough. I daresay she sat a quarter of an hour on the edge of my bed, gazing at my face. She then drew nearer, bent close over me, slightly raised my cap, and turned back the borders so as to expose my hair; she looked at my hand lying on the bedclothes.
>
> This done, she turned to the chair where my clothes lay: it was at the foot of the bed. Hearing her touch and lift them, I opened my eyes with precaution, for I own I felt curious to see how far her taste for research would lead her. It led her a good way: every article did she inspect. I divined her motive for this proceeding, namely the wish to form from the garments a judgment respecting the wearer, her station, means, neatness, et cetera. The end was not bad, but the means were hardly fair or justifiable. In my dress was a pocket; she fairly turned it inside out; she counted the money in my purse; she opened a little memorandum book, coolly perused its contents. …
>
> To a bunch of three keys, being those of my trunk, desk and work-box she accorded special attention; with these, indeed, she withdrew a moment to her own room. I softly rose in my bed and followed her with my eye. These keys, reader, were not brought back till they had left on the toilet of the adjoining room the impress of their wards in wax. All being thus done decently and in order, my property was returned to its place, my clothes were carefully refolded.

To Lucy Snowe, Catholicism was a religion based on hypocrisy, where the ends justified the means and where lies could be sanctioned. She says "Not a soul in Madame Beck's house, from the scullion to the directress herself but was above being ashamed of a lie; they thought

nothing of it." They would confess such sins to their priest but he paid little attention to sins of deceit. But if they had missed going to mass, or read a chapter of a novel, that was another thing and for such deadly sins they would receive a severe rebuke.

Lucy made the mistake of saying once, to some of her pupils, that she considered falsehood worse than an occasional lapse in church attendance. "The poor girls were tutored to report in Catholic ears whatever the Protestant teacher said" and Lucy noticed that she was never again on such close terms with them.

Once, one of them said to her "Mademoiselle, what a pity you are a Protestant!"

"Why, Isabelle?"

"Because when you die you will go to Hell".

"Do you believe that?"

"Certainly, everyone knows that."

A pivotal scene is where Lucy became extremely lonely in the summer vacation, when everyone went off on holidays. She was left with only one mentally retarded student and a servant for company.

One day during these holidays Lucy went for a walk and found herself in a church where confession was taking place. Though she was a Protestant she was so lonely that she went into a church just as the service was ending.

The bells of a church arrested me in passing; they seemed to call me in to the *salut*, and I went in. … After a space, breathless and spent in prayer, a penitent approached the confessional. I watched. She whispered her avowal. Her shrift was whispered back: she returned consoled. Another went, and another. A pale lady, kneeling near me, said in a low, kind voice:

"Go you now, I am not quite prepared."

Mechanically obedient, I rose and went. I knew what I was about; my mind had run over the intent with lightning speed. To take this step could not make me more wretched than I was; it might soothe me.

The priest within the confessional never turned his eyes to regard me; he only quietly inclined his ear to my lips. He might be a good man, but this duty had become to him a sort of form: he went through it with the phlegm of custom. I hesitated; of the formula of confession I was ignorant: instead of commencing them with the prelude usual, I said:

"*Mon père, je suis Protestante*." …

He inquired, not unkindly, why, being a Protestant, I came to him?'

I said I was perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort. I had been living for some weeks quite alone; I had been ill; I had a pressure of affliction on my mind of which it would hardly any longer endure the weight …

He looked thoughtful, surprised, puzzled. "You take me unawares," said he. "I have not had such a case as yours before: ordinarily we know our routine, and are prepared; but this makes a great break in the common course of confession." …

"Must I go, father?"

"My daughter," he said kindly – and I am sure he was a kind man: he had a compassionate eye – "for the present you had better go".

He then suggested that Lucy visit him the next morning in the place where he lived. But the appointment was never kept.

According to her letters to Emily, Charlotte had a very similar experience. She told Emily of her extreme loneliness and of her resorting to talking to a priest in a confessional out of desperation. But she urged Emily not to tell Papa.

Some years ago I was on a Brontë Society excursion to Brussels and we visited the church and saw the actual confession box in which Charlotte had knelt. How did we know it was that one?

In her letter to Emily, Charlotte mentioned the name of the church and also the address of the priest's house where she was invited to seek further guidance. A search of church records showed which priest lived at that address and, since each priest had his own special pair of confession boxes, it was possible to know that it was in one of the two boxes that we sat outside of, was where Charlotte had kneeled. As we sat there our guide, Selina Busch, read the relevant excerpt from Charlotte's letter.

Lucy's criticism of the Catholic system came to a head in the following:

A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world was this school …There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. "Eat, drink and live!" she says. "Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. … I guarantee their final fate." A bargain, in which every true Catholic deems himself a gainer. Lucifer just offers the same terms; "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of it; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will give it. If thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine!"

Well, was Charlotte Brontë a closet Catholic? Of course not. There's no evidence that she ever seriously contemplated becoming a Catholic. But it's remarkable that, amidst all the anti-Catholic rhetoric of her day, she was so mild in her opposition to Catholicism.

Oh yes she said, through Lucy Snowe, some pretty scathing things about the Catholic Church and its priests. But remember, she was also very outspoken about Anglican curates in her novel *Shirley*, yet she ended up marrying one.

Charlotte was more amused by what she saw as the foibles of Catholics than alarmed by them. The two main aspects she focussed on were:

(1) the secrecy and dishonesty practiced by Catholics and

(2) the fact that they were so superstitious.

Madame Beck and her associates may have been spies but Lucy engaged in acts of counter-espionage herself. The amusing scene where Lucy observes Madame Beck carefully examining her belongings shows that Lucy is as much a spy as those she condemns.

Much of the detail she described was a testament not only to her powers of observation but also to her ability to observe from behind doors or other hiding places. In the park in the middle of the night she spies on her friends from behind a tree. She has acute hearing her and is always aware of who has just arrived or just left by the street door of the Pensionnat.

Catholics are dishonest, Lucy tells us. But would you trust Lucy herself? She is dishonest, even towards the reader. Long after she describes the various men with whom she has come across she reveals that:

(1) Graham Breton,

(2) the stranger who gave her directions when she arrived in Villette,

(3) Dr John and

(4) Isadore, the lover of Ginevra

are all the same.

She finally admits that she has known this for some time, though she'd left us, the reader, in the dark for many chapters.

The many unflattering things she has to say about Paul Emmanuel hide her true feelings. When it finally becomes clear to us

that Lucy has her heart set on Paul Emmanuel we are shocked by the suddenness of this affection. But Lucy has known all along that she was under his spell yet she failed to let us into her confidence.

Lucy was not anti-Catholic. No militant anti-Catholic person would have contemplated going to a Catholic country and then placing herself in what was little more than a Catholic convent.

In 1852 Catherine Sinclair wrote a cautionary tale called *Beatrice or Unknown Relatives*, warning her readers of the dangers of English fathers sending their daughters to the Catholic continent to finish their education.

> British fathers abroad, placing their children in foreign convents for the benefit of accomplishments, do so on a mere vague understanding that their religion shall not be tampered with! They might as judiciously dip a white dress into the dyer's vat of black on positive assurance that it shall come out white again.

This advice was many years too late for Patrick, as he contemplated allowing Charlotte and Emily to go to Brussels, but such warnings were around decades earlier. It is a testament to Patrick Brontë that he had confidence in his daughters to withstand any Catholic influence they might encounter. But it is also a testament to his level-headed acceptance of other faiths and the fact that he didn't fear that his daughters might be abducted and imprisoned in a convent prison.

No militant anti-Catholic person would have entered a confessional as both Lucy and Charlotte did. Not only didn't Lucy fear Catholicism, she was mildly attracted to some aspects of it. In whose bosom did her heart finally rest? In the boisterous, well-meaning but somewhat insensitive Protestant, Graham Breton or in the sensitive, reflective Catholic Paul Emmanuel? Who did Charlotte admire? The very Catholic Monsieur Heger.

Sensitivity, and the possession of a deep inner life, were qualities that were often attributed to Catholics in Charlotte's day. The typical Anglican squire had no time for an inner life. He was more concerned with his dogs and his guns than the cultivation of his soul. Going to the Church was, for him, an outward social obligation not an opportunity to contemplate his soul. The disciplines imposed on Catholics, such as going to confession, fostered a practice of self-

awareness and placed a greater value on the arts and literature than their Protestant neighbours.

Of course these are gross over generalizations. But amongst the anti-Catholics, Roman Catholic men were considered to be more effeminate than their Protestant counterparts. It was widely claimed that when they were not seducing young girls, Roman Catholic priests targeted effeminate young men.

So ironically it was perhaps due to his Roman Catholicism that fostered in Paul Emmanuel the qualities that endeared him to Lucy. And possibly the same could be said of Monsieur Heger.

Paul Emmanuel, though a strong Catholic, is shown to have a very mild attitude towards Protestants. He acknowledged that he and Lucy worshipped the same God, but practised different rites.

He urged Lucy to remain a Protestant. "My little English Puritan," he told her "I love Protestantism in you … it is the sole creed for Lucy."

Lucy believed that Paul Emmanuel embodied all that was good in Catholicism and that he avoided what she saw as bad.

All Rome could not put into him bigotry, nor the Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit. He was born honest, and not false – artless, and not cunning – a freeman, and not a slave. His tenderness had rendered him ductile in a priest's hands, his affection, his devotedness, his sincere pious enthusiasm blinded his kind eyes sometimes, made him abandon justice to himself to do the work of craft, and serve the ends of selfishness; but these are faults so rare to find, so costly to their owner to indulge, we scarce know whether they will not one day be reckoned amongst the jewels.

Charlotte, who was supposed to be highly critical of Catholicism, became nevertheless very close to Monsieur Heger, a very devout Catholic. It was a strange relationship – purely intellectual and emotional. She was no longer a schoolgirl, yet she had an intense schoolgirl crush. For two years after she had returned to Haworth she wrote to him and he hardly ever replied. Charlotte took this rejection badly. Things became so extreme that she almost had a nervous breakdown.

What did she see in him, despite his being a Catholic? I believe that many of the qualities that attracted her were those he possessed *because* he was a Catholic. This picture here is of Paul Heger, a great grandson of Charlotte's Monsieur Heger. We met him on our excursion to Brussels. I suspect that he is a lot more easy-going than his great grandfather!

Well, what of the other novels? *The Professor* contains similar criticisms of Catholicism to *Villette*. I don't think Catholicism gets much of a mention in *Shirley*. But what about *Jane Eyre*?

Rochester wasn't a Catholic, so far as we know, but in some ways he was like a Catholic priest, of the sort vilified by the anti-Catholics. He certainly practises deceit in concealing his mad wife, and also is dishonest towards Jane in encouraging her to believe that he was about to marry Blanche and that she, Jane, would be sent away.

The scene where Rochester disguises himself as a gypsy not only involves deception but, his interview with Jane has been described by some critics as being very like a priestly confession as he tries to get her to confess her feelings for him.

Finally, in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* Charlotte describes two very different schools. Lowood, run under the Evangelical arm of the Church of England is very severely criticised. The Pensionnat, run on Catholic principles, is criticised only very gently – and in fact it was praised for its humane treatment of the girls.

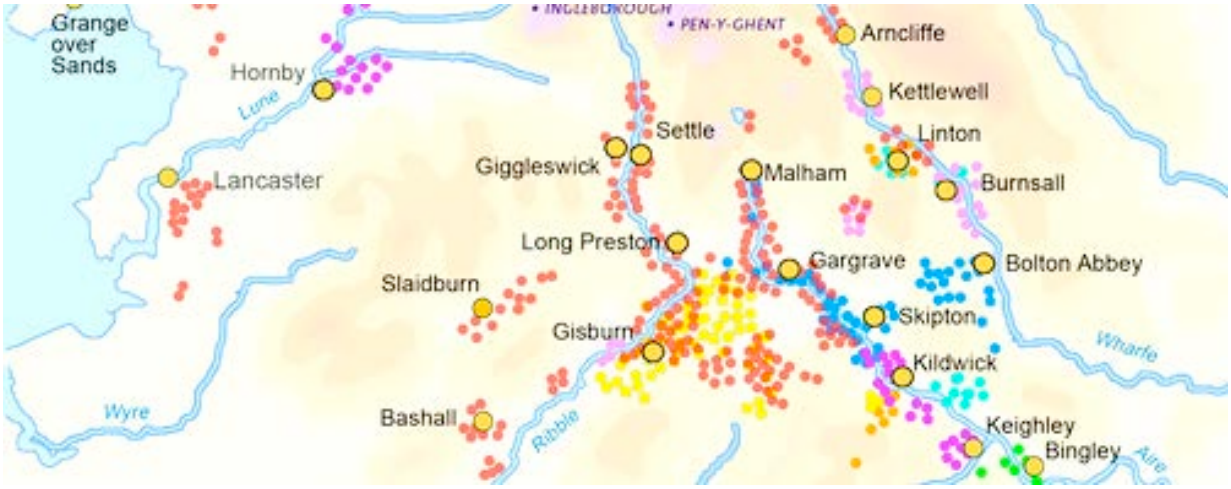
So Charlotte was not a closet Catholic. But she felt the appeal of certain aspects of Catholicism and, where she disagreed with them she was more amused than alarmed with Catholic behaviour. And there were a few aspects of Catholicism that attracted her.

THE KEIGHLEY – BRONTË CONNECTION

A talk by Lynne Granger to the ABA on 1st October 2016

Good morning, everyone, and, Sarah, thank you for asking me to speak to the Association about my family's connections with the English Brontë Society.

How I discovered the Australian Brontë Association was just one of a series of chances which I find amazing. Earlier this year I was approached by The Media Museum in Bradford, Yorkshire, to ask my permission for them to display one of my grandfather's photographs, of Top Withens, in an exhibition to be held in Thornton, Bradford, to mark the bicentenary of Charlotte Brontë's birth. The very next day I happened to glance at the NSW State Library brochure which fell open at the centre page, advertising Susannah Fullerton's fascinating talk about the Brontës, at the Library in May, which I'm sure many of you enjoyed.

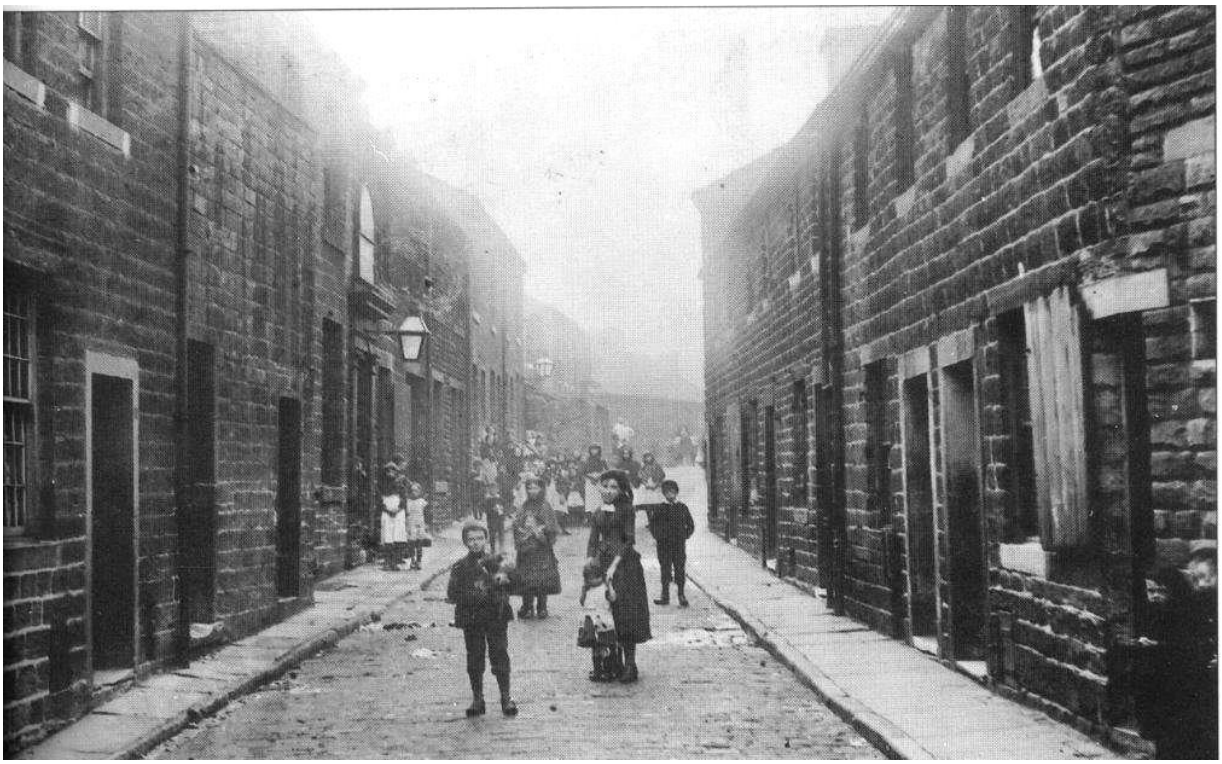


For those of you who have visited Haworth, you just need to look at my maiden name to guess where I come from, don't you. It somewhat takes the glamour out of having an ancient name to discover that in the Middle Ages it meant 'cow field', (Kigh-leigh) and Keighley (the town) in the distant past was indeed a small town in the valley of the River Aire, but by the Brontës' day it would have expanded into one of the grimy, polluted towns which until comparatively recently were covered by thick murky fog from the mills which all helped to make the industrial north of England wealthy.

And I can certainly attest to the dreadful weather in our day. ‘Pea soupers’ were days when the fog was so thick as to be impenetrable and indeed, my sister was sent away to boarding school in the south of England because of her ‘weak chest’ when she was six! We were then living in Halifax just south of Haworth, not far from Mirfield where the Roe Head School was situated, but the dreadful weather and the filthy, unhealthy conditions were experienced by all of the northern mill towns.

There is a local Yorkshire expression of ‘Where there’s muck there’s brass’, usually said – in my hearing anyway – by the more well-off as a sort of apology for the deprivation of others, thus implying that here was the road to wealth.

Well, wealthy for some anyhow and simply dreadful for the many who flocked into the towns in Yorkshire and in Lancashire for work in the textile mills, who lived in appalling conditions. Rows of houses had been hastily constructed as cheaply as possible to house them, the



worst of these dwellings being ‘back to backs’ which meant that the two side walls adjoined the neighbours, as did the rear, so what little light and air there was in the houses entered only through the front door and windows; the cold and the bone chilling damp were endemic, sanitation was essentially non-existent and therefore filth, sickness and early death prevailed.

Bradford was one of the worst of such towns and Thornton, where Charlotte, Emily, Branwell and Anne were born, was hardly immune either, so climbing up that dreadfully steep, cobbled street in Haworth to live at the Parsonage so close to the moors might I think perhaps have seemed to the Brontë family a healthier place to live than Thornton, whereas in fact Haworth was far from healthy, with the water supplies from the fresh local springs being contaminated by seeping through the graveyard and also collecting all the detritus running down the hill.

Indeed, the contrast between the black industrial towns and the beauty of the glorious green Pennine countryside beyond is amazing.

My family's forebears were however extremely fortunate and in the 19th century they owned one of the woollen mills in Keighley. 'They did all right', as they would have said in Yorkshire, this being a euphemism for people being quite well off.

My grandfather, Alexander Keighley, was an only child born in Keighley in 1861, so therefore just a few years after Charlotte's death. Upon leaving school he had high hopes of studying either medicine or the sciences, but his father insisted that he join the family textile business, starting at the bottom by sweeping the floors but working his way up to become a director before finally inheriting the mill. They made fine worsted cloth, although I recently learned that they also made the khaki fabric for the poor wretched soldiers to wear, marching off to the trenches in France in the First World War.

When later he sold the mill, he found himself wealthy enough to devote his life to his own interests which, as well as the sciences, included art – and then photography.

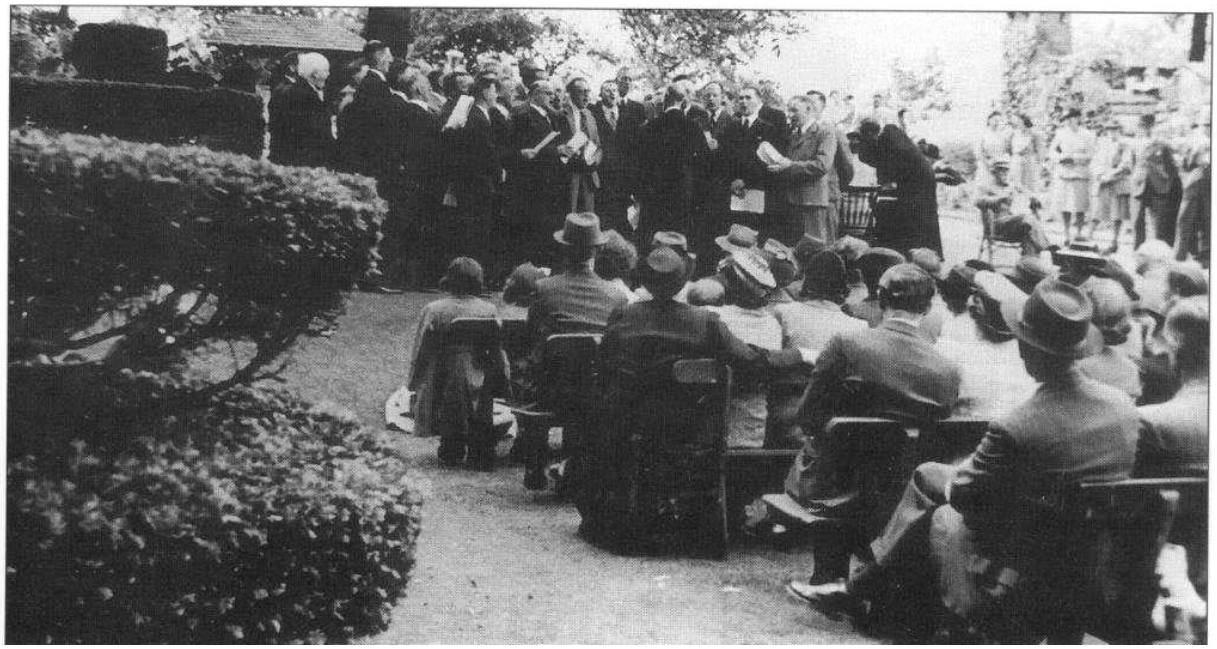
At the end of the 19th century he moved from Keighley out to the village of Steeton, a couple of miles west of Keighley, where there are two old manor houses, the Low Hall and the High Hall. He bought the handsome 17th century manor house, the High Hall, which was – and still is – set in beautiful grounds, and which he adored.

Previous owners of this house had included several generations of a family called Currer who had bought the property in the 1600s and there is indeed a bell in the bell tower, which is known as the Currer Bell. My mother used to ring this bell to call us in for meals when we lived there.

I have recently re-read Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, combing the pages for any glimmer of a whisper that Charlotte might have visited Steeton, but sadly in vain.

However, the occupants of the Low Hall in the 19th century were apparently acquaintances of the Brontës so – although I have no proof that any of the Brontë family actually visited the High Hall – it is certainly possible, if not probable, that this is the connection that Charlotte had when she needed a pseudonym for her work. It most certainly is so in the local folklore (and was considered 'feasible' by a representative of the Brontë Society when she visited the High Hall some eight years ago.)

There is another story which was sent to me by a local historian earlier this year in a High Hall garden party programme dated 1929 :



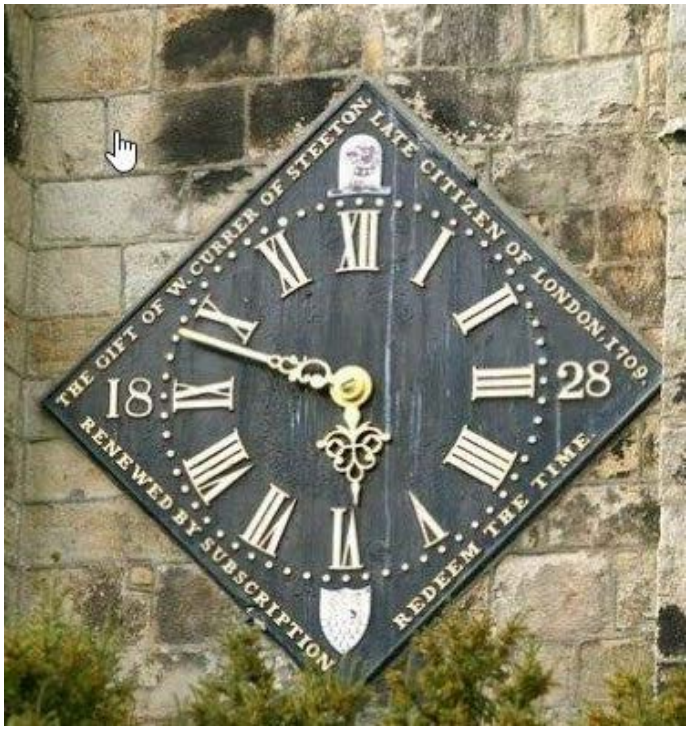
"THE HIGH HALL ... was built by the notable family of Currer in 1674, incorporating an older building, the residence of the de Stiveton's (after whom Steeton was named).

The family name was adopted by Charlotte Bronte as a nom-de-plume when writing *Jane Eyre*, having become familiar with the name on monuments in Kildwick Church, which she attended when a governess with the Sidgwick family at Stone Gappe, in Lothersdale, in the same neighbourhood."

Now, this is the family with the odious Mrs Sidgwick and her obnoxious children; Mr Sidgwick was a principal partner of High Mills, in Skipton.

Charlotte would have had to pass through Steeton on her journey to the tiny hamlet of Lothersdale, and the ancient church situated in the little village of Kildwick was at that time the parish church of the area. It would indeed have been but a short walk by Charlotte's standards, from Lothersdale to Kildwick, and Kildwick is then possibly 2 miles up the road from Steeton.

There are many references to the name Currer on windows and tablets and plaques in the church and on the clock face there is an inscription which says 'the gift of W Currer of Steeton, late citizen of London 1709'.

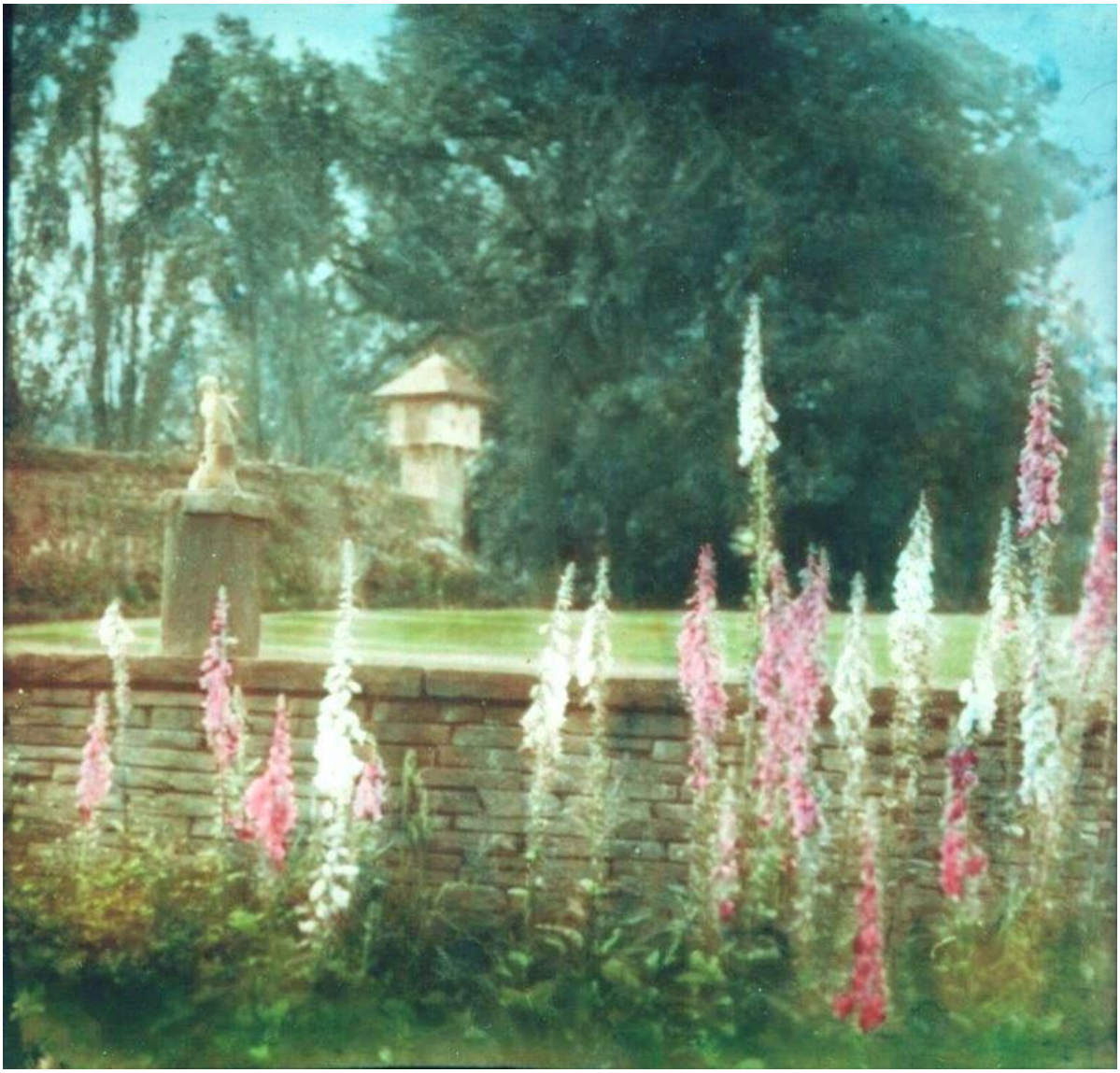


There were several generations of the Currer family then living both in Kildwick and in Steeton but when this church clock was commemorating William Currer in 1709, as you can see, it was when he was living in Steeton.

When the Brontës were living in Haworth, the High Hall was occupied by one of the Garforth family, so after 1470 other than the seven years preceding my grandfather moving in, there were many generations of Garforths and Currers living there.

Photography in the 19th century was perceived primarily as a science but my grandfather realised that here was a medium in which he could incorporate his love of art, and he was one of the founders of

a group called ‘The Linked Ring’ made up of a few like-minded people who could see the possibilities of developing photography with a more artistic focus than previously envisaged, and thus ‘pictorial photography’ was born. Indeed, A.K., as he was known, in some ways was really way ahead of his time, as he designed and framed some of his photographs in a very impressionistic manner, sometimes piecing in perhaps a cloud formation from an earlier photograph, or highlighting a



flock of sheep. He also coloured many of his glass plates by hand as you can see in this photograph of hollyhocks in our garden.

But he also travelled overseas throughout southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, driving with his chauffeur, Jim, always in his trusty Austin. In these days of such easy clicking and snapping photographs, it is amazing to think that he had the luxury of being able to spend sometimes two or three days, studying the light at dusk

perhaps, waiting to compose just one photograph, and to achieve artistic perfection with his old fashioned box camera, which he sometimes concealed in a paper parcel so as not to offend any of the local population.

This was at a time when very few people were able to travel overseas, so, as well as displaying his work in world-wide exhibitions, when he returned home he gave lectures of his travels illustrated with his lantern slides to the growing numbers of enthusiasts in the photographic clubs which were opening up both in England and also abroad. I have indeed heard from several sources that his talks were extremely popular.

He also organised ‘rambles’, both for the photography club members and also the local people, announcing them in advance, suggesting that people perhaps take along a picnic lunch and then set off for the day, and he then arranged for transport to ferry people to a local beauty spot, be it further up the Dales, or indeed up to Haworth, from where they could spend the day out walking on the moors.

Sometimes they then came back to the High Hall for what was known in Yorkshire as ‘a thick tea’ otherwise known as ‘a ham tea’, perhaps followed by a Yorkshire teacake.

He was regarded as the local squire and he opened the gardens of the High Hall frequently both to the villagers, most of whom certainly had no garden of their own, and also to members of these photographic clubs, and they showed their appreciation of his generosity by presenting him with gifts.

This tankard dated 1690 was presented to him by one such club, the Birmingham Photographic Association, and it has always been known in our family as ‘The Brontë Tankard’. I have been trying to confirm its provenance with the staff at The Parsonage but unfortunately so far without success, although they have told me that Aunt Branwell used to brew beer in the cellar, and tankards would have been in use by the family. My grandfather liked to

think that this was Branwell's tankard that he would take down to the Black Bull but I have always had my doubts about that as I think it is rather too dainty for someone who held such a reputation as a prodigious drinker.

I know that my grandfather loved Haworth and the surrounding bleak, wild, bracing moorland and also the Brontë connection, although at that time he could hardly have envisaged the Brontëland tourist area it has now become.

Alexander Keighley's early photograph of Top Withens

Both he and then later my father donated some items to the Brontë museum. I have a copy of some correspondence from AK to Mr Bradley of the Brontë Society dated 1925, at the intensely personal time when my grandmother, Lily, was dying, which to me shows that these two men must have been close friends. My father incidentally was 14 at the time and was away at boarding school. Unfortunately I don't have any of Mr Bradley's correspondence.

My only recollection of my grandfather is that of an old man with white hair, right at the end of his life, bouncing me up and down on his knee and roaring with laughter.

After he died in 1947, when I was five, we moved into the High Hall, so it remains the home of my childhood memories.

My father died 50 years ago this year, and I bitterly regret that I knew so little about his childhood and youth although, even had he told me, I suspect I would have been larking about and not listening. So in the last 20 years or so I have been piecing the family history together. I have been and am in touch with many people in England who have been extraordinarily generous to me with their memories, their information, their souvenirs of our family and I am so grateful for their interest and their time.

The volunteer at the Parsonage who has been digging up information on my behalf told me that she had in fact visited the High Hall Open Garden Day a couple of years ago, when in fact Paul and I had also just visited the house. And another contact has just told me that she went to the Open Garden Day just a couple of months ago.

I have tried to trim the edges off all of this to keep from rambling on too long about my family and to keep focussed on the connection with the Brontës. But I know there will always be more ... as I feel there is indeed a ‘Linked Ring’. Thank you very much for listening.

JANE MATTERS

A talk given to the ABA by Christine Gietz on March 2016

"I shall soon be thirty and have done nothing yet"[1] - so said Charlotte Brontë.

Do not worry Charlotte, you will do something and that something will become *Jane Eyre* and *Jane Eyre* matters.

Jane Eyre the novel and Jane Eyre the eponymous character are seminal and perennial fixtures in the English literary canon and the subject of numerous adaptations including a ballet, an opera and a plethora of films. It is also a set text on the current HSC English curriculum.

So why does Jane matter? Indeed, for some, both the character and the novel have not mattered at all except as a subject of denigration. A review of *Jane Eyre* from 1848[2] categorized the character as "the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit" and that while she has strength, "it is the strength of a mere heathen mind which is a law unto itself. No Christian grace is perceptible upon her." Jane and Mr Rochester are described as "beings both so singularly unattractive" and the novel itself is described as being "stamped with a coarseness of language and a laxity of tone" such that "sheer rudeness and vulgarity have come in for a most mistaken worship."

Despite some condemnation, *Jane Eyr*e mattered both instantly and enduringly: "This is not merely a work of great promise; it is one

[1] Charlotte Bronte, March 24, 1845 as cited by Elizabeth Gaskell in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 253 reproduced by Cosimo Inc. 2008.

[2] *Quarterly Review (84:167*, 1848 retrieved from http://www.quarterly-review.org/classic-qr-the-original-1848-review-of-jane-eyre/

of absolute performance. It is one of the most powerful domestic romances which have been published for many years… it is full of youthful vigour, of freshness and originality… It is a book to make the pulses gallop and the heart beat, and to fill the eyes with tears."[3] This article explores the rich and diverse matters pertaining to *Jane Eyre* and why *Jane Eyre* matters.

"With a new kind of heroine defiantly virtuous, morally courageous and fiercely independent, Charlotte Brontë brought about change in the style of fiction of the day, presenting an unconventional woman to be admired for her ability to overcome adversity."[4]

The story of *Jane Eyre* works on so many levels which is why it has come to matter so much to readers of the past and present, readers both male and female and readers both young and old. For those who like a good rags-to-riches story, then Jane makes the perfect Cinderella complete with evil step-aunt and step-cousins; she falls in love with a wealthy man of position who wants to shower her with jewels and she is whisked away at the penultimate moment by a magic call. Jane's Prince Charming is destitute until reunited with Cinders who takes her rightful place by his side "in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine".

Or, for those who like a good Gothic thriller we have a mansion with a secret chamber, goblin laughter, thumps in the night, a Bluebeard secret, attempts at murder, an insane woman and a maiden who, while she does not scream, does faint and must run off into mist and rain to save herself from a bigamous entanglement. There are mysterious forces which speak on the air, references to fairies and elves and of course a tree torn asunder as a portent of disaster. "I was chilled with fear... This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed and deep... Something gurgled and moaned... I withdrew the bolt and opened the door with a trembling hand" – the Gothic tension is superbly wrought.

If readers prefer a Dickensian social commentary about inequality and abuse of power then Brontë offers the mistreatment of the working class as represented by the plight of governesses from the morally

[3] *Charlotte Bronte "Jane Eyre"* retrieved from http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/bronte.html

[4] Merriman, C. D. (2007). *Charlotte Brontë.* Jalic Inc. Retrieved from http://www.online-literature.com/brontec/

bankrupt Reeds and Ingrams, the social and moral neglect of the poor at Lowood, and the antithesis of Christian virtue and corruption of institutionalism symbolised in the form of Brocklehurst whose "mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness".

Jane Eyre has long been adopted by feminist critics who herald it as a seminal work hailing the eponymous Jane as a woman who can live within the conventional Victorian milieu and yet exhibit autonomy over her own destiny. "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will". Alternatively, the novel can be read on a psycho-analytic level where Jane, and indeed Mr Rochester, personifies the ego of self-determination, Bertha represents the id of unbridled passions and Helen Burns is the superego of moral restraint, "Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs".

There is certainly something appealing in a book based on binaries – there are the binary opposites of the passionate Jane and the restrained Helen, there is the opposite role models of Miss Temple to Mrs Reed, the opposites of the self-indulgent Georgiana and the puritanical Eliza, the opposites of the self-serving Reed cousins and the generous Rivers cousins, where, interestingly, both are two females and a male and of course there is the fire and ice binaries of Rochester and Rivers. Strikingly there are the binary opposites of the insane buxom Bertha to plain Jane's sanity, ''That is *my wife*... And *this* is what I wished to have ... this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon."

Lastly, and perhaps most satisfyingly, this is a love story. We have a brooding Byronic hero and a delicate English rose. Rochester falls in love with Jane the moment his hand touches her shoulder in the lane and she returns that love. Despite the differences in their ages, in their ranks, in their wealth and in their experiences, he loves her "Oh, Jane! My hope – my love – my life" and she loves him "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven."

Of course, one cannot have a good romance without rivals and suitors and what is a tale of love without impediments along the way? What an imagination Brontë had to not only create a rival in the form of Blanche but also a first wife in the form of Bertha; Jane is offered

marriage not only by a bigamist but also by a missionary zealot; she goes from a destitute outcast not once but twice and yet ends up a rich heiress. Not content with one fire in a bed, Brontë burns down a whole mansion and at the centre of storms and starvation, travels and tribulation is the ethereal Jane and a love story that has mattered to readers from *Jane Eyre*'s publication in 1847 under the androgynous penmanship of Currer Bell who claimed to be the editor of Jane's autobiography. This romance is not driven solely by passions of the flesh but appeals to readers because it is a passion of two disparate souls who overcome not insignificant barriers to be united in a profound and destined love. For Rochester, Jane is "my sympathy – my better self – my good angel" and for Jane, Rochester is "ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh".

To understand Jane Eyre, the character, it is necessary to explore Jane's evolution from impetuous orphan child to a fulfilled and autonomous adult. More than anything else, this novel is a *bildungsroman* or a coming-of-age story which follows Jane's literal journeying along with her physical growth and development of her moral compass. It is Bronte's insight into the flaws and strengths, passions and reasonings of the human condition which make *Jane Eyre* matter.

Jane undergoes five incarnations from orphan to autonomous adult and those incarnations are reflected in the locations in which Jane is situated.

"You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness, but I cannot live so."

The reader first meets Jane as a ten-year-old where Brontë generates sympathy for the orphan who is "always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned". It is here at Gateshead where Brontë opens the gate on Jane's personality and in so doing releases the passion within her. She was "such a picture of passion" and as Jane recalls "I resisted all the way: a new thing for me". For nine years Jane was the quiet and submissive child who wore a "habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, [and] forlorn depression" and then in the tenth year the gate opened. "*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely,

and *must* turn" and in speaking her "soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph". Gateshead is where the gate opened for Jane and it is the head or start of her journey, both figuratively and literally for Brontë empowers Jane with a voice, "I am not your dear; I cannot lie down: send me to school soon, Mrs Reed, for I hate to live here."

The scene that cannot be forgotten by readers, nor by Jane herself, is the terror experienced in the Gothic-inspired red room where the child Jane is frightened beyond imagining of "a herald of some coming vision from another world" such that Jane implores her aunt for mercy. "O aunt! have pity! Forgive me! I cannot endure it." But her remorseless aunt has no such pity in her heart. Jane is forever scarred by this incident which "gave my nerves a shock of which I feel the reverberation to this day". While the child Jane is bitter: "Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time", Brontë endows the adult Jane with the wisdom of compassion. "Yes, Mrs Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering, but I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did."

"Hush, Jane! you think too much of the love of human beings."

In Jane's next incarnation she literally travels far from Gateshead to her next formative life stage, that of an orphan in a charitable institution that often lacked charity. "Breakfast was over, and none had breakfasted. Thanks being returned for what we had not got". Jane transforms from a child ruled by passion, "bitter and truculent when excited" to a young woman who had "better regulated feelings". Brontë captures the pathos of reality as this part of Jane's journey is based on Brontë's own experiences with school which heralded the death of her two elder sisters, and perhaps also on Dickens' workhouse

for boys depicted in *Oliver Twist*, published ten years before *Jane Eyre*.

Lowood is representative of the early Victorian privations that was meted out to the poor and disadvantaged. Lowood, was literally a low place of "semi-starvation": "That forest-dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence." Despite the conditions, Jane flourishes: "I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries." Jane grows and as Lowood becomes a truly useful institution so does Jane become a truly useful teacher, but the real Jane was buried: "I appeared a disciplined and subdued character … my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple". And it is here that a seminal moment occurs in the making of Jane Eyre the woman: "Now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils".

This is turning point for Jane who makes a choice to embrace life and is willing to risk the perils inherent in such a choice. This is not just a seminal moment in the life of a fictional character but also one of those pivotal moments that marks development in the evolution of individual growth.

As Jane grows it was not the cruelty of Brocklehurst, nor the serenity of Miss Temple which left the deepest mark upon the growing Jane, it was of course Helen Burns: "I never tired of Helen Burns; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment, as strong, tender and respectful as any that ever animated my heart."

Why does Helen matter so much to Jane? Jane loves Helen for her "quiet and faithful friendship". The insight that is most important to Jane's motivation derives from her love for those who love her: "if others don't love me I would rather die than live – I cannot bear to be solitary and hated".

"And it is you, spirit – with will and energy, and virtue and purity – that I want: not alone your brittle frame."

The third incarnation of Jane occurs during her the life at Thornfield which she hopes will herald a bright new future. She believes she had arrived at a safe haven: "My couch had no thorns in it

that night; my solitary room no fears". However, Thornfield is well named, for she will encounter thorns and fears both in her room and without.

Jane falls in love with Mr Rochester, her master, and one whom she believes could not possibly love "a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" but of course he does love her and he loves her with a grand passion. "You – you strange, you almost unearthly thing! – I love as my own flesh." Brontë creates one of the great love affairs in fiction. The ugly middle-aged brooding man with a dreadful secret falls for his poor and obscure girl-governess. The bird-like Jane falls in love with a man whom she idolises. But thorns lie in wait for Jane and she fears that she is not meant for happiness. "I feared my hopes were too bright to be realised; and I had enjoyed so much bliss lately that I imagined my fortune had passed its meridian, and must now decline."

Indeed, Brontë snatches the cup of happiness away from Jane on the very altar of marriage. "Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman – almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate." Why is this love tale so engrossing? Because we sympathise with Jane and the obvious obstacles she has had to overcome, because we love to believe that the ordinary person, so much like ourselves, can have a grand romance and because the pathos is so deeply affecting. And Brontë, just as she brings "stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears" to Jane's eyes, so she wrenches at the readers' heartstrings. "Not one thought was to be given either to the past or the future. The first was a page so heavenly sweet – so deadly sad – that to read one line of it would dissolve my courage and break down my energy. The last was an awful blank: something like the world when the deluge was gone by."

The twin use of allusion and hyperbole artfully convey the depth of sentiment attached to this scene of anguish for Jane.

Why does Brontë send Jane back to Gateshead? This is quite a long scene where Jane is removed from Thornfield and we are removed from the fascinating interchange in the love triangle of Jane, Rochester and Blanche.

One obvious reason is that it creates tension as we are eager to see them reunited. Another is that it will provide a little back story in finding that Jane has an uncle of means. However, if for no other

reason, then the leaving and the returning are pure entertainment. There is a playfulness and touch of humour in the departure:

"Just let me look at the cash."

"No, sir; you are not to be trusted."

"Jane!"

"Sir?"

And there is joyful understatement in the return:

"I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead."

"A true Janian reply! ... Absent from me a whole month, and forgetting me quite, I'll be sworn."

"I knew there would be pleasure in meeting my master again."

Most importantly, Brontë understands that for Jane to move forward, she must first visit her past and lay to rest those demons. It is in revisiting her roots that Jane understands better who she is.

"I still felt as a wanderer on the face of the earth; but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression. The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished."

"I had nobody; and now three relations, – or two, if you don't choose to be counted, – are born into my world full-grown. I say again, I am glad."

Jane's fourth incarnation sees her once more on the road, once more destitute. "I thus wandered about like a lost and starving dog." And it is once more, ironically, a school for the poor that is Jane's salvation. Once more she gains autonomy over her life through the role of teacher and "became a favourite in the neighbourhood". More importantly, the young Jane (remember she is near nineteen) experiences not only intellectual company, but company that is without secrets or threats and in this she can blossom like a flower. "There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time – the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles."

Jane has journeyed far to Marsh End and it is in this end that Jane is reborn and begins again. The days of privation are akin to a biblical purging in the wilderness out of which Jane can start afresh. She gains

work and autonomy, she gains money and more importantly to her, she gains a family.

It might seem overly contrived that the family door at which she collapses turns out to be *her* family, and that she is in fact an heiress. Brontë, however, knows what she is doing. The Rivers are the antithesis of the Reeds: the Reeds strangled the life out of Jane while the Rivers pour life-giving water into her. Both families are used to showcase the best and worst of Victorian life for a woman. The frivolous and indolent Georgiana is off-set by purposeful and gracious Diana; the corrupt and despotic John is off-set by the missionary zeal and philanthropy of St John. With the Reeds, a poor Victorian girl is treated with cruelty but with the Rivers a poor Victorian girl is treated with charity and so Brontë rewards the Rivers and Jane with an inheritance as a moral salutation to righteousness.

A marsh is not without its perils however and the peril for Jane is her cousin St John. "By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind … I fell under a freezing spell … But I did not love my servitude."

Jane is once more a recipient of an impassioned marriage proposal and St John is equally as eloquent as Rochester, but he does not love Jane "you are formed for labour, not for love … I claim you – not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service."

Oh, Brontë, you clever, clever woman. We know Jane is formed for love and we know she deserves love and we want her to obtain that love. How exciting is this scene when Jane, who is just nineteen, is being solicited for marriage but not for the right reasons? Jane reflects "but as his wife – at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low… *this* would be unendurable."

Victorians often married for duty not for love, but Jane is a prototype of the modern woman. "Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent?" Her answer is "Oh! I will give my heart to God … *You* do not want it." And Jane literally scorns his offer. We can but cheer this woman on as she refuses patriarchal despotism.

"To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth."

Jane's final incarnation is one of fulfilment when she lays claim to her destiny. Feminists struggle with Jane's conventional and Victorian aspiration to become a wife and be a possession. But this is Jane's choice, she exerts her will to choose that which will make her happy. Brontë elucidates the difference between Victorian conservatism and Gothic romanticism by giving Jane a choice. Jane chooses to leave Rochester because she listens to her moral compass, she chooses to reject St John because there is no love for her and she choose to go in search of Rochester because she has love to give and wants to be loved in return and thus Jane is a fully autonomous and functional human being and has come of age.

There is so much in *Jane Eyre* that matters. There is the role of money and its correlation to autonomy; there is the fascinating discourse between pagan and Christian philosophies; there is the curious device of naming the novel an autobiography where histories and autobiographies were common terms for earlier novels; there are the engrossing motifs that Brontë utilises such as fire and ice, fairies and in particular birds which are frequently mentioned from the classic declaration by Jane, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me" to Mr Rochester's description of her. 'I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high.' Brontë incorporates other engaging devices such as foreshadowing and portents, the most obvious but also most affecting is that of tree where there "was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal" which accompanies Rochester's line "God pardon me! and man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her".

There is something of Victor Frankenstein in the hubris of presumption that sees a man determined to meddle with the laws of God as people believed at the time. One matter that must be mentioned is Brontë's use of the Byronic hero. Byron who had died in 1824 had

been described by Lady Caroline Lamb as ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’, had already become an iconic character in the poems and play of Byron himself (*Childe Harold* 1812-1818, Conrad from *The Corsair* 1814 and *Manfred* 1817) and would gain popularity in Lamb’s eponymous Glenavron (1816), Lord Ruthven from Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), Hugo’s Claude Frollo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) and Edmond Dantes from Dumas’ *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844). Mr Rochester is dark, brooding, ‘proud, sardonic … moody’ and who is haunted by a dreadful secret.

Above all else, *Jane Eyre* matters because it is about passion, the quest for love and the resilience of the human spirit. Brontë does not paint a picture, rather she holds a lens to the human condition and we cry and cheer with Jane when she asserts her right to love and to speak “The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes, – and to speak.’ Jane speaks out in the 1847 book but her words transcend time and the conventionalities of Victorian England for she speaks of a love that transcends physical desire: “I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh; – it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal, – as we are!”

Does *Jane Eyre* matter? Of course it does – it is one of the truly great love stories with that most satisfying of conclusions where the orphan girl finds her true home in the heart of the man who loves her. Brontë does not dash our hopes for happiness with a bitter tragedy, instead she uplifts our spirits. Four little words complete the story of why Jane matters:

“Reader, I married him.”

FRIENDS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Our year of celebrating Charlotte Brontë's Bicentenary began with members introducing some of those who knew and loved Charlotte and the contribution they made to the enduring legacy of their friend's life and works.

MARGARET WOOLER by Brian Beergah

Miss Margaret Wooler was one of the few lifelong friends of Charlotte Brontë, so much so that she gave Charlotte away at her low-key wedding of 1854. Margaret assumed management of a previously existing school at Roe Head alongside her sister, Catherine, in 1830. The school, which continues to operate to this day, had no more than ten pupils at any one time in Charlotte's day. It was at Roe Head where Charlotte, aged fourteen, would develop a lifelong friendship with Miss Wooler. Charlotte must have made such an impression on Margaret that she was asked to run the school for Miss Wooler upon her completion of her studies, Charlotte kindly declined this offer. Charlotte did, however, return to teach at the school in 1833. The school was eventually closed by Miss Wooler at the end of 1841 due to low student enrolments.

Patrick Brontë remembers Margaret as being *'clever, decent and motherly'*. She was believed to have had a sweet and beautiful singing voice and was fond of long drawn out conversations. She was also a gifted teacher and a linguist (she was fluent in Italian). Charlotte enjoyed many a pleasant evening having intellectually stimulating conversations with Margaret, which included long pauses of agreeable quietness, which reflected the ease and closeness of their friendship.

Margaret was a faithful companion and an ever encouraging presence for Charlotte throughout her formative years, mentoring and guiding charlotte into adulthood. A mutually respectful and affectionate friendship between the two lasted long beyond Charlotte's passing. In later life it was Margaret, in whom Charlotte confided in matters of finance and investing the monies she acquired from *Jane Eyre*. As Charlotte was facing the prospect of perpetual spinsterhood, it was to Margaret to whom she looked as a role model and for morale.

Margaret Wooler moved to West Riding in 1867, living in a separate wing of a house which belonged to her brother who was a doctor by profession. Margaret understood and appreciated progressive women like Charlotte. She approved of Charlotte's novels and protected Charlotte's memory long after her untimely passing. Margaret, who possessed thirty-five letters from Charlotte, carefully and protectively chose which of those letters which could be safely passed onto and respectfully utilized by Mrs Gaskell to write Charlotte's biography.

In Miss Wooler Charlotte had someone who profoundly understood and deeply appreciated her. Margaret is to be credited with both recognising Charlottes' creative potential and for playing a pivotal role in encouraging and developing Charlotte's talents. She died at the age of 93 in 1885.

ELLEN NUSSEY by Carmel Nestor

Yes, my name is Ellen Nussey and I come from Birstall West Riding Yorkshire. I am "the conscientious, observant, calm and well-bred Yorkshire girl". At least that is how my friend Charlotte described me in one of her letters.

I was born on 20th April 1817, the 12th child of my father John, who was an affluent cotton merchant, and my mother Ellen.

My first school was a small local one. Then I moved onto Gomersal Ladies Academy and finally, in 1831, to Miss Wooler's school, better known as Roe Head. It was near Dewsbury in Yorkshire.

I was 13 years old and I arrived one week after another new arrival. Her name was Charlotte and she was very lonely and homesick.

When I first met her she was standing near a window watching the other girls outside playing. When she realized that I also was homesick she smiled. I took her hands and so began our very long friendship.

I remember her as a teenager who was very small and had terrible eyesight. This made her nervous and during any play she always stood aside and watched.

From being at the bottom of the class she soon rose and became the top student. She was such a hard worker that she deserved everything she achieved and the girls respected her for it.

Roe Head was a happy school and Miss Wooler was a role model for us all. She was a great story teller and read to us every evening.

It was some time after we left school that Charlotte came to stay with me at my home, Rydings. At this time she was very close to her brother Branwell and he escorted her. He was so taken with my home he declared it Paradise and told Charlotte that she couldn't but be happy there.

When I visited Haworth ten months later I thought it quite wild and uncultivated and that steep climb up to the parsonage was almost too much for the horses.

Reverend Brontë's manners were very formal and I thought Aunt Branwell a little antiquated but she liked me and talked to me describing her younger days and life in Cornwell. I liked her as she was a very independent lady intelligent and a match for Patrick. He told stories which I tried not to hear. I thought them strange and rude especially to be coming from a clergyman.

When Charlotte and I were apart we wrote to each other frequently and we shared the many intimate details that girls do.

Then in one letter, she told me that the sisters had to prepare for work and so Emily would be going to Roe Head School. She also was returning to Roe Head as a teacher and we rejoiced that we would be much closer to each other again. She stayed there for three years

When Charlotte returned home from Roe Head she experienced a period of despair almost a kind of breakdown and she wrote of it to me in detail. She needed me as a helpmate in this crisis but these letters I misplaced.

I visited the parsonage many times and became very close to all the sisters especially Anne. On one occasion William Weightman, a young curate, was there and he seemed to single me out for special attention.

One night we attended a lecture he gave at Keighley Mechanical Institute and it was a night of great fun. We walked the eight miles there and back. Charlotte teased me about him for a long time till she realised that nothing had ignited between us.

I persuaded Charlotte to come away with me to the coast for a few weeks. She needed the break badly but Aunt Branwell caused so much dithering that in the end I turned up in a carriage and took her. We really enjoyed ourselves. We walked many miles. We rode on an amazing new railway train and we saw the sea – for Charlotte the first time.

After this the 3rd edition of *Jane Eyre* appeared and Charlotte still had not told me about her writing. I had heard the rumours so I bought the book and read it. It was as though Charlotte's voice was coming through in every word. She had actually been reading the proofs while staying with me at Brookroyd but she still fended me off. Very hurtful. She did this with everyone until after Emily died.

At the turn of the new year I visited the parsonage and found everyone very anxious about Anne. It was not very long after Emily's death.

To me, Anne looked pretty flushed and in capital spirits but the news from the doctors was not good. Anne had a longing to go to the seaside and especially Scarborough but she had to wait until after winter. Then Patrick not only refused to go himself but refused to stay home alone without Charlotte.

Anne asked me to accompany her. Fortunately, when the time came Patrick agreed to stay alone and allowed Charlotte to come with us.

Our lodgings included a sitting room overlooking the sea. We went along the sands, Anne riding in a donkey cart and taking the reins. That night we saw the most wonderful sunset over the water. The next

day Anne wanted to return home but it was not to be. The next day morning she died.

At her father's suggestion, Charlotte and I did not return home immediately but stayed for a little while in a small fishing village. Here the sea in all its moods, and the long walks, helped her in her grief.

Just before Christmas 1852 I received a surprising letter from Charlotte. She wrote: "Arthur Bell Nichols is in love with me. Did you have any idea?" I hadn't as I had misread every sign. In her letter she described every detail of his proposal and she did not encourage his suit.

Her father was strongly, almost violently, against it and as her letters to me were all frank and vivid they showed how she was caught in the middle.

Eventually Arthur Nichols left the parish and she became very ill with influenza so I went to stay at the parsonage. When I saw her I realized she had hidden the intensity of her feelings and her growing regrets he was gone.

I didn't approve of Arthur Nichols because I had known him for eight years and didn't find him exciting. Charlotte had not had a good word to say for him and I was confused by her inconsistency. We quarrelled for the first time ever I can't even remember why? And for eight months we did not write.

Then, when Charlotte finally wrote, she told me that Arthur was back and she was able to tell me that her father's consent to their marriage had been given. She then went on to say, "In fact dear Ellen, I am engaged". A little like Jane saying "Reader, I married him".

It was a quiet wedding – only two guests attended the actual ceremony, Miss Wooler and myself. At the last minute Patrick announced he would not attend the service or give the bride away so Miss Wooler had to fill these roles.

After they returned from their honeymoon I visited Charlotte again but the old friendship was not so intimate. I didn't like Mr Nichols.

I liked him even less when I realized he was reading and trying to censor Charlotte's letters to me. He told her he thought her letters gossipy and dangerous and insisted I burn them. If I refused he would not allow Charlotte to continue writing to me.

Ten days later Charlotte wrote again saying that I had not distinctly promised to burn her letters as they arrived. You must give him a plain pledge or he will censor all correspondence.

I replied agreeing to the pledge provided he would pledge himself to no censorship. He agreed.

It wasn't long before Charlotte became very ill. She only wrote a few more letters and they were asking about relief during pregnancy.

Then a letter came from Patrick saying that the doctors had given up hope of her recovery. Immediately I left for Haworth but I was too late. Charlotte had died in the morning. She had only been married eight months.

Very soon after Charlotte's death inaccurate pieces of information began appearing so I persuaded Patrick that these attacks would continue until there was an official biography. I suggested Mrs Gaskell. Patrick agreed but Arthur was not happy.

Mrs Gaskell accepted and I became her most fascinating resource. I had nearly six hundred letters. After Patrick died I allowed Thomas Reid access to the letters for his biography of Charlotte. Then a Mr T J Wise, ostensibly a reputable collector, promised to keep the letters together and donate them to the nation. He didn't. He sold them off as soon as he got them. I was horrified.

I expect to die when I am 80 on 28 November 1897 in my home, Moor Lane, Gomersal West Yorkshire. My family's tomb stands alone in front of St Peter's Church, Birstall.

And I ask you to remember if it were not for me you would have known little about the Brontës lives today. What a pity not one of my letters survived Arthur and Patrick.

CONSTANTIN HEGER by Michael Links

My name is Constantin Heger. I am a Professor of Rhetoric and teach French at my wife Zoe's school.

My wife tells me that we are expecting the arrival of two new pupils from England, Charlotte and Emily Brontë. They are older than our other pupils, being 25 and 23 respectively. I am looking forward to meeting them.

"Bonjour Miss Charlotte, Miss Emily, welcome to our home and school. This is my wife, Zoe, who manages the school. I will be your French teacher. You will have private lessons with me, because you are older and more mature than my Belgian students."

They are small of stature and plain in appearance. Our Catholic practices must be repugnant to them as staunch Protestants. However, with a little tolerance on both sides we can set aside our prejudices. Emily has greater intelligence that I would expect to find in a man, much less a woman. They are hurt by my criticisms of their writing, but it is for their own good. Emily resents me, but Charlotte listens very diligently to my instructions and takes copious notes. Her writing style is improving and, with correction, her work now shows great promise. Her French translation is becoming very accurate. I found her work of such high quality that I read it to the other classes.

"Charlotte, you are making great progress with your French and German. Your knowledge of English far surpasses mine. Zoe and I are most impressed with your abilities and, after the holidays, in return for free board and lodgings, we would like you to teach all the English classes, including separate lessons for myself and my brother-in-law, Monsieur Chapelle".

Charlotte has been called home unexpectedly to attend the funeral of her Aunt Branwell, her guardian for many years after the death of her mother. I have sent a letter with her outlining my satisfaction with her progress as a pupil and her teaching ability. I hope she will return soon.

After Charlotte's return

Charlotte has some difficulty controlling a class of unruly girls. She called me to admonish them and I had to threaten to expel them if they do not behave.

As for my own English lessons, the pupil now becomes the master. From an anxious student, Charlotte has become a woman of substance and seriousness. We are making excellent progress. As a reward, I took Charlotte and another pupil to the Mardi Gras procession. She was like an excited child. I am quite fond of her, in a fatherly sense.

My wife has concerns about Charlotte. As a male teacher at a school full of young adolescent girls, it is not uncommon for a pupil to have a romantic crush on a teacher. With a little advice and some firm discipline, the crush usually goes away and young girls form attachments with young men of their own age. My wife has spoken to other teachers, and listened to some local gossip, and is of their opinion that Charlotte has an unhealthy attachment to me. I am fond of her, to be sure. She is a star pupil of mine, and she is also my teacher. She is eight years younger than I am. I am a happily married man with children, and a Catholic. Perhaps I have misread her youthful enthusiasm. She is older than the other students, but has had little experience of life and romance and may be subject to similar inappropriate feelings. My wife is concerned that the school's reputation might be compromised.

"Charlotte, you may use our family room as a study during the day and when are at Mass. You may wish to read the scriptures. Please accept this gift of a German New Testament. I also have another gift for you". – Charlotte unwraps it – "It is a piece of wood from the coffin of Napoleon. Your essay on Napoleon was such an excellent piece of writing that I read it to the class."

Charlotte has heard that her father is ill and begs permission to leave Belgium for England at once.

"Charlotte, I cannot allow you to leave at such short notice. You have a responsibility to your pupils. You must give me time to find a replacement English teacher. They are in short supply here. I was relying on you to stay for a long time." Charlotte stayed just another six weeks.

My wife is relieved. She was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with Charlotte's apparent obsession with me. She will accompany her on her way to make sure she really goes. Charlotte has hopes for a career as a writer and poet. She would face great difficulties in this male dominated world. But I see a promising future for her as a teacher. She has expressed hopes of opening her own school.

"Charlotte, please accept this diploma as a record of your achievement here. I wish you success in the future and success in establishing your own school." I clasped her close to my breast and gave her an affectionate hug – my wife frowns!

After Charlotte left

I have received a letter from Charlotte. Unfortunately, she has been unsuccessful in her attempts to establish a school. I have written some words of encouragement to her.

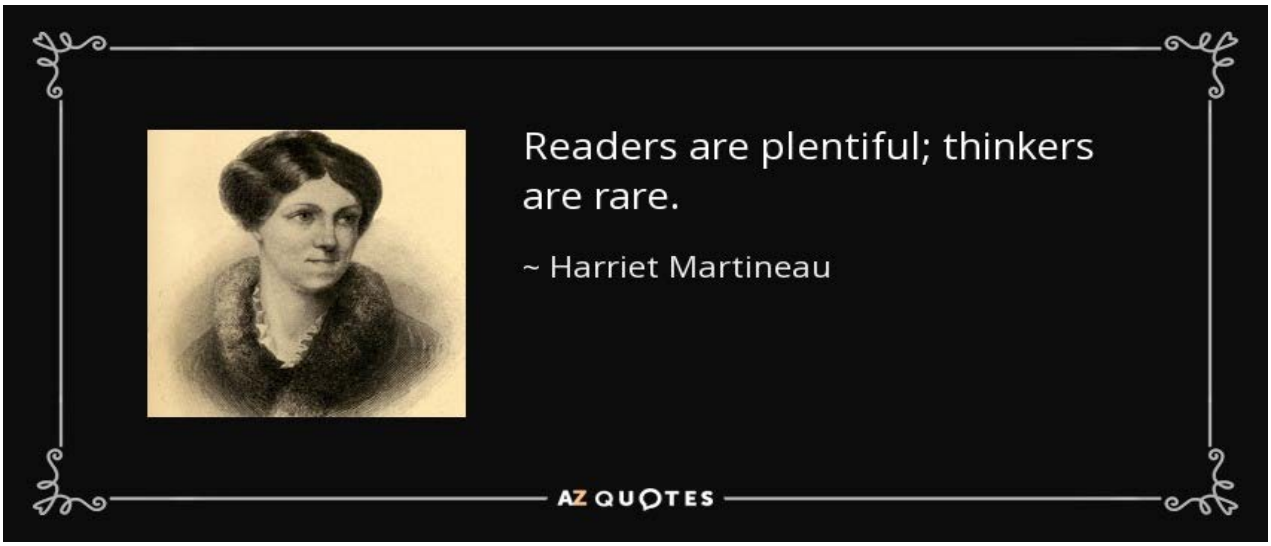
I thought that Charlotte should be more discreet. Madame must never see Charlotte's letter. I must destroy it before she sees it. I am sorry, but I cannot reply. I am a married man, with children. My wife watches me very closely. She is already suspicious of Charlotte's motives for keeping in contact. She must find a soul mate and marry him. She must forget me. Let her remember everything I taught her but she should forget our close friendship.

On 31th March 1855, Charlotte died in the early stages of pregnancy. On 7th April, I was reading the paper and came across an obituary, which shocked me. *"Others now mourn her, in a domestic sense; and, as for the public, there can be no doubt that a pang will be felt in the midst of the strongest interests of the day, through the length and breadth of the land, and in the very heart of Germany (where her works are singularly appreciated), France, and America, that the 'Currer Bell,' who so lately stole as a shadow into the field of contemporary literature has already become a shadow again,—vanishing from our view, and henceforth haunting only the memory of the multitudes whose expectation was fixed upon her."(Leeds Mercury).*

With tears in my eyes, I reminisce: "My poor Charlotte. You were the best pupil I have ever had. I have read your books. You were right, you were born to write. Your books will live on and will be

studied for centuries to come. I was privileged to have taught you and to have been taught by you. You have been taken from us just as you were about to embark on the great adventure of family life. Au Revoir, my Darling."

HARRIET MARTINEAU by Annette Harman
Charlotte's 'useful' friend at first!!



I am a wealthy celebrity who advocates social reform and writes novels. My brother James, a theologian, encouraged me to write and praised my works which popularized social reforms. I am unmarried and deaf. I believe in Mesmerism* (it cured my illness, it really did); abolishing slavery; educating girls outside the home, not just in it; and in the power of the press. For example, I wrote about Queen Victoria's Coronation in 1837, because she had invited me and I was an eye-witness. Some consider me the first female journalist and sociologist in England. I campaigned in America against Slavery and against Democracy "missing in action" there. They weren't happy with what I said.

In 1849 Charlotte sent me a copy of *Shirley* because of 'the pleasure and profit' she derived from my works. I felt 'affectionate approbation' for her gift. Charlotte visited me in London on 9th December 1849 and now I know the real identity of Currer Bell.

From 16th – 23rd December 1850 Charlotte visited me at 'The Knoll' in Ambleside. She summed me up as: "both hard and warm-hearted, abrupt and affectionate – liberal and despotic".

I published *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* in 1851, written with Henry George Atkinson. This was received controversially by the public. Now James, my brother, is no longer my friend, we don't speak to each other. Charlotte was shocked by the atheism (read "credulity" and "agnosticism") that Henry and I expressed, and she considered the book a 'death blow' to my future usefulness to her. However, she wrote appreciatively to me about this publication. Naturally, I asked Charlotte to act as an intermediary for me with George Smith, her publisher; as now I wished to publish anonymously, my new novel *Oliver Weld*. Charlotte was not surprised when Smith rejected my unorthodox novel.

I critiqued *Villette* on February 3rds, 1853 in the *Daily News.* I praised this work of genius and I objected to 'the atmosphere of pain and characters' obsession with love'. Now Charlotte has broken off our friendship because she is hurt and indignant.

My obituary of Charlotte in the *Daily News*, 6th April 1855, covered Charlotte's "force of integrity" and expressed "the deep grief of society that her genius will yield us nothing more".

I left an autobiographical sketch, my obituary, to be published by the *Daily News*, twenty years before it was required, in which I wrote:

Her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say." In short, she could popularize while she could neither discover nor invent.

Notes from Wikipedia, accessed 3/2/2016 by Annette Harman:

In 1877 her autobiography was published. It was rare for a woman to publish such a work, let alone one secular in nature. Her book was regarded as dispassionate, "philosophic to the core" in its perceived masculinity, and a work of necessitarianism. She deeply explored childhood experiences and memories, expressing feelings of having been deprived of her mother's affection, as well as strong devotion to her brother James Martineau, a theologian. Anthony Giddens and Simon Griffiths argue that Martineau is a neglected founder of sociology and that she remains important today. She taught that study of a society must include all its aspects, including key

political, religious and social institutions, and she insisted on the need to include the lives of women. She was the first sociologist to study such issues as marriage, children, religious life, and race relations. Finally, she called on sociologists to do more than just observe, but also work to benefit the society.

In February 2014, it was reported that London's National Portrait Gallery held several portraits of Harriet, whose great nephew, Francis Martineau Lupton, was the great–great–grandfather of Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, the gallery's patron. Harriet was close to her niece Frances Lupton, who worked to open up educational opportunities for women.

*Mesmerism –n, "hypnotism," 1802, from French *mesmerisme*, named for Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), Austrian physician who developed a theory of animal magnetism and a mysterious body fluid which allows one person to hypnotize another.

ELIZABETH GASKELL by Michelle Cavanagh

My name is Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell – known to my family as Lily – and I moved into my third home at 84 Plymouth Grove Manchester the same year I met my dear friend Charlotte Brontë. That year was 1850 and at the time Charlotte was depressed and lonely – her two sisters Emily and Anne and brother Branwell had all died in the previous two years. I was six years older than Charlotte, but we'd both suffered the loss of our mothers at an early age, Charlotte was five when her dear mother died while I was only 13 months so I don't even have any memory of her. And just as Charlotte lost her sisters and brother to early death, I lost six of my seven siblings in early childhood. So we did have a lot in common apart from our literary pursuits.

My writing career began in 1845 after the death from scarlet fever of my son William, who was born in 1844. I collapsed following his death so my husband William – who our son was named after – encouraged me to write about it to help ease my sorrow and this resulted in my novel Mary Barton. I was also a volunteer teacher and charity worker, and was known as an extremely sociable woman who loved to travel.

My life was so different from Charlotte's who had lived alone with her father from 1849; indeed her father was so worried about her that he'd persuaded her to accept an invitation from Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth to visit Gawthorpe Hall where they lived. Once Sir James discovered that 'Currer Bell' the literary sensation of the decade lived less than twenty mile away from him he'd invited her to Gawthorpe Hall but Charlotte never took up his invitations. Fearing she'd never visit them, Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth finally visited Charlotte in the Parsonage. Once there the Kay Shuttleworths again asked Charlotte to visit them and, with her father Patrick Brontë pushing the idea, she reluctantly agreed. The Kay Shuttleworths – Sir James was a friend of mine before he met Charlotte – took a house, Briery Close, near Lake Windermere in 1850, inviting both Charlotte and I to join them. So it was on 20th August 1850 that I first met the little authoress who became my dear friend although we had corresponded earlier when Charlotte sent me a copy of her novel *Shirley* in October the year before. Luckily for us Lady Kay Shuttleworth – who was a great gossip – was suffering from a cold during that time which meant that Charlotte and I were alone together for much of our time there. But I have to tell you that some of the bizarre stories about Patrick Brontë which I later wrote about in my biography of Charlotte were told to me by Lady Kay Shuttleworth, and were disputed by Patrick who denied them vigorously as having "no foundation in fact". Actually it got me into trouble so much so that I had to make some changes in the third edition of my biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.*

Anyway, after that initial meeting Charlotte and I became firm friends. Charlotte visited me at my Manchester home in both 1851 and 1853 the same year that I also visited her at the Haworth Parsonage. Prior to Charlotte's wedding to Mr Arthur Bell Nicholls on 29th June

1854 she wrote to me about the choice of a wedding dress; “Nothing would satisfy some of my friends but white which I told you I would not wear. Accordingly they dressed me in white by way of trial – vowed away their consciences that nothing had ever suited me so well – and white I had to buy and did buy to my own amazement but I took care to get it in cheap material – there were some insinuations about silk, tulle and I don't know what but I stuck convulsively to muslin – plain book muslin with a tuck or two … If I must make a fool of myself it shall be on an economical plan.” While I would have liked to have been present “there were only to be the officiating clergyman, the bride and bridegroom, the bridesmaid, and Miss Wooler”. Miss Wooler gave her away as Charlotte’s father said he was too sick to attend. I wonder!

While Charlotte wanted the wedding to be a quiet event, some of the locals found out about it and caught a glimpse of the little party as they came out of church, reporting that she looked like a “like a snow-drop” dressed in a “white muslin dress with delicate green embroidery, a lace mantle and a white bonnet, trimmed with lace and a pale band of small flowers and leaves.” After a honeymoon in Ireland Mr and Mrs Bell Nicholls went back to live in the Parsonage.

Of course my home in Manchester was so much more inviting than the Haworth Parsonage. And Manchester was of course much nicer than Haworth, a town which I thought was isolated and primitive, as I wrote in my biography, a view which future biographers have taken issue with. I’ve been castigated because I took my description of Haworth from 17th and 18th century writers and it’s since been pointed out that Haworth was in fact a busy industrial township not the remote rural village which I described it as. I might have thought Haworth was a miserable place but as I was to write at the time certainly the Parsonage was “of the most dainty order, the most exquisite cleanliness. The door steps spotless; the small old-fashioned window panes glittered like looking glass. Inside and outside of that house cleanliness goes up into in essence, purity.” But I can’t say that I really liked Haworth itself – to me it was a bit of a back-water.

Nevertheless I can say with all truthfulness, because I live there, that Manchester is a great cultural and intellectual centre, with

institutions like the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Mechanics Institute and the Portico Library, all of which my husband William, a Unitarian Minister (we married in August 1832) was involved with. It has to be pointed out though that Manchester, Britain's first major industrial city, while it created much wealth, it contained extreme poverty and squalor. Workers' cottages were dirty, miserable and un-sanitary, details of which I pointed out in my novel North and South.

But back to my dear friend Charlotte Brontë. It was such a shock when I learnt that she had died on 31st March 1855. She had been so happy in her short marriage.

Not long after Charlotte's death I'd actually thought about writing a memoir of my dear friend, an idea which I confided to her publisher George Smith and I started to jot down my personal recollections of our time together. So I was delighted when Patrick Brontë wrote to me three months after Charlotte had died asking me to document her life. My biography was first published in 1857.

Five weeks after receiving Patrick's letter I ventured, with a friend, back to Haworth to meet both Charlotte's father and her widower Arthur Bell Nicholls who both cried profusely. But after that visit I was determined not to interview either of them again in relation to their part of Charlotte's story. But I did talk Mr Nicholls into writing to Ellen Nussey – which I also did – asking her for access to all the letters Charlotte had written to her. Ellen granted my request, giving me access to 300 of the 500 letters Charlotte had written to her although she had erased the names of people and places she thought inappropriate. These letters were used as my main source for my biography. I did interview others who had known Charlotte and, after her initial reluctance to do so Miss Margaret Wooler also let me have her letters from Charlotte. And it was quite hard for me to gain access to letters which George Smith had which meant that I had to keep harassing him – in the nicest possible way of course – and he finally lent me about twenty letters. After the overwhelming success of Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre* it was George Smith who talked Charlotte into travelling to London to meet her public. Despite the extreme timidity that paralysed her among strangers and made her almost incapable of small talk with those she met Charlotte enjoyed her time

in London and was introduced to other great writers of the era, including Harriet Martineau and William Makepeace Thackeray. And it was George Smith who took Charlotte to the Chapel Royal in July 1850 and where she saw her hero, the Duke of Wellington.

Of course I didn't mention anything about Charlottes infatuation with her publisher George Smith or her crush on Constantin Héger. I wanted to make the world "honour the woman as much as they admired the writer," so I left out any part of the story that might be embarrassing or hurtful. I admit I did visit the Brussels boarding school run by Monsieur and Madame Heger in the Rue d'Isabelle where Charlotte and Emily had spent a couple of years. I spoke to Constantin Heger, who showed me the letters Charlotte had written him, letters that showed that she had been quite infatuated with him, but I decided to ignore them. After all, any mention of Charlotte having feelings for a married man would not have been proper. I wanted Charlotte to be seen as a modest, hard-working model of Victorian morals. I'm so glad that you're now celebrating two hundred years since my dear friend was born. Thank you for asking me to talk about her.

GEORGE LEWES by Gary Corkill

My name is George Henry Lewes and I was born in 1817. I am described as an English philosopher, an author and critic of literature and theatre. I have met Charles Dickens and acted in his amateur theatrical company.

Because I could not obtain a divorce from my first wife on the grounds of adultery, as I had adopted two of her children that she conceived with another man during our marriage, I had no alternative than to live with Marian Evans. Marian is better known as George Eliot and our relationship attracted much criticism. I foresee in the future that two Georges living together would not raise an eyebrow!

My review of *Jane Eyre* was considered to be the most friendly of the reviews the novel received. However, I incurred the wrath of Currer Bell by intimating that she might profit by writing less melodramatically, and gave her Jane Austen as an exemplar and inspiration. It is not an understatement to say that she was outraged by my suggestion.

In her reply to me it is apparent that she seethes with scorn and while her words pretend, in parts, to be meek and submissive, the tone of her letter is anything but! Currer Bell stated “Miss Austen is only shrewd and observant”.

I was one of the people that spread the rumour that Currer Bell was not a man but a woman, even though I was aware that she wanted to remain anonymous for her reputation’s sake.

At the same time I was highly critical of her book *Shirley*. Some thought my treatment of her was ‘disgraceful’, but little did they know that I had discovered her true identity. Charlotte wrote to her publisher and stated she was not angry with me, but wanted me to “let her alone”. She wrote a short note to me and stated “I can be on guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends”. However, I did review *Villette* in glowing terms.

I first met Charlotte in 1850 and I believe she considered me “clever, sharp and coarse”, but she judged me more leniently thereafter, seeing in my face a moving resemblance to her sister Emily. If that resemblance was a physical one, I can only suggest that Emily must have been a particularly unattractive woman!