

REMY BUMPPPO

think theatre

BRONTË

by
Polly Teale

Study Guide



Compiled and Edited by Peter Davis
07/08 Study Guides Sponsored by Don Stevens

Table of Contents

<u>Polly Teale: A Brief Biography</u>	3
<u>Shared Experience Theatre</u>	4
<u>“Three sisters” By Polly Teale</u>	5
<u>Brontë Family Timeline</u>	8
<u>Patrick Brontë (1777-1861)</u>	10
<u>Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)</u>	12
<u>Branwell Brontë (1817-1848)</u>	16
<u>Emily Brontë (1818-1848)</u>	19
<u>Anne Brontë (1820-1849)</u>	22
<u>Jane Eyre: An Overview</u>	25
<u>Wuthering Heights: An Overview</u>	29
<u>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: An Overview</u>	31
<u>Reviews of Polly Teale’s Brontë</u>	33

Polly Teale: A Brief Biography

Polly Teale is a London-based playwright, screenwriter, and director who also serves as co-artistic director of the award-winning Shared Experience Theatre Company. She began her association with Shared Experience when she co-directed a production of *Mill on the Floss* with Nancy Meckler in collaboration with the Young Vic. Her other directing credits with the company include: *The Clearing*, *A Doll's House*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *Madame Bovary*, *Breakfast with Emma* and *War and Peace*, also co-directed with Nancy Meckler. Her play, *After Mrs. Rochester* (which she also directed), won the Evening Standard Best Director Award and the Time Out Award for Best Production. It transferred to the West End in 2003. Outside of her work with Shared Experience, her directing credits include *Angels and Saints* for Soho Theatre; *The Glass Menagerie* at the Lyceum, Edinburgh; *Miss Julie* at the Young Vic; *Babies* and *Uganda* at the Royal Court; *A Taste of Honey* for English Touring Theatre; *Somewhere* at the National Theatre; *What is Seized* at the Drill Hall; *Ladies in the Lift* at Soho Poly; *Flying*, *Manpower*, and *Other Voices* at the National Theatre Studio.

Brontë is her last play of a trilogy of works on the Brontës that includes *Jane Eyre* (produced in 1995 and 1997) and *After Mrs. Rochester* (based on the life of Jean Rhys and her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, itself inspired by *Jane Eyre*). Additionally, she wrote *Afters* for BBC Screen Two and *Fallen* for the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. She lives in London with her partner, Ian Rickson (director of the Royal Court), and daughter, Eden.

Complete List of Plays by Polly Teale

Fallen (1987)
Now You See Me (1987)
What Is Seized (1988)
Jane Eyre (1995)
After Mrs. Rochester (2003)
Brontë (2005)

Shared Experience Theatre

Shared Experience Theatre is a fringe theatre company based in London, England. The members of Shared Experience have earned international acclaim for their commitment to physically innovative approaches to novel adaptations for the stage. One of the few living fringe companies remaining since the 1970s, Shared Experience is lauded for revitalizing storytelling techniques for the contemporary British stage.

Shared Experience's work in the 1970s, including landmark productions of *Arabian Nights* and Dickens' *Bleak House*, helped spark British interest in stage adaptations of literature. Under the artistic leadership of founder Mike Alfreds, the actors employed the narrative of the novel as a wellspring of theatrical possibility, physically transforming themselves through the slightest gesture. In 1987, Nancy Mekler and Polly Teale became co-Artistic Directors. Under Meckler and Teale, the approach to novel adaptation continued to be physical and innovative, yet took a significantly different path. The style is distinctly and powerfully physical and 'expressionistic'; their rehearsals are an exploration of what the story 'feels like' rather than what it looks like in reality.

During the past ten years, Shared Experience's work has been most successful with the adaptations of classic and often nineteenth-century novels such as *Anna Karenina*, *War & Peace*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Mill on the Floss*. The use of ritualized gestures, visual images, split characters, and the physicalization of characters' fantasies and dreams have all become hallmarks of the Shared Experience 'approach'.

In 2005 Shared Experience presented the world premiere of *Brontë* under the direction of playwright Polly Teale.



Three Sisters

By Polly Teale

Saturday August 13, 2005, The Guardian

In 1837, the poet Robert Southey wrote to the young Charlotte Brontë who had confided in him her literary ambitions: "... the daydreams in which you indulge are likely to produce a distempered state of mind ... Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties the less time she will have for it, even as a recreation." Charlotte replied: "Sir, I cannot rest until I have answered your letter. I felt only shame and regret that I had ventured to trouble you ... a painful heat rose to my face when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight but which was now only a source of confusion ... I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print. If the wish should arise I'll look to Southey's letter and suppress it." There is no evidence that she wrote anything for the next two years.

Today it is difficult for us to imagine a world where women were not allowed to enter a library, where women had to publish under men's names, where women had no part in public life. And yet 150 years is not so long ago. Their struggles are not so distant. We are fascinated by the Brontës because they broke the mould (against all odds). They broke it and yet they were made by it. They were every inch the product of their time, even in their attempts to free themselves. *Jane Eyre* is believed to be the second-most read book in the English language (after the Bible). *Wuthering Heights* remains one of the great literary creations of all time and is still a bestseller. So why, 150 years later, are we still so drawn to these stories, these characters?

Ten years ago, I adapted *Jane Eyre* for Shared Experience, the theatre company I run with Nancy Meckler. We are interested in theatre's potential to make visible what is hidden, to give form to the world of imagination, emotion and memory, to go beyond the surface of everyday life. This is what literature can do so powerfully: when we read a good novel we are allowed to enter the consciousness of the characters, to know their most intimate fears and longings, seeing the world as if through their eyes. *Jane Eyre* is exactly such a creation. Everything in the novel is seen through the magnifying glass of Jane's psyche. But if this is a psychological drama with Jane at its centre, why did Brontë invent a mad woman, Bertha, Rochester's first wife, locked in an attic to torment her heroine? Why is this rational young woman haunted by a raving, vengeful she-devil? I (along with many others, including the artist Paula Rego who has painted a whole series of work inspired by *Jane Eyre*) was intrigued by the mythic power of the mad woman, by Charlotte Brontë's repulsion and attraction to her creation, by the mad woman's danger and eroticism, her terrifying rage. I wanted to explore what she represented, how she came into existence, to understand how the mad woman had been born in reaction to the Victorian ideal of femininity, how she had grown out of the Victorian consciousness.

Later, I went on to write a play about Jean Rhys, whose novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, imagining the mad woman's life before she was locked away, giving the first Mrs. Rochester her own story. Here the mad woman is no longer a monster. We discover her as a child, follow her journey, her growing alienation, knowing where it will end. *Wide Sargasso Sea* became a modern classic. The mad woman was out

of her attic, back on the run, ready to stray into our fiction in whatever form she might choose, a symbol of female power and psychosis.

My third and final play on this subject is a return to the source, to the beginning: the Brontës themselves. How was it possible that these women, three celibate Victorian sisters, living in isolation on the Yorkshire moors, could have written some of the most passionate (even erotic) fiction of all time? Perhaps the simplest answer lies in their father (their mother died when they were children). Self-educated, from illiterate Irish peasant stock, he went on to Cambridge and later published books of his own poems and sermons. He was a passionate believer in the transformative power of literature and art. He educated his daughters and encouraged them to read whatever they could lay their hands on (most women at the time would have had carefully supervised reading). The Brontës read Byron, Shakespeare, George Sand, Milton and Shelley. From childhood they wrote books (on tiny pages made out of old flour and sugar bags), not knowing this was out of the ordinary, not yet knowing what was and wasn't allowed. But soon the sisters faced harsh reality. Highly educated, intelligent, full of curiosity and hunger for life, they entered a world with little or no place for them. As poor, plain women their life prospects were severely limited. Becoming a governess was virtually the only profession available to them. The sisters' attempts to work as governesses were lonely and short-lived. Anne was the only one who managed to hold down a job for more than a few months. It was never long before they returned home.

Their responses to their predicament were complex and individual: Emily refused to wear a corset or petticoats and withdrew from society, spending much of her time alone on the moors; Charlotte was hugely ambitious, longing for fame and recognition; Anne, the youngest, developed a strong social perspective, writing to expose injustice and bring about reform. Emily and Charlotte's reactions to their isolation could not have been more different. It took Charlotte months to persuade Emily to consider publishing her work; for Emily writing was a deeply private act, her invisibility a cloak that allowed her to live as a recluse, in communion with nature, untouched by social constraints or expectations. She never forgave Charlotte for betraying her real identity to her publisher by letting slip that the author was in fact a woman.

Meanwhile, their brother Branwell, floundering under the weight of the family's impossibly high expectations, returned home heavily in debt, an alcoholic and a drug addict. The Brontës were once again living under the same roof, back in the intimate proximity of childhood. It was through Branwell that the sisters experienced the horror of mental illness as he descended into paranoia, bringing chaos to the household. It was also Branwell who provided the source of their sexual knowledge: caught up in a series of affairs, he allowed the sisters to vicariously share in his adventures.

All three sisters used their brother as a model for their fictional characters. He appears in various guises in their work according to their relationship with him. Charlotte, who was closest to Branwell as a child, later became the most estranged. Her outrage at his degenerate behaviour was in part a way of dealing with her own bitter frustrations. Lonely and unloved, she was forced to look on as her brother satisfied his appetites.

Here we return to the mad woman, perhaps the most sexual of all the Brontë creations, and the question of where she came from, what she represented. She is both a hideous monster and an exotic temptress, raised to enchant, to seduce. Rochester's

description of her when they first met in the West Indies is irresistible. She is Charlotte's fantasy of herself, beautiful and desired. She comes from the land of the Brontë's imagination, from a land of hot rain and hurricanes. She is both dangerous and exciting. She is passionate and sexual, angry and violent. She is the embodiment of everything that Charlotte feared in herself and longed to express, of everything Charlotte's life could never be.

"I can hardly tell you how life gets on here at Haworth. There is not an event whatever to mark its progress. One day resembles another and all have lifeless physiognomies. Sunday, baking day, and Saturday are the only ones that bear the slightest distinctive mark. Meantime, time wears away. I shall soon be 30 and I have done nothing yet ... I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel, to work, to live a life of action."

Although Charlotte would never "live a life of action" in the external, physical sense, she would travel the world in her imagination. The external lives of the Brontë sisters were dreary, repetitive, uneventful, and yet their inner lives were the opposite. To tell this story we need to dramatise the collision between drab domesticity and unfettered, soaring imagination, to see both the real and internal world at once, to make visible what is hidden inside. That is why in our play the characters from the novels are living in the house, haunting their creators. While the sisters cook and clean and sew there exists another world full of passion and fury. It seems to me that the theatre is the right place to tell this particular tale. After all, this is a story of make-believe, of the power of the imagination to transcend time and place and circumstance, to take us to places we cannot otherwise go.

Brontë Family Timeline

- 1777 Patrick Brontë is born “Patrick Brunty” in County Down, Ireland.
- 1806 Patrick earns a bachelor’s degree in theology from Cambridge.
- 1807 Patrick is ordained by the Church of England.
- 1810 Patrick publishes his first poem, “Winter Evening.”
- 1812 Patrick marries Maria Branwell and moves to Yorkshire.
- 1814 Maria Brontë is born.
- 1815 Elizabeth Brontë is born.
- 1815 Patrick Brontë is named curate at Thornton.
- 1816 Charlotte Brontë is born.
- 1817 Patrick Branwell Brontë is born.
- 1818 Emily Jane Brontë is born.
- 1820 Anne Brontë is born and family moves after Patrick is offered the Perpetual Curacy at Haworth.
- 1821 Maria Brontë (wife of Patrick) dies.
- 1824 Maria and Elizabeth attend the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge in Lancaster; Charlotte and Emily soon follow.
- 1825 Maria and Elizabeth Brontë die within six weeks of each other from tuberculosis; Charlotte and Emily return home.
- 1831-32 Charlotte attends Roe Head School in Mirfield.
- 1835 Charlotte becomes a teacher at Roe Head School. Emily enrolls as a student but returns home shortly after. Anne takes Emily’s place at Roe Head.
- 1837 Charlotte and Anne return home after Anne becomes ill. Charlotte resigns her position.

- 1838 Emily is hired to teach at Law Hill School. She returns home six months later.
- 1838 Branwell goes to Bradford to become a portrait painter.
- 1839 Anne works briefly as governess to the Ingham family but is soon dismissed and becomes governess to the Robinson family.
- 1840 Branwell takes a position as assistant clerk in Sowerby Bridge Railway Station.
- 1842 Charlotte and Emily travel to Brussels to study at the Pensionnat Heger.
- 1842 Aunt Elizabeth Branwell dies at the family home in Haworth. Charlotte and Emily return home for the funeral. Charlotte returns to Brussels, while Emily remains in Haworth.
- 1843 Charlotte becomes a teacher in the Pensionnat Heger. Branwell is hired as tutor for the Robinson family.
- 1844 Charlotte returns to England.
- 1845 Anne resigns from position as governess to Robinson family and Branwell is dismissed for having an affair with Mrs. Robinson.
- 1846 Publication of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*.
- 1847 Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* published.
- 1847 Anne's *Agnes Grey* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* published together.
- 1848 Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* published; Branwell dies of tuberculosis, followed three months later by Emily.
- 1849 Anne dies of tuberculosis.
- 1849 Charlotte's *Shirley* is published.
- 1853 Charlotte's *Villette* is published.
- 1854 Charlotte marries Arthur Bell Nicholls.
- 1855 Charlotte dies of tuberculosis and complications from pregnancy.
- 1857 Charlotte's *The Professor* is published.
- 1861 Rev. Patrick Brontë dies, having outlived his entire family.

Patrick Brontë (1777-1861)

Reverend **Patrick Brontë** (born Drumballyrone, County Down, Ireland, March 17, 1777, died Haworth, Yorkshire, June 7, 1861) was an Irish Anglican curate and writer who spent most of his adult life in England and was the patriarch of the Brontë family. Born Patrick Brunty, he changed the spelling of his name to Brontë. It is not known for certain why he did this, although it is speculated that he may have wished to hide his humble origins. The name Brontë may have been chosen for the Greek god Bronte, God of Thunder. Other theories argue that in 1799 King Ferdinand of Naples bestowed the honour of Duke of Bronte in Sicily to Lord Nelson for fighting off the French Navy. Patrick may have taken the name as a sign of respect for Lord Nelson.



Patrick was the first of ten children born to Hugh Brunty and Eleanor McCrory in Drumballyrone (near Rathfriland), County Down. He had several apprenticeships (to a blacksmith, a linen draper, and a weaver) until he became a teacher in 1798. In 1802 he moved to Cambridge to study theology at St John's College. He gained his BA degree in 1806 and was appointed curate at Wethersfield, Essex, where he was ordained a deacon of the Church of England, and ordained into the priesthood in 1807. In 1809 he became assistant curate at Wellington in Shropshire and in 1810 he published his first poem, "Winter Evening Thoughts", in a local newspaper, followed in 1811 by *Cottage Poems*, a collection of moral verse.

The following year (1812) he was appointed school examiner at a Wesleyan academy, Woodhouse Grove School, near Guiseley, where he met Maria Branwell (1783-1821). The couple were married on December 29, 1812. Their first child Maria (1814-1825) was born after their move to Hartshead, Yorkshire, and their second, Elizabeth (1815-1825), after the family moved to Thornton. There the rest of the family was born; Charlotte (1816-1855), Patrick Branwell (1817-1848), Emily (1818-1848), and Anne (1820-1849). Patrick was offered the Perpetual Curacy of Haworth in June 1819, and took the family there in April 1820.

His sister-in-law Elizabeth Branwell joined the household in 1821 to help look after the children and to care for the elder Maria, who was suffering the final stages of terminal cancer. After Maria passed away later that year, Elizabeth moved permanently to Haworth to act as Patrick's housekeeper. During this time, he was responsible for the building of a Sunday School in Haworth, which opened in 1832. He remained active for local causes into his old age and between 1849 and 1850 organised action to procure a clean water supply for the village, which was eventually supplied in 1856.

Throughout these years, Patrick dealt with the losses of his six children. In 1825, his two eldest daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, died within six weeks of each other from tuberculosis. In 1848, both Branwell and Elizabeth also succumbed to tuberculosis, closely followed by Anne in 1849. In 1855, Patrick's last surviving child, Charlotte, died just nine months after her marriage. Patrick worked with Elizabeth Gaskell on Charlotte's biography, and was responsible for the posthumous publication of her first novel *The Professor* in 1857. Charlotte's husband Arthur Bell Nicholls (1819-1906), who had been Patrick's curate, stayed with Patrick until 1861, when Patrick Brontë passed away, having outlived his entire family.

Patrick Brontë Bibliography

The Letters of the Reverend Patrick Brontë. Edited by Dudley Green Foreword by Asa Briggs (Nonsuch Publishing Ltd 2005)

A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters, and Times of the Rev. Patrick Brontë. John Lock and Canon W.T. Dixon, (1965)

The Brontës. Juliet Barker (1995)

Charlotte Brontë: Evolution of Genius. Winifred Gerin,(1967)

The Letters of Charlotte Brontë (3 vols, edited by Margaret Smith), (1995 - 2003)

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

Charlotte Brontë was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, the third of the six Brontë children. In April 1820, Charlotte moved with the family to Haworth. After her mother died in 1821, Charlotte and the children were left in the care of their father and aunt Elizabeth Branwell. In August 1824, Charlotte was sent with three of her sisters; Emily, Maria, and Elizabeth, to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire, which she would later describe as Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Its poor conditions, Charlotte maintained, permanently affected her health and physical development and hastened the deaths of her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who both died of tuberculosis in 1825 soon after they were removed from the school.



At home in Haworth Parsonage, Charlotte and the other surviving children, Branwell, Emily, and Anne, began creating imaginary kingdoms and chronicling the lives and struggles of their inhabitants. Charlotte and Branwell wrote stories about the country of Angria, while Emily and Anne wrote articles and poems about the country of Gondal. The sagas were elaborate and convoluted (and still exist in part manuscripts) and provided them with an obsessive interest in childhood and early adolescence, which prepared them for their literary vocations in adulthood.

Charlotte continued her education at Roe Head school in Mirfield from 1831 to 1832, where she met her lifelong friends and correspondents, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. During this period she wrote the novella *The Green Dwarf* under the name of Wellesley. Charlotte returned as a teacher in 1835. In 1839 she took up the first of many positions as governess to various families in Yorkshire, a career she pursued until 1841. In 1842 she and Emily traveled to Brussels to enroll in a pensionnat run by Constantin Heger and his wife Claire Zoé Parent Heger. In return for board and tuition, Charlotte taught English and Emily taught music. Their time at the pensionnat was cut short when their aunt Elizabeth Branwell died of internal obstruction in October 1842. Charlotte returned alone to Brussels in January 1843 to take up a teaching post at the pensionnat. Her second stay at the pensionnat was not a happy one; she became lonely, homesick, and deeply attached to Constantin Heger. She finally returned to Haworth in January 1844 and later used her time at the pensionnat as the inspiration for some of *The Professor* and *Villette*.

In May 1846, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne published a joint collection of poetry under the assumed names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Although the book failed to attract interest (only two copies were sold), the sisters decided to continue writing for publication and began work on their first novels. Charlotte continued to use the name 'Currer Bell' when she published her first two novels. Of this, she later wrote:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because - without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' - we had a

vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.

Her novels were deemed coarse by the critics. Much speculation took place as to who Currer Bell really was, and whether Bell was a man or a woman.

Charlotte's brother, Branwell, the only son of the family, died in September 1848. His death was attributed to tuberculosis, which also claimed sisters Emily and Anne in December 1848 and May 1849, respectively.

Charlotte and her father were now left alone. In view of the enormous success of *Jane Eyre*, she was persuaded by her publisher to visit London occasionally, where she revealed her true identity and began to move in a more exalted social circle, becoming friends with Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray and G. H. Lewes. However, she never left Haworth for more than a few weeks at a time as she did not want to leave her aging father's side.

In June 1854, Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father's curate, and became pregnant very soon thereafter. Her health declined rapidly during this time, and according to Gaskell, her earliest biographer, she was attacked by "sensations of perpetual nausea and ever-recurring faintness." Charlotte and her unborn child died March 31, 1855. Her death certificate gives the cause of death as phthisis (tuberculosis), but many biographers suggest she may have died from dehydration and malnourishment, caused by excessive vomiting from severe morning sickness. There is also evidence to suggest that Charlotte died from typhus she may have caught from Tabitha Ackroyd, the Brontë household's oldest servant, who died shortly before her. Charlotte was interred in the family vault in The Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Haworth, West Yorkshire, England.

Charlotte Brontë Bibliography

NOVELS

The Green Dwarf (1833)
Tales of Angria (1834-1839)
Jane Eyre (1847)
Shirley: A Tale (1849)
Villette (1853)
The Professor: A Tale (1857)

POETRY/ESSAYS/LETTERS

Poems of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell (1846)
The Twelve Adventurers: And Other Stories
Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, 1826 - 1832
Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, 1833 - 1834
Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, 1834 - 1835
The Belgian Essays (1842-1843)
The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: 1848-1851 With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends

BIOGRAPHIES/CRITICISM

We Are Three Sisters: Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës. Drew Lamonica. (Univ of Missouri Press, 2003).
Charlotte Brontë and Female Desire. Jin-Ok Kim. (Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).
The Brontës A to Z: The Essential Reference to Their Lives and Works. Lisa Olson Paddock & Carl E. Rollyson. (Facts on File, Inc., 2003).
Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History. Heather Glen. (Oxford University Press, 2003).
Austen, Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and the Mentor-Lover. Patricia Menon. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
Student Companion to Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Barbara Z. Thaden. (Greenwood Publishing, 2001).
Understanding Jane Eyre: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents. Debra Teachman. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001).
Charlotte Brontë: The Girl Who Turned Her Life into a Book. Kate Hubbard. (Short Books, 2001).
Charlotte Brontë. Jane Sellars. (Oxford Univ Press, 2000).
Readings on Jane Eyre. Jill Karson. (Greenhaven Press, 2000).
Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on the Drug Experience, Including Charlotte Brontë, Louisa May Alcott, Anais Nin, Maya Angelou, Billie Holiday, Nina Hagen, Carrie Fisher, and Others. Michael Horowitz. (Inner Traditions Intl Ltd, 2000).
The Brontës. Harold Bloom. (Chelsea House Publishing, 1999).
The Brontës and Religion. Marianne Thormählen. (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The Life of Charlotte Brontë. Elizabeth Gaskell. (Penguin USA, 1998).

Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës. Diane Long Hoeveler. (Pennsylvania State Univ Press, 1998).

Imagining Characters: Conversations About Women Writers: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Willa Cather, Iris Murdoch, and Toni Morrison. Ed. Rebecca Swift. (Vintage Books, 1997).

Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life. Lyndall Gordon. (Chatto & Windus, 1994).

The Colonial Rise of the Novel: From Aphra Behn to Charlotte Brontë. Firdous Azim. (Routledge, 1993).

Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience. Carol Bock. (University of Iowa Press, 1992).

The Brontës: Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte. Bettina Liebowitz Knapp. (Continuum, 1991).

Critical Essays on Charlotte Brontë. Barbara Timm Gates. (G K Hall, 1990).

Lyrical-Analysis: The Unconscious Through Jane Eyre. Angelyn Spignesi. (Chiron Publications, 1990).

Charlotte Brontë. Penny Boumelha. (Indiana University Press, 1990).

The Brontës: Charlotte Brontë and Her Family. Rebecca Fraser. (Crown Publishing, 1988).

Critics on Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Ed. Judith O'Neill. (Univ of Miami Press, 1979).

Styles in Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot. Karl Kroeber. (Princeton Univ Press, 1971).

Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius. Winifred Gerin. (Clarendon Press, 1967).

Charlotte Brontë. E. F. Benson. (Longmans, Green & Co., 1932).

The Brontës. Life and letters, being an attempt to present a full and final record of the lives of the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Clement Shorter. (Scribner's Sons, 1908).

Branwell Brontë (1817-1848)

Patrick Branwell Brontë was the fourth of six children and the only son of the Brontë family. He was born in Thornton and moved with his family to Haworth in 1820. Of the four Brontë siblings who survived into adulthood, Branwell seems to have been regarded within the family as the most talented, at least during his childhood and youth. While four of his five sisters were sent to Cowan Bridge boarding school (resulting in the death of his two oldest sisters, Maria and Elizabeth), Branwell was kept at home to be privately educated by his father, who gave him a classical education suitable for admission to Oxford or Cambridge. Branwell collaborated as a writer with his sisters in childhood and adolescence, creating fictional worlds. His surviving juvenilia shows that he collaborated most closely with Charlotte on their imaginary world of Angria.



Branwell Brontë self portrait



As a young man, Branwell was trained as a portrait painter in Haworth, and worked as a portrait painter in Bradford in 1838 and 1839. His most famous portrait is of his three sisters, in which he seems to have painted himself out. (*pictured, left*) In 1840, Branwell became a tutor to a family of young boys in Broughton-in-Furness but was dismissed within six months. During this time he wrote a translation of Horace. He was then employed on the Luddenden Foot railway station in 1841 but was dismissed in 1842 due to a deficit of eleven pounds in the accounts attributed to incompetence rather than theft. During his period of employment both as a tutor and on the railways he harbored literary ambitions and published poetry under various pseudonyms in the Yorkshire press.

In 1843 Branwell took up another tutoring position in Thorp Green, appointed as the tutor to the Robinson family's young son. He gained this position through his sister Anne, who was the governess to the Robinsons' two older daughters. During this time he corresponded with a number of old friends about his increasing infatuation with Lydia Robinson. He was dismissed on unspecified charges in 1845. It is thought, according to his account to his own family, the Robinson family's silence on the reason for his dismissal, and subsequent gifts of money from Mrs. Robinson through her servants, that he had an affair with Mrs. Robinson and that the affair had been discovered by her husband.

Branwell returned home to his family at the Haworth parsonage. Devastated by Mrs. Robinson's abandonment and the increasing unlikelihood of a reunion, he turned to alcohol. He became an alcoholic and was thought to be addicted to laudanum. His behavior became irrational and dangerous as he developed delirium tremens. Charlotte's letters from this time demonstrate that she was angered by his behavior, but that her father was patient with his broken son. Although it was at this time that his sisters' first

novels were being accepted for publication, it is not known whether he was even informed.

Branwell's severe addictions masked the onset of tuberculosis, and his family did not realize that he was seriously ill until he collapsed outside the house and a local doctor identified him as being in the disease's terminal stages. Not long after, in 1848, Branwell dies, allegedly while standing up and leaning against a mantelpiece, purely in order to prove that it could be done. His sister Emily died of the disease in December of that year, while Anne followed the next May.

Branwell Brontë Bibliography

Branwell Brontë: a biography by Winifred Gérin (Toronto/NY: T. Nelson & Sons, 1961, Hutchinson 1972)

The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë by Daphne du Maurier (Victor Gollancz 1960, Penguin Books 1972)

The Poems of Patrick Branwell Brontë, ed. by Tom Winnifrith (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd, 1983)

The Life of Patrick Branwell Brontë by Tom Winnifrith

The Brontës and their Background by Tom Winnifrith (1973 Macmillan, 1988 Palgrave Macmillan)

The Brontës by Juliet Barker (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994)

A Brontë Family Chronology by Edward Chitham (2003 Palgrave Macmillan)

Emily Brontë (1818-1848)

Emily Brontë was born in Thornton, the fifth of six children. In 1820, the family moved to Haworth, the town where Emily would live for all but two years of her life. In 1824, three years after the death of her mother, Emily left Haworth to attend school with her three elder sisters. She attended school for less than a year before being brought home following the illness, and eventual death, of her sisters Maria and Elizabeth.

It was at home during the following years that the family's literary work began to flourish. The most commonly known work from the family at this time were their tales of Angria (written largely by Charlotte and Branwell) and Gondal (by Emily and Anne). While some of the Angria tales still exist, little of Emily and Anne's work remains. Beyond these writings on Gondal, Emily also composed plays with Charlotte. Charlotte later wrote of these: "Emily's and my bed plays were established the 1st December 1827; the others March 1828. Bed plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones." While these plays are also lost, they do show a strong connection between Emily and Charlotte at this time. In 1831 Charlotte left to attend Roe Head School. During this time, Emily's bond with Anne strengthened as they wrote more together, while her connection with Charlotte faded.

In 1835 Charlotte took a job teaching at Roe Head School. Emily accompanied her as a student, however she did not adjust well to the school. A solitary girl by nature, Emily became very ill and homesick, and was sent home in mere months. After returning home, Emily again immersed herself in writing. One of her earliest surviving poems comes from this period:

*High waving heather; 'neath stormy blasts bending
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars;
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending,
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending,
Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending,
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars.*

-December 13, 1836

In 1838, Emily commenced work as a teacher at Miss Patchett's Ladies Academy at Law Hill School, near Halifax. Again, Emily suffered from homesickness, and returned to Haworth six months later. In 1842, at Charlotte's urging, Emily and Charlotte together traveled to Brussels to attend the Pensionnat Heger. Emily's time there was cut short by the death of her aunt. Charlotte and Emily returned home for the funeral, and Emily opted to remain at home from then on, feeling that was where she belonged.

In 1846, poems by the three sisters were collected and published as *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. This collection was followed a year later by the publication of Emily's only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, in 1847. Originally, the book was published under the Ellis Bell pseudonym, and as two volumes of a three volume set, the last



Portrait by Branwell Brontë

volume being *Agnes Grey*, by Acton Bell (Anne). Its innovative structure somewhat puzzled critics, and although it received mixed reviews when it first came out, the book subsequently became an English literary classic. Three years later, in 1850, Charlotte edited and published *Wuthering Heights* as a stand-alone novel and under Emily's real name.

Like her sisters, Emily's health had been weakened by the harsh local climate (Haworth had one of the worst death rates in the country). In September 1848, Emily caught a chill during the funeral of her brother Branwell, and her health quickly deteriorated. She refused all medical help, insisting to her sisters that nature be allowed to take its course. On December 19, 1848, Emily died of tuberculosis. She was interred in the Church of St. Michael and All Angels family capsule, Haworth, West Yorkshire, England.

Emily Brontë Bibliography

NOVELS

Wuthering Heights (1847)

POETRY

Poems of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell (1846)

The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë

Best Poems of the Brontë Sisters

BIOGRAPHIES/CRITICISM

We Are Three Sisters: Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës. Drew Lamonica. (Univ of Missouri Press, 2003).

Wuthering Heights: Complete Text With Introduction, Contexts, Critical Essays. Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler. (Houghton Mifflin Co, 2002).

A Student's Guide to Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë. Richard E. Mezo. (Brown Walker Press, 2002).

Student Companion to Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Barbara Z. Thaden. (Greenwood Publishing, 2001).

Emily Brontë. Robert Barnard. (Oxford Univ Press, 2000).

The Brontës. Harold Bloom. (Chelsea House Publishing, 1999).

The Brontës and Religion. Marianne Thormählen. (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Readings on Wuthering Heights. Hayley R. Mitchell. (Greenhaven Press, 1999).

The Brontës: Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte. Bettina Liebowitz Knapp. (Continuum, 1991).

A Chainless Soul: A Life of Emily Brontë. Katherine Frank. (Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

Emily Brontë. Stevie Davies. (Indiana University Press, 1988).

A Life of Emily Brontë. Edward Chitham. (Basil Blackwell, 1987).

Emily Brontë Criticism, 1900-1982. (Meckler Publishing Corporation, 1984).

The Art of Emily Brontë. Anne Smith. (Vision Press, 1976).

Emily Brontë. Winifred Gerin. (Oxford Univ Press, 1971).

Emily Brontë: Her Life & Work. Muriel Spark & Derek Stanford. (Maxwell, 1960).

The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë: a Biography. Virginia Moore. (Rich and Cowan, 1936).

All Alone: The Life & Private History of Emily Jane Brontë. Romer Wilson. (Chatto & Windus, 1928).

The Brontës. Life and letters, being an attempt to present a full and final record of the lives of the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Clement Shorter. (Scribner's Sons, 1908).

Anne Brontë (1820-1849)

Anne Brontë was born in Thornton, the last of the six children. At the age of 1, Anne lost her mother Maria. During her earliest childhood, she also lost her two eldest siblings, Maria and Elizabeth, who both died of tuberculosis contracted at the Clergy Daughters' boarding school at Cowan Bridge in 1825. Much has been written about the influence of these deaths on Anne and her remaining siblings as well as its possible influence on their writings.

Anne was educated at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, Mirfield starting in 1835. Between 1839 and 1845 she worked as a governess, first for the Ingham family, and later for the Robinson family. While working for the Robinsons, Anne encouraged the family to hire her brother Branwell to serve as a tutor. In 1845 both Anne and Branwell left the Robinson household amidst rumors of an affair between Branwell and Mrs. Robinson.

While working as a governess, Anne used her spare time to write, an activity she pursued from her early childhood with Charlotte, Emily, and Branwell. In 1846, Anne, Emily, and Charlotte's work was published as *Poems by Curer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. At the same time, Anne began work on her first novel, *Agnes Grey*. The novel was published in 1847 within a month of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and was originally bound in three volumes with Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Her second and last novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published in 1848, shortly before the deaths of Branwell and Emily in September and December of 1848 respectively.

Remembered as the most pious of the three Brontë sisters, Anne was a Christian universalist, believing that all people will eventually be saved. She discussed that belief in a December 1848 letter to the Rev. David Thom.

In May 1849, Anne died of pulmonary tuberculosis at the seaside resort of Scarborough, England, where she had gone to convalesce after a prolonged illness. A blue plaque on the wall of the town's *Grand Hotel* marks her place of death. She was buried in the town's Saint Mary's Churchyard.



Portrait by Charlotte Brontë

Anne Brontë Bibliography

NOVELS

Agnes Grey (1847)
The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)

POETRY

Poems of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell (1846)
Complete Poems of Anne Brontë
Best Poems of the Brontë Sisters

BIOGRAPHIES/CRITICISM

We Are Three Sisters: Self and Family in the Writing of the Brontës. Drew Lamonica. (Univ of Missouri Press, 2003).
Anne Brontë. Betty Jay. (Northcote House Pub Ltd, 2001).
The Brontës A to Z: The Essential Reference to Their Lives and Works. Lisa Olson Paddock & Carl E. Rollyson. (Facts on File, Inc., 2003).
The Brontë Myth. Lucasta Miller. (Jonathan Cape, 2001).
New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë. Ed. Julie Nash & Barbara A. Suess. (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001).
The Brontës. Harold Bloom. (Chelsea House Publishing, 1999).
The Brontës and Religion. Marianne Thormählen. (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës. Diane Long Hoeveler. (Pennsylvania State Univ Press, 1998).
Anne Brontë. Maria H. Frawley. (Twayne Publishing, 1996).
Anne Brontë's Radical Vision: Structures of Consciousness. Elizabeth Hollis Berry. (Univ of Victoria Dept. of English, 1994).
A Life of Anne Brontë. Edward Chitham. (Blackwell, 1991).
The Brontës: Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte. Bettina Liebowitz Knapp. (Continuum, 1991).
Anne Brontë: The Other One. Elisabeth Langland. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 1989).
The Brontës: Charlotte Brontë and Her Family. Rebecca Fraser. (Crown Publishing, 1988).
Anne Brontë: A New Critical Assessment. P.J.M. Scott. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 1983).
Anne Brontë: Her Life and Work. Ada Harrison & Derek Standford. (Telegraph Books, 1981).
Anne Brontë: Her Life and Writings. (Folcroft Library, 1974).
The Brontës and Their Background. Tom Winnifriith. (1973)
Emily and Anne Brontë. W.H. Stevenson. (Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1968).
Anne Brontë: A Biography. Winifred Gerin (Thomas Nelson, 1959).
Four Brontës: The Lives and Works of Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne Brontë. Lawrence Hanson & Elisabeth Hanson. (Oxford University Press, 1949).
Pattern for Genius: A Story of Branwell Brontë and His Three Sisters Charlotte,

Emily and Anne Largely Told in Their Own Words. Edith Ellsworth Kinsley. (E. P. Dutton, 1939).

The Brontës. Life and letters, being an attempt to present a full and final record of the lives of the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë. Clement Shorter. (Scribner's Sons, 1908).

Jane Eyre: An Overview

Jane Eyre is considered Charlotte Brontë's strongest work and one of the most famous of British novels. Charlotte first published the book as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* under the pseudonym Currer Bell. The novel was an immediate critical and popular success. Especially effusive in his praises was William Makepeace Thackeray, to whom Charlotte dedicated the novel's second edition, which was illustrated by F. H. Townsend.

Jane Eyre is a first-person narrative of the formative years of the title character, a small, plain-faced, intelligent, and passionate English orphan girl. The plot follows the form of a Bildungsroman, a novel that tells the story of a child's maturation and focuses on the emotions and experiences that lead to his or her maturity. The novel goes through five distinct stages: (1) Jane's childhood at Gateshead, where she is abused by her aunt and cousins; (2) her education at Lowood School, where she acquires friends and role models but also suffers privations; (3) her time as governess at Thornfield Manor, where she falls in love with her Byronic employer, Edward Rochester; (4) her time with the Rivers family at Marsh's End (or Moor House) and at Morton, where her cold clergyman-cousin St. John Rivers proposes to her; and (5) her reunion with and marriage to her beloved Rochester at his house of Ferndean. Partly autobiographical, the novel abounds with social criticism and sinister Gothic elements. *Jane Eyre* is divided into 38 chapters, and most editions are at least 400 pages long (although the preface and introduction on some copies can take up another 100).

The novel begins in Gateshead Hall, where a ten-year-old orphan named Jane Eyre is living with her mother's brother's family. The brother, surnamed Reed, dies shortly after adopting Jane. His wife, Mrs. Sarah Reed, and their three children—John, Eliza, and Georgiana—neglect and abuse Jane, for they resent Mr. Reed's preference for the little orphan in their midst. In addition, they dislike Jane's plain looks and quiet yet passionate character. Thus, the novel begins with young John Reed bullying Jane, who retaliates with unwonted violence. Jane is blamed for the ensuing fight, and Mrs. Reed has two of the servants drag her off and lock her up in the red-room, the unused chamber where Mr. Reed had died. Still locked in that night, Jane sees a light and panics, thinking that her uncle's ghost has come. Her scream rouses the house, but Mrs. Reed just locks up Jane for longer. Then Jane has a fit and passes out. A doctor comes and suggests that Jane should go to school.

Mr. Brocklehurst is a cold, cruel, self-righteous and a highly hypocritical clergyman who runs a charity school called Lowood. He accepts Jane as a pupil in his school. Jane is infuriated, however, when Mrs. Reed tells him that Jane is a liar. After Brocklehurst departs, Jane bluntly tells Mrs. Reed how she hates and condemns the Reed family. Mrs. Reed, so shocked that she is incapable of responding, leaves the drawing room in haste.

Jane finds life at Lowood to be grim. Miss Maria Temple, the youthful superintendent, is just and kind, but another teacher, Miss Scatcherd, is sour and abusive. At one point, Mr. Brocklehurst goes so far as to accuse Jane of being demon-possessed after she accidentally breaks a slate, although she is later cleared of this charge (by Miss Temple), and Mr. Brocklehurst is disliked even further by the students.

Brocklehurst embezzles the school's funds to support his family's luxurious lifestyle while hypocritically preaching to others a doctrine of privation and poverty. As a

result, Lowood's eighty pupils must make do with cold rooms, poor meals, and thin garments whilst his family lives in comfort. Many become sickly from a typhus epidemic that strikes the school, and Brocklehurst's neglect and dishonesty are laid bare. Mr. Brocklehurst is disgraced and stripped of power, and conditions improve dramatically at Lowood under the new regime.

Jane is impressed with one pupil, Helen Burns, who accepts Miss Scatcherd's cruelty and the school's deficiencies with passive dignity, practicing the Christian teaching of turning the other cheek. Jane admires and loves the gentle Helen, but cannot bring herself to emulate her friend's behavior. While the typhus epidemic is raging, Helen dies of consumption in Jane's arms.

The narrative resumes eight years later. Jane has been a teacher at Lowood for two years, but she thirsts for a better and brighter future. She advertises for a governess and is hired by Mrs. Alice Fairfax, housekeeper of the Gothic manor of Thornfield, to teach a lively, rather spoiled French girl named Adèle Varens. A few months after her arrival at Thornfield, Jane goes for a walk and aids a horseman who takes a fall. On her return to Thornfield, Jane discovers that the horseman is her employer, Mr. Edward Rochester, a moody, charismatic gentleman nearly twenty years older than Jane. Adèle is his ward.

Rochester seems quite taken with Jane. He repeatedly summons her to his presence and talks with her. Adèle, he says, is the illegitimate daughter of a French opera singer, Celine, who was his mistress for a time, though he doubts Adèle is his daughter. That same night, Jane hears eerie laughter coming from the hallway, and upon opening the door she sees smoke coming from Rochester's chamber. Rushing into his room, she finds his bed curtains ablaze and douses them with water, saving Rochester's life. Rochester says a matronly servant named Grace Poole is responsible, yet does not fire her, and Grace Poole shows no signs of remorse or guilt. Jane is amazed and perplexed. But by this time, Rochester and Jane are in love with each other, though they do not show it.

Soon after the fire incident, Mr. Rochester departs Thornfield, reportedly to the Continent. He returns unexpectedly with a party of high-class ladies and gentlemen, including Miss Blanche Ingram, a beautiful but shallow socialite whom he seems to be courting. The party is interrupted when a strange old gypsy woman arrives and insists on telling everyone's fortunes. When Jane's turn comes, the gypsy tells her a great deal about her life and feelings, much to Jane's surprise. Then the gypsy reveals "herself" to be Rochester in disguise.

That night, after a piercing scream wakes everyone in the house, Mr. Rochester comes to Jane for help in attending to a wounded guest, a certain Mr. Richard Mason, a queer Englishman from the West Indies. Mr. Mason has been stabbed and bitten in the arm, and a surgeon comes and secretly whisks the wounded man away. Again, Rochester hints that Grace Poole is responsible.

Jane receives word that Mrs. Reed, upon hearing of her son John's apparent suicide after leading a life of dissipation and debt, has suffered a near-fatal stroke and is asking for her. So Jane returns to Gateshead, where she encounters her cousins Eliza and Georgiana Reed. Eliza has become a self-righteous puritan, while the plump and pretty Georgiana has become vapid, always moaning about her love affairs. Although she rejects Jane's efforts at reconciliation, Mrs. Reed gives Jane a letter that she had

previously withheld out of spite. The letter is from Jane's father's brother, John Eyre, notifying her of his intent to leave her his fortune upon his death. Mrs. Reed dies in the night, and no one mourns her. Eliza enters a convent in France, and Georgiana travels to London.

After Jane returns to Thornfield, she and Rochester gradually reveal their love for each other. Though Jane accepts Rochester's proposal of marriage, she is plagued by doubts about it. She feels she is Rochester's inferior and continues to address him as "master" even after they are engaged. Her forebodings deepen when a strange, savage-looking woman sneaks into her room one night and rips her wedding veil in two. Yet again, Rochester attributes the incident to Grace Poole.

The wedding goes ahead nevertheless. But during the ceremony in the church, the mysterious Mr. Mason and a lawyer step forth and declare that Rochester cannot marry Jane because his own wife is still alive. Rochester bitterly admits this fact, explaining that his wife is a violent madwoman whom he keeps imprisoned in the attic, where Grace Poole looks after her. But Grace Poole imbibes gin immoderately, occasionally giving the madwoman an opportunity to escape. It is Rochester's mad wife who is responsible for the strange events at Thornfield. Rochester nearly committed bigamy, and kept this fact from Jane. The wedding is cancelled.

Back at the manor house, Rochester explains further. Under pressure from his father to make an advantageous marriage, and lured by Bertha's vast inheritance and personal beauty, Rochester had as a young man married Bertha. When Bertha became openly insane, Rochester locked her up in Thornfield and departed for a life of sensuality in Europe. Rochester then asks Jane to accompany him to the south of France, where they will live as husband and wife, even though they cannot be married. But Jane refuses to give up her self-respect by becoming a rich man's mistress, even though she loves him still. But she does not trust herself to refuse a second time. In the dead of night, Jane slips out of Thornfield and takes a coach far away to the north of England. When her money gives out, she sleeps outdoors on the moor and reluctantly begs for food. One night, freezing and starving, she comes to Moor House (or Marsh End) and begs for help. St. John Rivers, the young clergyman who lives in the house, admits her.

Jane, who gives the false surname of Elliott, quickly recovers under the care of St. John and his two kind sisters, Diana and Mary. St. John arranges for Jane to teach a charity school for girls in the village of Morton. At the school, Jane observes the interactions of St. John, a cold and stern man but a truly devout Christian, and Rosamond Oliver, a beautiful but silly young heiress. Jane comes to believe that the two are in love, and boldly says so to St. John. St. John confesses his love but says that Rosamond would make a most unsuitable wife for a missionary, which he intends to become.

One snowy night, St. John unexpectedly arrives at Jane's cottage. Suspecting Jane's true identity, he relates Jane's experiences at Thornfield and says that her uncle, John Eyre, has died and left Jane his fortune of 20,000 pounds. After confessing her true identity, Jane arranges to share her inheritance with the Riverses, who turn out to be her cousins. Not long afterwards, St. John decides to travel to India and devote his life to missionary work. He asks Jane to accompany him as his wife. Jane consents to go to India but adamantly refuses to marry him because they are not in love. St. John is not cruel or hypocritical like Mr. Brocklehurst, but he does not respect other people's feelings when they conflict with his own. He continues to pressure Jane to marry him, and his

forceful personality almost causes her to capitulate. But at that moment she hears what she thinks is Rochester's voice calling her name, and this gives her the strength to reject St. John completely.

The next day, Jane takes a coach to Thornfield. But only blackened ruins lie where the manor house once stood. An innkeeper tells Jane that Rochester's mad wife set the fire and then committed suicide by jumping from the roof. Rochester rescued the servants from the burning mansion but lost a hand and his eyesight in the process. He now lives in an isolated manor house called Ferndean. Going to Ferndean, Jane reunites with Rochester. At first, he fears that she will refuse to marry a blind cripple, but Jane accepts him without hesitation.

Speaking from the vantage point of ten years, Jane describes their married life as blissful.

I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result. (Chapter XXXVIII)

Meanwhile, St. John has gone to India as a missionary and dies there. Rochester eventually recovers sight in one eye, and can see their first-born son when the baby is born.

Wuthering Heights: An Overview

Wuthering Heights is Emily Brontë's only novel. It was first published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, and a posthumous second edition was edited by her sister Charlotte. The name of the novel comes from the Yorkshire manor on the moors on which the story centers. (As an adjective, *wuthering* is a Yorkshire word referring to turbulent weather.) The narrative tells the tale of the all-encompassing and passionate, yet thwarted, love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, and how this unresolved passion eventually destroys both themselves and many around them.

Now considered a classic of English literature, *Wuthering Heights*' innovative structure, which has been likened to a series of Matryoshka dolls, met with mixed reviews by critics when it first appeared. Though *Jane Eyre* was originally considered the best of the Brontë sisters' works, many subsequent critics of *Wuthering Heights* argued that its originality and achievement made it superior. *Wuthering Heights* has also given rise to many adaptations and inspired works, including films, radio, television dramatizations, a musical by Bernard J. Taylor, songs, ballet and opera.

The narrative is non-linear, involving several flashbacks, and involves two narrators - Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean. The novel opens in 1801, with Lockwood arriving at Thrushcross Grange, a grand house on the Yorkshire moors he is renting from the surly Heathcliff, who lives at nearby Wuthering Heights. Lockwood spends the night at Wuthering Heights and has a terrifying dream: the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw, pleading to be admitted to the house from outside. Intrigued, Lockwood asks the housekeeper Nelly Dean to tell the story of Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights while he is staying at the Grange recovering from a cold.

Nelly takes over the narration and begins her story thirty years earlier, when Heathcliff, a foundling living on the streets of Liverpool, is brought to Wuthering Heights by the then-owner, Mr. Earnshaw, and raised as his own. Earnshaw's daughter Catherine becomes Heathcliff's inseparable friend. Her brother Hindley, however, resents Heathcliff, seeing him as an interloper and rival. Mr. Earnshaw dies three years later, and Hindley (who has married a woman named Frances) takes over the estate. He brutalizes Heathcliff, forcing him to work as a hired hand. Catherine becomes friends with a neighbor family, the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange, who mellow her initially wild personality. She is especially attached to the refined and mild young Edgar Linton, whom Heathcliff instantaneously dislikes.

A year later, Hindley's wife dies, apparently of consumption, shortly after giving birth to a son, Hareton; Hindley takes to drink. Some two years after that, Catherine agrees to marry Edgar. Nelly knows that this will crush Heathcliff, and Heathcliff overhears Catherine's explanation that it would be "degrading" to marry him. Heathcliff storms out and leaves Wuthering Heights, not hearing Catherine's continuing declarations that Heathcliff is as much a part of her as the rocks are to the earth beneath. Catherine marries Edgar, and is initially very happy. Some time later, Heathcliff returns, intent on destroying those who prevent him from being with Catherine. He has, mysteriously, become very wealthy, and has duped Hindley into making him the heir to Wuthering Heights. Intent on ruining Edgar, Heathcliff elopes with Edgar's sister Isabella, which places him in a position to inherit Thrushcross Grange upon Edgar's death.

Catherine becomes very ill after Heathcliff's return and dies a few hours after giving birth to a daughter also named Catherine, or Cathy. Heathcliff becomes only more bitter and vengeful. Isabella flees her abusive marriage a month later, and subsequently gives birth to a boy, Linton. At around the same time, Hindley dies. Heathcliff takes ownership of Wuthering Heights, and vows to raise Hindley's son Hareton with as much neglect as he had suffered at Hindley's hands years earlier.

Twelve years later, the dying Isabella asks Edgar to raise her and Heathcliff's son, Linton. However, Heathcliff finds out about this and takes the sickly, spoiled child to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff has nothing but contempt for his son, but delights in the idea of him ruling the property of his enemies. To that end, a few years later, Heathcliff attempts to persuade young Cathy to marry Linton. Cathy refuses, so Heathcliff kidnaps her and forces the two to marry. Soon after, Edgar Linton dies, followed shortly by Linton Heathcliff. This leaves Cathy a widow and a virtual prisoner at Wuthering Heights, as Heathcliff has gained complete control of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. It is at this point in the narrative that Lockwood arrives, taking possession of Thrushcross Grange, and hearing Nelly Dean's story. Shocked, Lockwood leaves for London.

During his absence from the area, however, events reach a climax that Nelly describes when he returns a year later. Cathy gradually softens toward her rough, uneducated cousin Hareton, just as her mother grew tender towards Heathcliff. When Heathcliff realizes that Cathy and Hareton are in love, he abandons his life-long vendetta. He dies broken and tormented, but glad to be rejoining Catherine, whose ghost had haunted him since she died. Cathy and Hareton marry. Heathcliff is buried next to Catherine (the elder), and the story concludes with Lockwood visiting the grave, unsure of what to feel.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: An Overview

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the second and final novel by Anne Brontë. While not as well regarded as *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*, it has recently received critical attention as a landmark feminist text. For years, the book was considered inferior to Emily and Charlotte's work – a perception aided by Charlotte's own preface to Anne's *Agnes Grey* where she argues that Anne chose a poor subject matter for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

[Anne] had, in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was a naturally sensitive, reserved and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind: it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course, with fictitious characters, incidents and situations), as a warning to others.

The novel is divided into three volumes. The first part, narrated by prosperous farmer Gilbert Markham, describes the arrival of the mysterious widow Mrs. Helen Graham to a nearby, tumbledown mansion, Wildfell Hall. From the outset, she is a source of intrigue and curiosity for the small community. Although reticent, Helen and her young son Arthur are slowly drawn into the social circles of the village. Initially, Gilbert Markham is casually courting Eliza Millward, though his disapproving mother believes he can do better. However, his infatuation starts to wane as he becomes better acquainted with Mrs. Graham. In revenge for his change of heart, scandalous rumours and gossip about Helen start to be spread amongst the people, with Eliza often a carrier, if not the originator.

As conjecture and rumour fly wild, Gilbert is led to believe Helen is being pursued by his best friend, Mr. Lawrence. A violent encounter on the road ensues between the two men, with Mr. Lawrence injured. Unaware of this, Helen refuses to marry Gilbert, but gives him her diaries when he accuses her of loving Mr. Lawrence.

The second and third parts of the novels include Helen's diaries, which document her naive marriage to charming, but immoral and unworthy Arthur Huntingdon. At first, she is blinded by love and convinced that she will be able to bring about his reform with gentle persuasion and good example. Huntingdon is portrayed as a spoilt, selfish, self-indulgent man, but handsome and witty. When their son Arthur is born, he becomes increasingly jealous of the child's claims on her attention and affections. Huntingdon's friends become frequent visitors to their home, Grassdale, and form a dissolute pack indulging in unrestrained drinking and frenzied merriment. Moral decay is an overriding theme, with the wicked subjugating and tormenting those of finer character. No particular discrimination is made between men and women, however, with Lady Lowborough an equally unfaithful partner for her melancholy, but devoted and kind husband, Lord Lowborough.

Walter Hargrave, the brother of Helen's friend Milicent Hargrave, is established as a rival for Helen's affections. He refrains from much of the wildness of his fellows, but

is an unwelcome admirer, for Helen senses his predatory nature, most poignantly displayed in a silent struggle when they play chess. He alerts her to the infidelity of her husband, who had been carrying on an affair with Lady Annabella Lowborough. In the wake of his friends' departure, Helen's husband's torments increase, as he pines openly for his paramour and derides his wife. The corruption of their son -- encouraging him to drink and swear at his tender age -- is the last straw for Helen. She lays plans to flee, taking her son away from his father's disastrous influence.

These plans are thwarted, however, when her husband lays claim to her journals and reads of her desire for escape. His burning of her artist's tools, the means by which she had hoped to support herself, and violation of her diaries both illustrate the complete control exerted by a husband in that era. Eventually, with the assistance of her brother Mr. Lawrence, Helen is able to flee with her son and find a hiding place at Wildfell Hall.

Soon after Gilbert is enlightened as to Helen's true circumstances, she bids him leave her be, for she is unable to marry him with her husband still living. He obeys, though distressed at the prospect of never being united except in the afterlife. Shortly after, he receives word that, in the name of duty, she has returned to Grassdale to nurse her husband through an illness. Huntingdon's death is painful, fraught with doubts and terror at what awaits him. Helen cannot comfort him, for he refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions and wishes for her to instead come with him, to plead for his salvation.

A year passes. Gilbert follows the heels of a rumour regarding Helen's upcoming wedding, only to find his friend Mr. Lawrence marrying Helen's friend, Esther Hargrave. He views her old home at Grassdale, then discovers she is staying at her estates in Staningley. Doubts plague him, for it becomes apparent that she is landed gentry (from her marriage) while he is a simple farmer. He is almost driven to leave, but is overtaken at the gates by Helen, her aunt and young Arthur. The two lovers reconcile and are soon married.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall challenged the prevailing morals of the Victorian era. Especially shocking was Helen's slamming of her bedroom door in the face of her husband after continuing abuse, thereby overturning the sexual politics for the time. One critic went so far as to pronounce it "utterly unfit to be put into the hands of girls", though other critics cited it as "the most entertaining novel we have read in a month past." It is considered to be one of the first feminist novels. The main character, Helen, is spirited and forthright, unafraid to speak to the men in her life with frankness. Anne Brontë portrays this as desirable, compared to the meekness of Milicent, who is trampled and ignored by her unrepentant husband.

Reviews of Polly Teale's *Brontë*

***Brontë* at York Theatre Royal, York**

Review by J.D. Atkinson, *The British Theatre Guide*, 2005

Novelists, poets and pillars of the heritage industry, the Brontë sisters have acquired a semi-mythological status unique in the history of English literature. There is something perennially fascinating about the three gifted sisters who lived in not-so-genteel poverty with their strict clergyman father and alcoholic brother. Now Polly Teale, whose adaptation of *Jane Eyre* was such a great success for Shared Experience a few years ago, takes on the story of Yorkshire's most famous literary daughters.

Those familiar with the Shared Experience performance style will not expect a straightforward biographical play, and Angela Davies' set - a smokeblackened façade with interior walls incorporating Paula Rego's unsettling images of Victorian women - makes no concessions to costume-drama realism.

The author, who also directs, begins the play with three actresses in modern dress musing on the Brontë legend. As they don their costumes they assume the identities of Emily (Diane Beck), Charlotte (Fenella Woolgar) and Anne (Catherine Cusack). The characters move back and forth in time, creating their childhood fantasy worlds of Gondal and Angria with adored brother Branwell (Matthew Thomas), caring for their overbearing father Patrick (David Fielder), struggling to make their livings as governesses and working on their novels. The sisters are also haunted by Cathy Earnshaw, the mad Mrs. Rochester (both played by Natalia Tena), Heathcliffe and Arthur Huntingdon (the drunken husband in Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*).

Every member of the cast rises to the challenge of playing England's foremost literary family and their creations. Diane Beck vividly conveys Emily's self-contained genius and contempt for celebrity; Fenella Woolgar's Charlotte, unlikely literary lion and the only sibling to marry, manages to retain our sympathy even when she becomes the self-appointed censor of her dead sisters' works; and Catherine Cusack gives a touching performance as Anne, who despite a gentle and (by Brontë standards) conventional nature managed to produce an account of domestic violence that scandalized Victorian critics even more than Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Natalia Tena's Cathy is spinechillingly effective, but her Creole Mrs. Rochester suffers from Teale's overuse of heavy-handed symbolism - do we really need the character's frequent appearances, usually crawling on her hands and knees, to grasp that the "madwoman in the attic" represents the repressed sexuality and anger of Victorian women?

As the title indicates, the play isn't solely concerned with the three sisters. Matthew Thomas' Branwell, first seen as a lively and imaginative young boy, is more than the untalented runt of a brilliant family - his pitiful descent into alcoholism and drug addiction is triggered by the unrealistic expectations of his family, who regard him as their only hope of escape from poverty and obscurity. David Fielder plays Patrick Brontë as an autocratic but not unloving father and also doubles as the curate Arthur Bell Nicholls, whose spaniel-like devotion to Charlotte drove him to the brink of a nervous breakdown before she finally accepted his proposal of marriage.

Teale's strangely insensitive treatment of this episode, reduced to its bare bones and played for laughs, is one of several "liberties" she admits to taking with biographical

fact (for understandable purposes of clarity) and the only one that strikes a jarringly false note; otherwise the play is an ingenious and gripping interpretation of the Brontë legend.

***Brontë* at Lyric Hammersmith, London**

Review by Philip Fisher, *The British Theatre Guide*, 2005

Polly Teale, who has written and directed this family biography, has brought Shared Experience back to familiar ground. Two of the company's greatest successes, *Jane Eyre* and *After Mrs. Rochester* were variations on this theme.

In true Shared Experience style, the play combines the biographies of the members of this extraordinary writing family with linked, ethereal realizations from *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and more briefly *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In the background too, is a view of a wider world in which the Industrial Revolution is changing England forever.

We start (and end) with the actresses wryly commenting on the lives of the women whom they are to portray, prior to donning costumes and accents, in order to take us back a couple of centuries.

In front of some large, rather depressing murals painted by Anglo-Portuguese artist, Paula Rego, the bittersweet experiences of the four children of a stern, Irish vicar are brought to life for the next two and a half hours.

As was customary at the time, the initial focus is on the heir, Matthew Thomas' dissolute Branwell. He is the blue-eyed boy who seems destined to become a famous writer. Unfortunately, a love of drink (and the boss's wife) wrecks his reputation and then his health.

It is left to his sisters to achieve fame and fortune, albeit under the names of fictitious men. Their writing is their lifeblood at a time when nothing was expected of the fairer sex beyond skill with an embroidery needle or as a governess to spoil, rich children. Emily summed it up well when she said, "When I write, I leave behind this miserable body".

Diane Beck's headstrong Emily constantly battles with the proper Charlotte (Fenella Woolgar). Their goals and attitudes could hardly be more different with Charlotte regarding Emily's work as "obscene".

Matters get worse when the great works are published and the "Bell brothers" achieve fame. Emily craves anonymity while Charlotte is happy to get her share of glory, delighting in meeting the surprisingly ordinary William Makepeace Thackeray. As Catherine Cusack had identified before becoming Anne, this last sister has to be satisfied to be remembered as little more than a footnote to her more famous siblings.

Polly Teale has cleverly interwoven the lives of the Brontës with the novels that they wrote so that, as their lives are enacted, so are their stories. In particular, dancer Natalia Tena plays a kind of feral animus who realizes their sexuality in ways that the three women never could in their own day.

Brontë is the kind of thing that Shared Experience do so well. Polly Teale, who also directs, has illuminated the lives of three famous women and reminded her audience both of what good writers they are and the hurdles that they were forced to overcome in order to allow their writing to achieve publication.