

# Five British Writers

Day 20  
(of 28)



# *The Four Youngest Brontë Siblings*



Emily

Charlotte

Anne

(their brother Branwell  
painted himself out)

# Haworth and Angria



Figure 1 Haworth Parsonage in the 1850s. From an ambrotype in the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

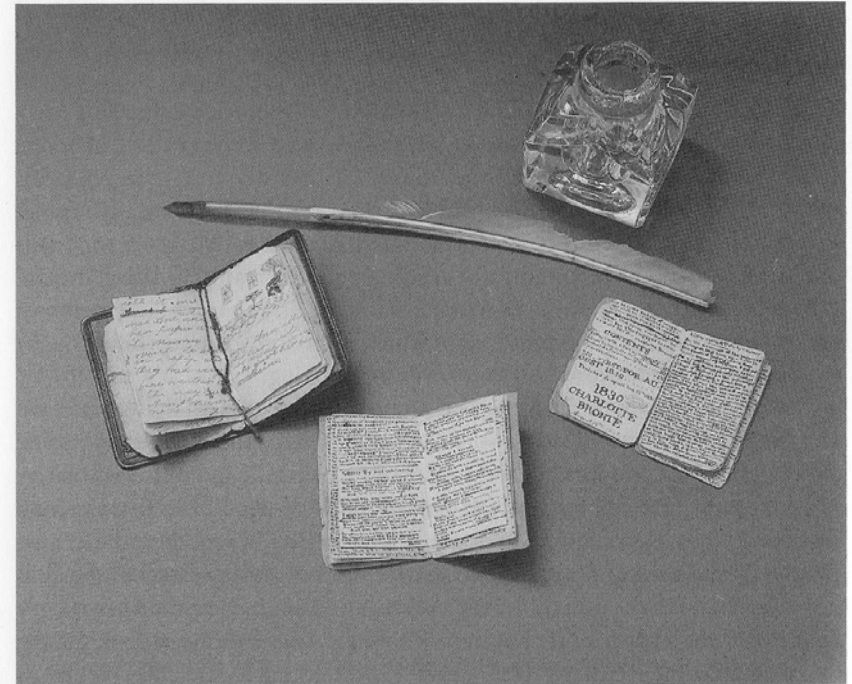


Figure 2 Some of the little Glass Town volumes. Brontë Parsonage Museum.

The Brontës lived in Haworth Parsonage, on the Yorkshire Moors. But the four youngest Brontës wrote fantastic literature set in imaginary realms like Glass Town or (in the case of Charlotte and Branwell) Angria, envisioned as being in some part of Western Africa, although with very English characteristics.

# *Jane Eyre*

- The novel was first published in October 1847, in three volumes.
- It was immediately popular—a second edition was published in January 1848 and a third in April 1848. A single volume edition appeared in 1850.
- Your text is that of the third edition, with some additions from the original manuscript and with both of the prefaces Charlotte Brontë wrote (for the second and third editions, respectively).
- We will discuss the way Brontë defends and introduces her work in these prefaces more when we read early criticism of the novel, but it is important to keep in mind even while reading that the novel was controversial as well as popular, branded as “anti-Christian” by certain critics, and described by Brontë’s Victorian biographer as a novel she would not allow her daughter to read before the age of 20.

# 18<sup>th</sup> c. Novel Genres

## Picaresque Novel

The 18<sup>th</sup> c. picaresque novel developed out of a form of novel initially begun in 16<sup>th</sup> c. Spain. It is a novel of adventure that follows the picaro (a rough but attractive figure, usually an orphan or presumed illegitimate child, typically male) as he journeys through society, often unsettled and seducing women, until he ultimately finds a vocation, a wife, and, of course, magically, a family of noble birth from whom he had been tragically separated as an infant. The picaresque style is characterized by social satire and realistic descriptions of scenes from 'low' life.

## Sentimental/Seduction Novel

Another popular 18<sup>th</sup> c. novel form was the sentimental/seduction novel, usually about an exceedingly pure and innocent heroine who is pursued by a "rake" who tries desperately to seduce her. Either he fails and her purity is rewarded with a happy ending, or he is successful and she dies shortly afterward, often of syphilis (sometimes becoming a prostitute in the interim).

## Gothic Novel

A related genre to the sentimental novel is the gothic—a word originally referring to a Germanic tribe of Goths, by this point it had come to have a very loose meaning, indicating an interest in some sort of barbarous or medieval or romantic scene (as opposed to the civilized or classical or rational world). In the gothic novel, a young English person (usually a woman) travels to Europe (usually Italy and the alps) where she is somehow held captive by an evil figure, typically noble or pseudo-noble (*Dracula*, written at end of 19<sup>th</sup> c. borrows entirely from gothic motifs). The biggest threat is the perversion of her good English virtues through the machinations of her captor. Her 'Englishness' is what preserves her.



# *What Kind of Novel is Jane Eyre?*

Many scholars use the German term *Bildungsroman* to describe *Jane Eyre*. A *Bildungsroman* is a novel of education or development, usually about a male protagonist, almost always an orphan, from boyhood to manhood.

How does the form of this mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. novel appear to relate to the other genres just discussed?

*“There was no possibility  
of taking a walk that day” (13)*

- What is the significance of the novel’s first sentence?

### *Books, Windows, Mirrors*

- Where is Jane Eyre located when the reader is first given a picture of her?

See p. 14

- How does John Reed’s interruption of this picture raise the issues of class and gender?

See p. 15-18

# *Narrator and Character*

- How does the narrator of the novel relate to the character of Jane?
- Is there a difference in their viewpoints?
- When is this difference most marked? See p. 40-41, for example. How does the voice of 'Jane' begin to change? See p. 83.
- Why is the depiction of childhood so important to Victorian fiction?

“the child is father to the man”

Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*



# Body, Spirit, Authority and Agency

- The novel maps familial relations onto political relations

“I was rather *out* of myself as the French would say... like any rebel slave, I felt resolved to go all lengths” (19)

“A child cannot quarrel with its elders...without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse” (47)
- The novel also appears to map issues of mental and spiritual control onto physical states

“I could not eat...I put both plate and tart away” (28)

“I must keep in good health, and not die” (41)

# *Repeating Structures?*

- Gateshead

John Reed

Mrs. Reed

“What would uncle  
Reed say to you, if he  
were alive?” (36)

Eliza, Georgiana

- Lowood

Mr. Brocklehurst

Miss Temple

“she has to answer to  
Mr. Brocklehurst for  
all she does” (61)

Miss Miller, Helen  
Burns

# Lowood

- Based on the Clergy Daughters' school where two of Charlotte's sisters lost their health: Mary and Elizabeth. See note p. 507
- How is authority expressed physically here?  
“you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls” (75)  
“We are not to conform to nature” (75)
- How does Helen Burns internalize these teachings?  
Is her ‘inside beyond interference’?  
“our corruptible bodies” (69)

# *Lowood and Loss*

How does Jane respond to the teachings of Brocklehurst and Helen?

What is the significance of the last word of the penultimate chapter in the first volume?

*“Resurgam”*

# *Next Class: JE, Chapters and Scenes*

- Read chapters 10-21.

Your edition gives you both the numbering of the complete work and the numbering by volume (Volume I Chapter 10 to Volume II Chapter 7)

- Post the questions you would like to discuss on our *Jane Eyre* day of discussion.

Remember, you now also have the option of responding to another student's post for credit.