

Walking with Anne Brontë: Insights and Reflections

Editor's Introduction

I'm asked frequently which Brontë is my "favourite," as though they can be ranked by talent and approachableness. Say "Anne," and you receive a puzzled but intrigued look of approbation, as though you have revealed yourself to be a deeply mysterious and unconventional individual. Name "Charlotte," however, and you are often—in my experience—met with a slight smirk. *Charlotte*. Of course. The obvious option.

—Sophie Franklin, *Charlotte Brontë Revisited* (2022)

It is a sad fact that Anne Brontë has come to be regarded by posterity as the Cinderella of the famous trio of sisters. Critics have been off-hand about her two novels, tending to dismiss them as mere talent against her sisters' genius.

—Arnold Craig Bell, *The Novels of Anne Brontë* (1992)

[Anne Brontë] has been passed over—both as a writer and as an individual—by successive Brontë biographers as less than nothing, or dismissed with a gesture of condescension as affording only a pale replica of her sisters' genius. . . .

For in the last resort Anne Brontë must be judged by the high character which she displayed not only at the end but at every turning in her life. It is for what she was, quite as much as for what she created, that one wants to know more of her.

—Winifred Gérin, *Anne Brontë* (1959)

Few readers today will be able to appreciate Hale's conclusion that Anne wrote only because she could not fulfill her "true" vocation, that of wife and mother.

—Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Brontës* (2018) referencing W. T. Hale's conclusion in his *Anne Brontë: Her Life and Writings* (1929)

“Dear gentle Anne,” as Charlotte Brontë’s friend Ellen Nussey viewed the youngest Brontë sibling, has traditionally been many people’s impressions of Anne Brontë. In recent decades, however, there has been far more of a focus on what Juliet Barker has referred to in her seminal biography of the Brontës as Anne’s “core of steel.” This has been coupled with an admiration for Anne’s own stated desire to “tell the truth” in her two novels and a sense that her personal attributes of courage and duty may well have exceeded those exhibited by Charlotte and Emily. These enduring qualities have steadily come to replace much of the frequently dismissive personal comments and ambiguous literary commentary that bizarrely defined Anne’s reputation in the writings of early Brontë biographers and interpreters.

I decided to open this introduction with commentary from some of the writers who have chosen to highlight some of this denigration, if only to destroy it. Even some of Anne’s own early biographers such as W. T. Hale were apparently not too sure how far they could go in admiring her.¹ In life, things were never easy for Anne Brontë; and in death, her legacy has frequently been dismissed as if it has been all too much and too unreal to have three talents in one family. George Moore in his *Conversations in Ebury Street*, and an erstwhile huge champion of Anne, says as much as we shall see later.

This present work is unfortunately littered with unfair commentary about the youngest Brontë sibling by other writers—I consider May Sinclair to be among the worst of the early writers along with Ellis Chadwick who saw only two geniuses (Emily and Charlotte) in the family and everyone else as contributing to making them sound even better.² Another early Brontë biographer Clement Shorter opened a description of Anne in *The Brontës and Their Circle* by proclaiming that both “*Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* would have long since fallen into oblivion but for the *inevitable* association with the romances of her two *greater* sisters” (my emphasis added).³ While some of Anne Brontë’s more recent biographers and critics have successfully emulated the earlier panache of these earlier Brontë scholars and have emerged with fully engaging accounts, others have demonstrated the tactical aplomb of good defense lawyers with strength-based assessments of their “client.” In a similar way, my coauthors and I have also chosen to shine a spotlight on Anne’s earlier critics if only swiftly to destroy their potential reach and acceptance with fairer academic and personal assessments—assessments designed (with hopefully some panache added) to override the hasty conclusions of former prejudiced judges and to convince the jury of current readers with a more judicial-minded

reasoning behind our loyalty to Anne. Even today, some of the older and more prejudiced opinions prevail; and it is reasonable to add, since I live here, that Anne Brontë is not very well known in the United States. For those who are familiar with *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen, it would not be entirely inaccurate to suggest that Anne's profile here is not that much greater than that of Margaret Dashwood, the younger sister of Elinor and Marianne—in other words, Anne has a tendency to be viewed as a character of marginal interest who occasionally distracts the otherwise disengaged reader with her prattle.⁴

Working *down* the age range from the eldest to the youngest of the Brontë siblings who survived childhood, it has often seemed to me that the exhaustion that surrounds intense literary and other critical attention on members of the Brontë family typically stops at Emily. In the process, Branwell is largely dismissed as too great a problem while their elder siblings Maria and Elizabeth sadly died too young to leave much of a trail for biographers and critics. It is almost superfluous to say that this paradigm has led to Anne inevitably becoming overshadowed or just “included” in other critical works that primarily focus on Charlotte and Emily. I am surely not the only admirer of the Brontës who has found this highly annoying and irritating.

If instead of working our way down from Charlotte's undeniable literary achievements, we were to work ourselves *up* from looking into the literary and personal world of the youngest to the eldest surviving sibling, what would the literary world think if we were *still* to stop after admiring Emily's life and achievements and decided to ignore Charlotte? The idea would be unthinkable, right! Forgetting the brilliant writer of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* would seem irrational and even criminal in literary circles. It seems superfluous to be point out that their troubled brother, Branwell, is typically viewed sparingly in both directions!

In short, my fellow authors and I feel that it should be just as unthinkable to ignore Anne's literary legacy as the compelling writer of *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, fifty-nine beautiful poems, two self-penned “diary papers,” and five interesting or heartbreaking letters as it would be to ignore Charlotte's. Anne's biographer Edward Chitham at the 1994 Anne Brontë conference organized by the Brontë Society in Scarborough had every reason for saying at the outset of one of the talks that he was an “Anne person.” He still is, as am I, and several writing here would assert the same.

Taking Mr. Chitham's memorable comment as the inspiration for much of my own devotion to the memory of Anne, I wanted to put together an anthology of like-minded admirers of the youngest Brontë. Our goal has been to bring together a "Team Anne" approach toward showcasing Anne's literary talents and interesting personality to those that either have not heard of her, avoid thinking too much about her achievements if they have, or who have too often been wary of declaring their deep affection for her in company otherwise disposed to revere Charlotte and Emily as the only writers of consequence in the family. We also hope that *Walking with Anne Brontë* will be viewed as a worthy addition to the growing body of work written by those who *have* already absorbed the lessons of Anne Brontë's life and who understand the literary power of her novels and poetry. In this regard, I was very struck by a comment that Samantha Ellis wrote in *Take Courage* in which she was surprised to discover that "most of the volunteers" who work for the Brontë Parsonage and Museum "say that Anne is their favorite."

Ms. Ellis is one of my favorite interpreters of Anne's life and work, and she goes on to wonder:

Why she is ignored, or written off as boring? Why isn't she read as much as her sisters? Why was her work suppressed, why is it underrated even now, and what does that say about what women still are and aren't allowed to say? And what can I learn from her life and from her afterlife? (Samantha Ellis, *Take Courage*, p. 5)

These are typical reflections when it comes to thinking about Anne Brontë. As we walk with Anne and listen to some of her own insights and reflections in the pages ahead, readers will hopefully come to understand more of why Ms. Ellis was prompted to ask these questions. Most of the time when many of us look at the Brontë literary landscape, we find ourselves wanting to learn as much about Anne as scientists eager to study some interesting geological formation in a hitherto undiscovered or overlooked country. Anne needs seeking among, and rescuing from, the "foggy ruins of time," to quote from "Mr. Tambourine Man" by Bob Dylan. Other literary "geologists"—Anne would like this as she was fascinated by the subject—have been doing the same in recent decades with the meticulous Edward Chitham, the loyal Nick Holland, the lively and curious Samantha Ellis, and the highly appreciative Adelle Hay among those most seeking to find or enhance her reputation. There have been other more distant writers such as George Moore and W. T. Hale in the 1920s and Winifred Gérin, and Ada Harrison with Derek Stanford in the late 1950s through to the more recent Arnold Craig Bell, Elizabeth Langland, Maria Frawley, and P. J. M. Scott from the 1980s onward who have

added their “humble quotas” to the overarching goal of making sure that Anne Brontë is appreciated for the talented genius she was.⁵

I cannot find Mr. Hale’s book, but I have all the other critical and biographical works named above that have been published on Anne. The tragedy is that it has taken so long for her to achieve this just recognition. For the most part, she really doesn’t have as much of a presence on shelves devoted to Brontë literary criticism as she should do. What we need to know at this point is that even Anne’s first serious biographer, Winifred Gérin, placed her on “an oaken stool” beside her sisters’ thrones.⁶ It was Anne’s first and earlier champion, George Moore, who first correctly identified her as the “Cinderella” of English literature.⁷ There may be skepticism tossed out to some of his claims as we shall see later, but reading his comments today is somewhat heartwarming for Anne’s more devoted admirers. Was *Agnes Grey*, for example, the “most perfect prose narrative” in English literature as Mr. Moore claimed it to be or one of many in the highest of literary echelons as I would argue?

I need to make it clear to our readers from the outset that while everyone writing in this book fully admires the literary achievements of Charlotte and Emily Brontë and is as devoted to them as they are to Anne, we do rightly feel a mixture of surprise and sense of aggrievement that Anne is the overshadowed sibling among the three sisters. We feel this loss as unwarranted, and like Elizabeth Langland has said in a memorable conclusion to her study of Anne in *Anne Brontë: The Other One*, we really need to flip Mary Ward’s earlier assessment of Anne as “like them [Emily and Charlotte], yet not with them” to “unlike them, yet with them.” I have always remembered and cherished this defiant and memorable observation and it helped to shape my subsequent appreciation of Anne in the years since.

Those who do end up reading *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* could be forgiven for asking why it has seemed so hard for others to see the intricacies of this unique “geological” literary formation. Is it because one or both dusty books can only be seen on a hard-to-reach upper shelf or are only available to the knowing reader online as is the case with my local library system? Anne Brontë used to love the “distant prospects” on the moor above Haworth according to Charlotte in a letter she wrote to her literary reader, William S. Williams, May 22, 1850. Maybe this is how *not* Anne’s, *but* Emily’s and Charlotte’s literary reputations have been seen by those who choose to focus their effortless attention on the brightest of the distant stars and not on the more intricate shades of the

abundant life nearby that maybe requires a variety of instruments and tools to see. For *me*, either I can find Anne in those same distant prospects of sunrises, sunsets, and bright stars or I can find her close by requiring my closest attention. Rewardingly so, it has to be said, and I would argue that it is better to view the achievements of all *three* sisters in the same way.

When we come to consider the long-established way of looking at the lives and work of the Brontë sisters, we can trace this lack of a fair appreciation of Anne's talents back to the efforts of both Mrs. Gaskell and Ellen Nussey to portray the whole family largely through the eyes of Charlotte alone. Given that the former was Charlotte's first biographer and the latter her closest friend, this is not surprising; and over the succeeding years, Brontë biographers have typically followed their spiritual and effervescent lead. In most cases they have generally found it easier to write about the family as a whole with Juliet Barker's magisterial *The Brontës* taking this trend to its successful and, arguably, unsurpassed conclusion. This holistic approach can be the case even when a biographer otherwise tries to focus on one or other of the family—the others in the family will somehow shove or merge their way in and create a melting pot of influence in the process.⁸ It is generally (and understandably) easier when writing about children of the same family to see them as a group with similar interests such as reading and writing. It would be difficult to write a biography about Anne, Emily, Charlotte, or Branwell and *not* remark on how much he or she would end up doing things together with one or other or all their siblings. This was very much a hallmark of the Brontë siblings' childhood: from their famous sharing of Branwell's toy soldiers in 1826 and saying little when in company outside the Parsonage while reading voraciously and talking with ease within it, to writing stories based on imaginary worlds and walking the moors above Haworth.

It actually amazed me when I was putting together my recent "*Meeting*" *Anne Frank* book how easily some writers of my source material could separate and highlight Anne Frank's childhood from that of her sister Margot. Just as I have found with Anne Brontë, it can only be done if a writer chooses to ignore the lesser-known sibling (Margot in the case of the Franks) in favor of following the one (Anne) with the louder voice that rests on a deserving fame that overwhelms rather than illuminates those around her. In other words, I think Anne Brontë is just as interesting as her better-known elder siblings, Charlotte and Emily, and I think that Margot Frank is just as compelling a person as her more famous younger sister, Anne. As Margot's importance to her sister's story is rarely conveyed fairly in the literature about the Franks and Anne's only marginally more so in works on the

Brontës, it is fair to say that both Margot Frank and Anne Brontë are rendered the poorer for this by being reduced to imperceptible shadows.

Others will see this conclusion as tangential at best or irrelevant at worst, but having written about both Margot Frank and Anne Brontë, I can see the connection between the two clearly. While there may be perfectly valid reasons for the greater attention paid to Anne Frank, and Charlotte and Emily Brontë, that is not my purpose here in raising this complex topic. Fame can distort as much as it can illuminate and any discussion of Anne Brontë has to contend with the question of why this is so given that she is every bit as talented and interesting as the greater-known of her literary siblings. It is a little more complex in Margot Frank's case as she was more talented intellectually than her sister but has been cruelly categorized by fame as a person of lesser interest through no deserving fault of her own. Although she wrote a diary while hiding in Amsterdam, it has sadly not been found; this leaves us with all the equally deserving fame and interest that surrounds Anne Frank. While Anne Brontë is clearly better known in literary circles than Margot Frank is in any historical discussions of the Holocaust, the Frank family, or the Jewish experience in the Netherlands during the Second World War, *within* the context of those same literary circles Anne has traditionally been viewed as a lesser talent whenever someone wants to compare her literary achievements to those of Emily and Charlotte.

Over the years, Charlotte Brontë has often been viewed as the spokesperson for the entire family, understandably admired as much for her own talents as for acting as the marshaling genius of all three sisters' publishing endeavors.⁹ This extended to curating what the world would first understand about her sisters (and herself) in her 1850 "Biographical Notice" that she penned to accompany the Smith, Elder & Co. republished edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.¹⁰ The net result of this attempt at sympathetic clarity was that Emily would come to be viewed as the literary and poetic genius of the family, while Anne would be provided with a "nun-like veil" that was so heavy that too many subsequent chroniclers of the Brontë family would find it hard to lift.¹¹ Until relatively recently, this "shield" proved to be both of a personal and literary nature and its weight prevented us from seeing Anne's true deserving. Thus, could Ellis Chadwick claim (with no evidence whatsoever) that Charlotte and Anne's famous train ride to London to see their publishers in July 1848 contained "sufficient excitement" to "suit Charlotte immensely" while the "quiet and serene" Anne "probably slept."¹² Thus, could Mrs. Gaskell quickly cement the impressions raised by Charlotte's account of her youngest sister's literary inconsequence with the telling remark that Anne's second novel *The Tenant*

was “little known.”¹³ For some early Brontë critics and biographers these first interpretations and dismissive assessments about Anne’s personal and literary worth were not worth challenging and as they did not impede their more accurate assessment of Emily’s weird genius and Charlotte’s drive toward personal and literary greatness, they were probably forgiven more than they should have been.¹⁴ For others, though, Charlotte’s initial efforts in 1850 to explain her youngest sister, edit her poems, and dismiss *The Tenant* have proved to be *considerably* problematic. No reasonable work on Anne Brontë can truly ignore Charlotte’s “Biographical Notice” and still claim to have said everything necessary in her defense; several of my fellow writers in the pages ahead have likewise taken up the challenge of adding their own commentary.

Anne Brontë and I

I have loved Anne and her work for over thirty years now. If I can only vaguely remember when I first “walked with” Anne and read *Agnes Grey* over the course of visiting my grandmother in 1990, I have a better memory of the moment when I first discovered *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in a Keswick bookshop in the English Lake District. This took place while I was on a coaching tour in late 1991, and I began reading the novel both during the rest of the trip and then on our way home. Unlike Thackeray who supposedly read *Jane Eyre* overnight, I am not blessed with the faculty of rapid reading. By the time I attended an Emily Brontë conference in Leeds later in 1992 (arranged by the Brontë Society), I must have been hooked on learning about Anne as much as I already was on Emily since I remember talking a lot about her to anyone I met. I hadn’t been to Haworth before this conference, and I can remember rushing up the steps into the Parsonage convinced that I would be able to roam the place freely and not collide as I almost did with all the guide ropes everywhere. This meant that although I could readily *look* at where Charlotte, Emily, and Anne had once lived and written their novels and many of their poems, I could not as easily *feel* what I needed to. I am sure that others will easily be able to do both on visiting the Parsonage, but in my naivety, I must have been expecting a different and totally unrealistic experience from my first visit. If I had thought about it, it was hardly likely that Brontë fans would be able to sit at the same dining room table on which the sisters wrote their novels or be allowed to perch on the edge of one of the beds!

I also recall seeing Anne’s collection of stones from Scarborough, and I certainly must have been looking forward to a probable future Anne Brontë conference judging by the poems that I wrote

after the conference in which I referred to both Emily and Anne as if I wanted readers to think that I knew both girls personally—which I wish I had!

I devoured many biographies and critical works of Anne Brontë in the immediate months following the Emily conference with what were then recent critical works by Arnold Craig Bell, Elizabeth Langland, and Edward Chitham leaving the most impact on my realization that this talented youngest sister had been unfairly ignored and even slighted over the years. I still deeply loved Emily—both for how her life resonated and for her powerful literary legacy—and, of course, I must admit to also studying Charlotte and finding her just as highly compelling as I'd been led to expect; but Anne had the most enduring and deepest impact on me as I enjoyed my earliest years in the world of the Brontës and the Brontë Society. My happiest moment came when an article I wrote, "The Impressive Lessons of *Agnes Grey*," was accepted for what was then known as Brontë Society *Transactions* (now *Brontë Studies*).¹⁵ In those days, I was obliged to use an electric typewriter and was often forced to cover corrected whole sentences and paragraphs with needed glued replacements. I would then photocopy the end result and submit my efforts for peer review. Edward Chitham not only reviewed and ultimately accepted my Anne Brontë article, but he edited it as well. I really enjoyed writing what I viewed as a necessary critique of the *Atlas Newspaper's* flat and unfair review of *Agnes Grey*.¹⁶ It marked the genesis of my now deep-rooted skepticism of the work of those who write dismissive studies of Anne Brontë's life and negative reviews of her work. I really *felt* a level of anger toward the *Atlas* that has never left me whenever I "alight upon" articles and books written in a similar dismissive tone.

In this regard, I believed fervently that such critics ignored Anne's cogent realism, overlooked the "condition of family" lessons and gentle romanticism of *Agnes Grey*, dismissed the vital precepts underlying her purpose in writing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and undervalued her quest for the psychological truth that later impressed even May Sinclair who found Anne's insight to be "superior to Charlotte's."¹⁷ That such early reviewers might recognize *some* of the above points, or felt an embarrassing need to compensate for their distracted and begrudging recognition of Anne's talents in some areas by revealing their ignorance in their others, amounted to an overall dishonest disservice.

The Anne Brontë conference that then followed in Scarborough in 1994 seemed both inevitable and unexpected in how swiftly it arrived; I assumed that one centered on Charlotte would come first, or maybe there had already been one before I discovered the sisters' works. I must have been to Scarborough before with my parents, but I couldn't recall going, and I certainly could not have imagined that we would have gone to see Anne's grave at St. Mary's Church. My dad just didn't

like visiting grave sites for one, and my mother was a Latin teacher and steeped more in the world of Romans and Greeks than she was in Victorian literature.

Insert Picture(s)

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How Anne's grave in St. Mary's, Scarborough, looked in 1997 before the Brontë Society placed a plaque over the main stone in 2011 © Tim Whittome

Although I had seen Anne's grave before with my then girlfriend in 1992, the Scarborough conference and the commemoration beside it was obviously a much more focused and official occasion. Debbie and I relished the idea of talks by, and meetings with, Anne Brontë scholars and other like-minded fans. At the time, it seemed as if Anne had finally arrived; and every talk, every walk, every meal we took together seemed designed to prove her value and worth and the close bond that existed among some of her most devoted followers. Catherine Rayner, who has submitted an essay for this anthology, was the chair of the conference committee and arranged the weekend proceedings at the Grand Hotel and visits to the theater for an Alan Ayckbourn play and Filey. Catherine recently described it to me as "a wonderful weekend soaked in Anne Brontë and all of her life and works." Sadly, I could not be part of Anne's bicentennial celebration of her life in 2020, but as the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed much of the attention, I probably didn't miss as much as I might have. Once again, many would find Anne at the losing end of the "attention [that] must be paid" scale to quote from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

The last time that I would get to "see" Anne Brontë in Scarborough and to visit Haworth came in 1997. My future wife and I gathered around Anne's weathered grave in St. Mary's Church and paid just tribute. My wife was American, and after I moved with her to Los Angeles that year and then quickly to Seattle in 1998, we sadly lost sight of the Brontë sisters in terms of being able to visit the sights and sounds of their world—*except* I could still carry their works with me, and I hoped I would be able to draw from Anne Brontë's much cherished personal and literary abilities as calm instructor and empathetic therapist when *really* needed. I felt that they resonated most when I tried to engage as meaningfully as I could with Emily's "hopeless world without."¹⁸ In the United States this was never going to be easy after having been raised in England with very different expectations! When it came to working hard to be a successful adoptive parent of a troubled teenage daughter with reactive

attachment disorder and an unwillingness to become part of a new “forever family,” both Anne’s advice and Emily’s scorn would end up being tasked to their fullest extent.

As it turned out, Emily’s scorn would swiftly triumph over Anne’s advice, but that was less Anne’s fault than it could be laid at the feet of a child-welfare legal complex eager to destroy what it couldn’t help. As Anne had experienced with her teaching of either difficult children or teenagers unwilling to be fully guided, I was a powerless participant, and I felt paralyzed by the difference between what I *knew* about my daughter’s difficulties and what I was being *told*. Just as Anne had drawn from her own experiences as a governess in two very different homes to write two very truthful novels centered around the need for reforms in the legal status of married women and for changes in the responsible raising of children, I decided to write what I saw as an instructional trilogy about my experiences as an adoptive parent of a child who angrily refused to attach or be parented.¹⁹ Like Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, I believed strongly that “helicopter parenting” was more relevant to raising my difficult daughter than neglect, indulgent acquiescence, or authoritarian rule ever could be. Like Anne, I wanted to “tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it.” Those unable to receive it sadly included those who sought to break up my family to find another “solution” to my daughter’s mounting troubles—Cordelia ending up being homeless was one such.

Much of the brutality and pointlessness of my daughter’s world while in state care would have appalled Anne if she were alive today and we were friends. If it is not overly presumptuous to say, I like to think that Anne would have despaired at Cordelia’s unwillingness to engage with her new “forever family” or communicate her needs effectively. In adoption, as in friendships and relationships, reciprocity is surely key to building mutual trust and understanding. I could see this. Assuming that *Agnes Grey* has some correlation with the truth here, I think Anne could see this when, as a governess at Blake Hall in 1839, she despaired of getting her rambunctious charges to listen. One can recall what Charlotte said of her youngest sister in her 1850 “Biographical Notice”: “What [Anne] saw sank deeply into her mind [and] did her harm.”

Just as Charlotte also says of Emily in that same “Biographical Notice” that “an interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world,” so too did (and still does) my daughter need an interpreter. Anne Brontë inspired me to develop that role, but in the end, it was not enough to save my daughter from the effects of ruinous state control and oversight. I learned how it is sometimes possible to convey the truth as Anne wished to do with her two novels and *still* fail to influence

anything, the right person, or the intended audience. Anne would have experienced a similar despair with being unable to influence her own brother Branwell's behavior.

I wanted to be a father, just as Anne wanted to be a successful governess; and in fairness to us, I like to think that we would have been so much better as adoptive parent and teacher if we had been blessed with raising and educating receptive children. I love Cordelia deeply, just as I believe that Anne came to understand and perhaps even enjoy the company of the Robinson girls. But love, understanding, and empathy are rarely enough with troubled or uncooperative children; via different experiences and trials, Anne and I lived through the consequences of this underlying truth. My many critics in Los Angeles would argue that I was out of my depth as an adoptive parent of a troubled teenager in much the same as Anne, Charlotte, and Emily were said to be out of their comfort zone as teachers and governesses. I do not presume to know what Anne would have said in her response to critics of the Brontës as governesses, but I have no doubt as to why she once felt the need to write in her prayer book that she was “sick of mankind and their disgusting ways.”²⁰

But for all her many trials, Anne's “core of steel” never failed her through to her last words to Charlotte as she lay dying, urging her sister to “take courage.”²¹ She battled to the end, always resolute, and was always desirous of doing good in the world before she left it. This courageous rising to the challenge of her personal difficulties and her artistic ability to convey her many personal, religious, and employment experiences in a clear, compelling, and often imaginative way define her legacy to us today.

The Brontës and Us: Editing *Walking with Anne Brontë*

The writers you will be meeting in the pages ahead—six from the United Kingdom, five from the United States, and one from France—have inspired, insightful, or reflective words to write about the nature of their walk with Anne Brontë in line with their preferences for an academic or personal “Team Anne” approach.

As the editor of *Walking with Anne Brontë*, I recently came across the following grounding statement that “editing someone else's work is a sensitive task” and that “a good editor will never underestimate an author's connection to, or passion for, the work.” Such an editor could also be a “perfectionist,” but they should have a good eye for identifying “spelling” and “grammar” problems and for noting when further “detail” is needed, or when extraneous information needs to be dropped—anything that could potentially “hurt” the project. Editors are expected to be “honest,”

“communicative,” and “empathetic” and to “ensure that every sentence counts.” We must also not “inhibit the style” of the author or make “changes for changes’ sake.”²² Much as I hope I have fulfilled these goals in the pages ahead, it is certainly not for me to say if I have succeeded or if my coauthors would agree that I have. I can only assure my fellow authors and readers that I did not speed-read any of their contributions or accept them without comment or suggestion.

Overall, we tasked ourselves to show our readers how Anne belongs as much with Emily or Charlotte as either of her elder sisters belongs with Anne, no one sister’s talent superseding or eclipsing that of the other two but with a personal preference allowed. The world of the Brontës constitutes a surprisingly competitive field of study, and more than it ought or deserves to be. While it is possible to have favorites—mine are clearly Anne and Emily just as others find Charlotte and Emily more to their liking.²³ As noted above, no one writing for this anthology has tried or wanted to denigrate Emily’s and Charlotte’s literary or personal achievements as the price for being able to admit Anne to their elevated ranks. Yet we do believe that Anne has a comfortable and well-padded chair alongside them and not a rickety wooden stool at their feet, and this assurance has meant that some of us have felt the need to take Charlotte to task for her attitude toward her youngest sibling.

Speaking for myself as the editor and also as one of the twelve contributors, I share a lot in common with each of the Brontë adult siblings, including even with Branwell. I am often as indiscreet as Charlotte could be, and I understand her low self-esteem as well as her need to receive interesting or romantic news in the daily post. This would probably manifest itself today in special attention being paid to the contents of the “Primary” folder on Gmail! I can also relate to her penchant for writing expansive, verbose, and unfiltered letters both to those who are and to those who are probably not interested in what is being conveyed. If she were alive now, Charlotte would have probably been as anxious for “likes” and “loves” on her Facebook page as I totally fail to set aside those hopes for my own laboriously analytical posts. Given how the world is today, Charlotte and I would likely comment on each other’s rants, anxieties, hopes, and frustrations if we were “friends” on Facebook. We would both be “royalists” and I am sure we would have “queued” together for Her Late Majesty’s “lying in state” at Westminster Hall. As writers, both she and I would have a similar aversion to receiving negative “customer reviews” of our works on online stores as well as a shared anxiety for whether or when we will receive any at all. As was the case with Charlotte, , I hate to be distracted away from anything I might be doing or writing, and I have “a strong wish for wings—wings such as wealth can furnish.”²⁴ My friend Joy once told me that she and I shared in a propensity for being “excited” for

some people, and this to me also defines how Charlotte viewed some of her acquaintance and literary idols; I would only add that Charlotte and I would have also shared in a disgust for others. We would not have agreed on Jane Austen though!

I am also as much of an oddball as Emily likely was and have largely withdrawn from the indifferent world of outside work that has so often rejected me and my personality traits inherent to my incurable Asperger syndrome (high functioning autism). Just as Charlotte said of Emily that “liberty was the breath of her nostrils,” so too do I prefer to indulge my lively and creative “world within” and just write or edit books like this one.²⁵ Emily has always resonated easily for me, and I find her simply irresistible as a grumpy personality who frequently wants to exorcise the “world without” and forget nearly everyone in it. My misanthropic penchant for indulging in unfiltered, sarcastic, or barbed commentary is a trait that Emily would have hopefully appreciated if she were alive today and we were friends. She was my first Brontë love, and I understand more why now that I am more familiar with my own Asperger’s.

I even share a sense of failure with Branwell, which helps me to understand and not reject the only male in the family who simply could not focus on or achieve what was expected of him in a patriarchal world that consistently expected the best from its men and the least from its women. Branwell, by virtue of failing so often at jobs and at developing his other artistic talents, never came close to matching the *high* expectations of his role as chief provider for his siblings, just as his sisters failed to come close to matching the *low* prospects expected of them as members of the female sex. After all, neither Emily nor Anne became the wives and mothers that would have been expected of them, while Charlotte managed the one (late for the time) but sadly died before becoming the other as well; Emily couldn’t survive outside the home as an expected governess or teacher; and even Anne eventually gave up being as much of a perpetual governess as her father was a perpetual curate. Moreover, all three girls then made matters “worse” by achieving what was *not* expected of them—they became gifted and famous writers.

Still in Part I, and Looking at our walk ahead, *Brenda Whipps* will present us with an introductory overview of salient events and themes in Anne’s life. Brenda makes us aware how the youngest Brontë sibling cannot be fully appreciated without also understanding how her devastating experiences with her mother and two eldest sisters dying while both they and she were young would

have shaped her spiritual and other outlook. In addressing both, Brenda makes it clear how courageous Anne was and how her resilience in both studying what she would have needed of the accomplishments of her day and carrying out the responsibilities of the governessing work she endured for so long shaped both her thoughtfulness and her sense of duty to those whom she loved.

Brenda then takes readers through the last dramatic and poignant months of Anne's life and makes it clear why she believes that the youngest Brontë sibling did not go to Scarborough to die *but* to try to live.

Brenda loves all the Brontës, but she especially admires Anne; like me Brenda is aggrieved at the lack of attention that used to be paid to Anne and she is happy to see that this neglect has been addressed in a spate of recent biographies and critical commentaries.

Part II is handed over entirely to *georgë kear* for her to discuss the inspiration behind her lovely cover and frontispiece artwork for *Walking with Anne Brontë*. As already noted, georgë has an EmilyInGondal Facebook page, and she shares many of her fascinating designs over there. While georgë identifies strongly with Emily, she appreciates each of the Brontës and had no trouble at all coming up with appropriate designs for *Walking with Anne Brontë*.

In Part III, we begin our academic walk with Anne Brontë with *Joanna Hughes* looking at the various thematic “routes” you can take through Anne's work—both in terms of the literal importance of traveling to find work (complete with overcoming barriers) and thereby fulfilling one's duty to oneself and others, and in the viewing of “transportation” as a literary and artistic metaphor. Joanna looks at Anne's life and work through a number of separate subheadings that cover the “pull of home vs. duty”; the “metaphorically transportive power of faith, love and memory”; Anne's “gaining of experience”; the “call of duty”; how “travel both broadens and crushes the mind”; the “home hearth”; a “journey through inner landscapes”; the correlation between “distance, destination, and destiny”; the “use of conveyance, modes of transportation and walking in Anne's work”; the presence of “boundaries and hedgerows” in Anne's work; and the role of “pilgrimages.” Joanna let me know that she couldn't stop writing her contribution! Another of those “Charlotte Brontë writing the *Thornfield* parts of *Jane Eyre* in weeks” bursts of inspiration that all writers crave at some point.

Jane Sunderland will next explore the “role of the governess” in *Agnes Grey* and examine how Anne used her experiences to illuminate the poor status of women in early Victorian England. This will be covered in the first of her two essays. In her second, she will look at the appearance, breed, and history of Anne’s dog Flossy as far as we can make it out. Jane will also examine the role of the dogs that appear in the Brontës’ fiction—such as Snap in *Agnes Grey*, Dash in *The Tenant*, Fanny in *Wuthering Heights*, and Sylvie in *Villette*. Jane then examines how Flossy influences the dogs portrayed in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant*. I especially enjoyed a concluding remark that Jane added to her essay on further review that Flossy should not be made to bear more of a literary or symbolic burden than he is capable of bearing for such a small dog! Sometimes people, natural features, and animals can be viewed literally in literature, and we cannot always indulge ourselves in their perceived symbolism!

Catherine Rayner examines Anne’s relationship with Charlotte and the “separation” between the sisters that led to much of the subsequent denigration and dismissal of Anne as both a writer and a person. Catherine is very interested in the question of birth-order theory and how this affected how Anne was regarded by the rest of the family. Like me, Catherine sees this as an unavoidable, highly important, and consequential subject area. I should add that Catherine told me recently that some of the themes of her essay will become part of an entire book that she is hoping to publish in the next year at time of writing this (March 2023). She will be looking at how Anne Brontë has been (mis)interpreted over the years and further developing the theme of her essay here of the youngest Brontë’s “separation” within the family. This should all be very interesting. Anne may have been born at the same location as her sisters at Thornton Parsonage—and there is a plaque reflecting the fact as you will see later—but she died and was then buried in Scarborough, separated from her siblings, parents, and aunt who all died and were buried in Haworth. Catherine looks at the extent to which this separation grew over the course of Anne’s life and that it came to be reflected in her different attitude toward working outside the Parsonage, in writing to a different purposeful code, and then of symbolically (as well as literally) dying apart from the rest of her family. I see all this as sad, but also as something unique and powerful.

I will then reflect on the “treasure” as various characters sought to define it of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and offer my thoughts on why the novel should be regarded as a masterpiece in the canon of Victorian classical literature. For one, its psychological insight is both remarkable and modern. I originally wrote this essay in the mid-1990s and intended to submit it for what was then the regular academic journal of the Brontë Society, the *Brontë Society Transactions*. Although adhering to some of

the original structure of the planned article, I have expanded on most of my first impressions of the novel for the present work. I have had many subsequent impressions!

In my second essay, I will examine the “psychological assault” of Walter Hargrave and trace the journey of this “indefatigable foe” in terms of his efforts to manipulate his relationship with Helen Huntingdon for opportunistic advantage in *The Tenant*. This essay was again first written in the mid-1990s and has been dramatically expanded for this anthology.

Emmeline Burdett will next look at Anne’s great poem “A Word to the Elect.” Emmeline explores Anne’s understanding of the contrasting religious doctrines of Calvinism and Universal Salvation as they are revealed through the twelve verses of the poem. Emmeline makes it clear that Anne Brontë was far from being boring for being religious and that her concerns for the fate of those who sin or flout the scriptures are rooted in both divine love and true empathy for those whom she does not want to see eternally suffer.

Finally, for our “academic” section, are two essays by *James Granger*. These were originally sent as one essay, but we agreed that they made more sense as two separate studies despite their similarity of theme.

In the first of the two, James will examine the role of “speech acts” in *The Tenant*. James will be focusing here on Arthur Huntingdon’s violation of Helen’s privacy and her inability to get very far with merely “asking” for her paintings back when her then husband-to-be rummages through their “bowels” and struggles with her over an unfinished miniature of himself. At the time, our sense as readers of Arthur’s likely treatment of Helen following their marriage is anticipated but not yet fully known. It is not known to Helen either. At this point, Anne has yet to finish his miniature.

In James’s second essay, he will be looking more at the roles played by silence and anonymity in Anne’s two novels. He examines how Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon navigate their way through their respective powerlessness as governess and wife. This includes their need for silence and anonymity.

Part IV handles more of my contributors’ personal reflections on Anne Brontë; the essays here will have less of an academic focus but are not entirely devoid of it. As I have said elsewhere, the Brontës are covered in many different and equally valid ways from the academically curious and

extensively researched to the highly enthusiastic and personal. Many studies successfully mix the approaches.

First, I will return with a brief personal essay on why I like Gilbert Markham so much and why being a supposed literary antihero should not necessarily mean that he has no standing in the roll call of relatable literary male protagonists. I begin by looking at the discordance of Gilbert's "assault" on Frederick Lawrence whom he mistakenly sees as a rival for Helen's affections and not as her brother. As he has then no knowledge of this, I see his confusion as understandable; while Gilbert's violent *actions* may not be forgivable and shock many of us reading them today, his jealous *motivations* do have some basis in the circumstances as they were then known to him. I examine how Anne handles this incident very differently from how Emily handles the violence of *Wuthering Heights*. The way in which Anne captures the linear emotional progression from provoking motivation to assault, subsequent remorse, and a sense of lasting guilt is very different from how Emily approaches the violence of *Wuthering Heights*. Although the levels of domestic and other violence are actually far worse in Emily's novel, the brilliant way that Anne handles the same in *The Tenant* makes Gilbert's assault on his future brother-in-law *seem* even worse.

However, what personalizes this essay for me is the way in which Gilbert's various moods, motivations, jealousies, and sensitivities resonate. Anne weaves us a tapestry in which conflicting emotions surrounding Gilbert's courtship of Helen can be expressed at the same time and sometimes at different moments. This is all very modern and dovetails nicely with the psychological realism that I explored in my first essay for this anthology.

We will next be listening to *Christina Fishburne* who has informed me that she wishes to offer our readers an essay that shows "how a *cowardly* and slightly pissed-off minister's daughter found better things to do with her emotional angst through the influence of a *brave* and—sometimes irritatingly—faithful minister's daughter and the collaborations that brought the dead to life." Christina is talking about Anne Brontë, of course, and how her characters influenced her.

Tracy Neis will then write about how she discovered Anne's novels some twenty years after she first read Charlotte's and Emily's novels. Reading Anne's works has given Tracy a fresh inspiration to create her own series of contemporary novels based on those written by the Brontë sisters.

Rebecca Batley will next take us through the sites and inspirational aspects of the "Scarborough of Anne's day." As many readers will already know, Scarborough was extremely important to Anne,

and she visited it many times over the summer when she was governess to the Robinson girls of Thorp Green and when they rented one of Wood's Lodgings on St. Nicholas Cliff in the spa town. Depending on one's point of view, Anne either went to Scarborough in May 1849 to die in a place that she loved, or she went there with one last effort to restore her health. Either way, it would be hard to imagine "unquiet slumbers" for Anne in such a beautiful place.

Finally, *Anne Talbot* would have our readers know that she has written a "Frenchwoman's idiosyncratic take on Anne Brontë with a surprising conclusion!" I'll leave readers to discover what this is later in the book.

For Part V, I decided to include some poems that I first wrote in the 1990s and then decided to revisit and modify slightly for this anthology. I hope they have stood the test of time and that the vibrancy of Emily and Anne's impact on my journey through the Brontë world comes through. Two of these poems appeared originally in the *Brontë Society Gazette*.

In Part VI, I return with an epilogue outlining a few of my final thoughts on what I hope our book will have achieved. I will reiterate a few of the main themes and express my hope that continued scholarship will illuminate more areas of Anne's life, although I caution that what we most want to find—more of Anne's letters to her sisters and to the Robinson girls—will unlikely ever be found at this stage. I would still like to think they are out there, along with fair copy manuscripts of both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

In Part VII, I include a bibliography of all the works past and present that specifically focus on Anne Brontë. This will also cover a general listing of critical works on the Brontës that treat Anne with intelligence and respect; it is not, though, designed to be fully comprehensive and readers should not expect to find separate biographies of Emily and Charlotte.

I add further information on a selection of *Brontë Society Transactions* and *Brontë Studies* articles that pertain to Anne's life and work. Most are of a scholarly nature and reflect recent research.

Part VII also has a comprehensive index to the people, themes, characters, and writers referenced throughout this collection.

Walking with Anne Brontë: Structural Points

Finally, I must impart a few formatting and editorial points before we begin our walk with Anne in the pages ahead. Most of the following writers have compiled their own list of “works cited” for their essays, and nearly all have added their own endnotes. Jane has additionally included abstracts for both her essays. It is hopefully obvious that the writer’s own endnotes are all those that are *not* otherwise prefaced by my use of an *Editor’s note*. As anyone who has read my earlier “*Meeting*” *Anne Frank* book will know, I make few apologies for using endnotes extensively in my various published works. I see them as a means of including pertinent observations and further information that would otherwise distract the reader if included in the main running text. With respect to *Walking with Anne Brontë*, I would like readers to view the endnotes as integral to taking part in a separate ramble with Anne. Such a walk will afford us many opportunities to pause and hopefully listen to something interesting and more in depth about her world. I often see such information as akin to the unveiling of the lovely texture of a full and scented rose as opposed to leaving it as just a mysterious flower in the bud. While readers are encouraged to read the endnotes, it is not required that they do so; it should not affect their understanding and enjoyment of the contributions if they do not.

My fellow authors are all highly respected and well-known in the literary and social media world of the Brontës. It is important to state that we will *not* be offering our readers a fully comprehensive and biographical overview of all aspects of Anne’s life, personality, and work. We hope, instead, to offer readers some illustration of the depth of her wisdom in many areas, based, perhaps, on imaginary literary and personal conversations that my coauthors and I could have had on interesting rambles and walks with her. By the end of reading this work, I hope that our readers will assess that we have fairly and accurately listened to Anne Brontë’s perspective on life and absorbed her interpretations of her own work. I only say this because some early Brontë critics and biographers mentioned already clearly downplayed Anne’s importance to the Brontë story and failed to understand her work.

In pursuing our task, the reader will notice that several scenes and vignettes from Anne’s life and works appear and then reappear across our essays. There are several reasons for this, the most

important of which is the fact that my fellow writers have clearly been inspired by the same resonating passages in Anne's works and by their interpretation of key moments in her life. Just as importantly, none of them wrote their contribution(s) knowing what the others had written!

The full extent to which Charlotte Brontë undermined her youngest sibling's confidence and interfered with her literary legacy for reasons that are much debated to this day is a strong topic in the pages ahead, although not all of my fellow writers discuss the subject. Charlotte's 1850 "Biographical Notice" introducing Emily's and Anne's characters appears repeatedly and has already done so in this introduction. Brenda, Catherine, and I will have plenty to say on this topic in the pages ahead.

Anne Brontë's love for and final resting place in Scarborough are important and symbolic focal points for Brenda, Catherine, and Rebecca.

To what extent *Agnes Grey* is autobiographical is also discussed by a number of the essayists along with Anne's love of the sea. Brenda and Rebecca cover this. Anne's faith, love of duty, and adherence to the truth in her writing also figure prominently in nearly everyone's contributions. Anne's father's curate, William Weightman, makes a number of appearances in Brenda's introductory essay; Charlotte's letters conveying the roller coaster of emotions surrounding the last months of Anne's life are also covered extensively by Brenda. The links and contrasts with Jane Austen's literary style appear many times, but while the topic burns and is eager to burst into full bloom, it sadly remains as a topic in the bud as it were, reduced mainly to lengthy endnotes. At one point I hoped we could have presented an entire essay on the similarities and differences between Anne Brontë and Jane Austen as writers whose observant and satirical eyes were often wide open.

Part of the reason for what might appear like a narrow focus is because Anne died too young, and clearly a vast treasure trove of correspondence with her sisters and with the Robinson girls (her pupils at her second governing position at Thorp Green) must have been destroyed. I prefer to think that such a trove is yet to appear and that someone is just waiting for the right moment. Two of her former pupils (Elizabeth and Mary) did come to visit Anne during an inopportune time when Emily was dying in December 1848, but there appears to be no evidence suggesting that they were aware that their former governess was now the writer "Acton Bell." I also have no idea whether they recognized themselves as leading or supporting characters in Anne's novels. I like to think that Anne was continuing to "teach" them as she was writing both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant*.

Finally, this work has an American publisher and adheres to *The Chicago Manual of Style* grammatical rules and American spelling. However, where United Kingdom sources have been extracted, English spelling and original grammar have been retained. Although the works of the Brontë sisters are available in the United States, for the most part the editions that I have seen are *not* Americanized; accordingly, we have retained the spelling and adhered to the grammar used by the sisters in extracting from their novels and poems, and which were standard for their time. I used my Oxford *World's Classics* editions of both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant* to assist me in checking the overall textual and grammatical accuracy of extracts included in the essays of my fellow writers.

When extracting from the sisters' letters, I elected to cross-reference my coauthors' use of them against Margaret Smith's authoritative three-volume edited version of Charlotte's letters and associated correspondence and accounts from her siblings, father, and friends.

With respect to Emily and Anne's famous "diary papers," I have cross-referenced our use of extracts against the wonderful Christine Alexander and Many Swann edited version that was published in 2019 by the Juvenilia Press. This is available through the Brontë Society online store for those unable to get to Haworth. Readers should bear in mind that Emily and Anne displayed atrocious spelling and sloppy grammar in their "diary papers," but in their defense, they could not have exactly expected or suspected that the literary world would ever be reading them.²⁶ Adelle Hay delightfully compares them to casual texts written on a phone as opposed to the professional elegance of say a letter to a prospective employer.

Regarding the poems, I have cross-referenced our use of them against Edward Chitham's authoritative edited version of Anne Brontë's fifty-nine known poems, and which he first published in 1979 and then revised for republication in 2021. Our bibliography contains further bibliographical information on these and each of the works named above in this introduction.

Conclusion

We see Anne Brontë as a "rising character" in Brontë scholarship and that she has been for a while now; in fact, one could almost argue that as the "sun" of her reputation has risen high enough, it is only necessary with books like this one to make sure it doesn't set or once more leave Anne in the shadows of her past absence from the sky. Yet the noonday sun can be hot, and as the night sky has billions of sparkling stars, some readers may still find it preferable to have their Anne Brontë in the brilliance of the heavens. In that case, her sisters will be in the same place, and that is what we are

trying to achieve here. Whether we look for them in the heathery warmth of the Haworth Moor, in the night sky when comets and shooting stars blaze across the heavens, or in the bright constellations of a beautifully clear wintery night it should always be possible to see Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë together. How interesting is it that the three sisters are usually referenced in an order that leaves the word “Brontë” attached not to Charlotte or Emily, but to Anne! While this is likely done to make it clear that Charlotte followed by Emily are the senior writers among the three, it is nice to see how the name of “Brontë” is frequently attached to Anne whenever the three sisters are referenced together. I feel the opposite, of course, when Anne is not even included at all when the *two* (Emily and Charlotte) are deemed sufficient to capture the essence of all *three*. The youngest Brontë sibling does *not* “walk invisible.”²⁷ Thankfully, Sally Wainwright’s recent 2017 docudrama, *To Walk Invisible*, makes it very clear that Anne does *not* always have to be presented as walking invisibly in the shadow of her sisters. Charlie Murphy gives a superb performance as a much healthier and stronger Anne Brontë than viewers will have been used to seeing.

Anne Brontë yearned for “age and experience” from an early age by her father’s recollection, leaving the rest of us to admire how she attained both without losing the essential faculty of being able to teach others what she had learned along the way. Duty, courage, resilience, and a dissembling personality that allowed Anne to protect herself from an overwhelming sense of weakness in a patriarchal world were qualities that her siblings showed differently or—as was the case with Branwell—not at all. Charlotte did have a sense of duty and she could display strong courage, but she was certainly *not* a dissembler, and her letters flowed with emotional trauma, gossip, fury, hopes, and accounts of her ill health. While I would say that Emily did have a sense of duty as she understood it—she worked competently at home as Anne once acknowledged—and was courageous in her own way since she knew herself and was very aware of her abilities, both qualities would be viewed differently by Anne. She felt she had to express her duty and courage by being willing to “work for her living” as a governess for as long as she had strength and health to do so; she also saw an educational purpose in writing that Emily did not. Emily was a dissembler but for different reasons than Anne. Emily was clearly much more reserved than her youngest sister and she was not especially resilient in terms of working for others since she valued her liberty too much. As far as courage goes, the last six months of Anne’s life were far more prosaic than Emily’s more romantic and rapid departure—as is evidenced by Anne’s quiet determination to try to live for as long as she could so that she could fulfill more of her goals and avoid leaving her father and Charlotte bereft of yet another

child and sibling.²⁸ According to Ellen Nussey who was there, Anne's last words are believed to have been a plea to Charlotte to "take courage!"

I firmly believe that both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deserve to be assigned lofty places in the pantheon of great Victorian literature. It is a viewpoint that those of us writing here believe is gaining in popularity. If Anne Brontë was inspired in her writing by Jane Austen's wit and the believability (and absurdity) of her characters as well as encouraged to become a published author by Charlotte's ambition for all three sisters, it is also the case that Anne was driven by a need to educate her readers in a greater understanding of the issues of the day. Although she could certainly amuse the reader along the way, it is Anne's defining desire to see writing as a way of adding a "humble quota" to the ultimate goal of reforming the abuses of society in the family sphere that distinguishes her from Emily and Charlotte. In this regard, I also see her as the forerunner of other thoughtful literary greats such as George Eliot.

Finally, while I think it is important to add that it is not any part of our purpose to present our readers with a hagiographical perspective on Anne Brontë, I *would* like to say that it is not hard to like, admire, or even love her. Why I think so can be summed up by looking at three examples of her interesting and warm personality. The first two show her humanity and self-effacement as a person while the third reveals her ability as a writer to handle a difficult character with compassion and empathy. These are but three examples taken from the many that color Anne's life and work.

The first is from Anne's July 30, 1841, "Diary Paper" where she says this:

All are doing something for our own livelihood except Emily who however is as busy as any of us and in reality earns her food and raiment as much as we do.

Insert Picture(s)

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[A2V](https://1drv.ms/i/s!AjtGU4t918zphKR4CvF8hUiAJtTcJQ?e=eUt) (page 1)

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Manuscript of Anne's July 30, 1841, "Diary Paper" © The Brontë Society;
Blavatnik–Honresfield Library collection

The second is from a letter that Anne wrote to Ellen Nussey on October 4, 1847. At the time, the sisters were waiting on the publication of their first novels and disguising their endeavors from Ellen. After informing her that she has "no news to tell" her, Anne thanks their friend by saying,

We were all severally pleased and grateful for your kind and judiciously selected presents—from papa down to Tabby;—or down to myself, perhaps I ought rather to say. (My emphasis added)

Although Anne makes it as clear in *Agnes Grey* that she doesn't much care for her heroine being treated like a domestic in the Murray household as Charlotte wants Mr. Rochester to accept Jane Eyre as his equal, the above letter does show a self-effacing side of the youngest Brontë sibling that is very appealing.

The third is suggested by Agnes's obvious compassion for the unhappily married Lady Ashby (the "late Miss [Rosalie] Murray") at Ashby Park. I have always loved this scene as much for what it says about Anne's brilliance as a writer as it does about her likely empathy as a sister and daughter:

Of course, I pitied her exceedingly, as well for her false idea of happiness and disregard of duty, as for the wretched partner with whom her fate was linked. (*Agnes Grey*, Ch. 23)

My first example above shows Anne's deep and instinctual understanding of Emily. Anne sees how it is possible for her sister to earn just as much respect for keeping the home fires burning as Charlotte and she can for pursuing paid governessing opportunities. This has important implications for the status and acceptance of working inside and outside the family unit to this day. It also has powerful ramifications for how Anne Brontë would have handled motherhood in her own time if she had been lucky enough to have had children, and how she would handle any child of hers with mental health challenges such as Asperger syndrome (or high-functioning autism) if she were with us today. We see this potential across Anne's life and work.

I hope our readers—scholarly and interested alike—find enough inspiration in our walk ahead with Anne Brontë to want to undertake their own more in-depth journeys with her.

Endnotes

Endnotes

¹ Mr. Hale’s remark that Anne only wrote as a substitute for being a wife and mother is condescending and indicative of just how much work has had to be done over the years to enhance Anne’s reputation and rebalance the overall view of the Brontës as comprising only two geniuses or writers of any note. I cannot disprove Mr. Hale’s assertions any more than he can prove it. I just know that it *feels* wrong, and that is what is most important here.

² May Sinclair claims that the flow of genius in the Brontë family

emerges at five different levels, rising from abortive struggle to supreme achievement—from Mr. Brontë to his son Branwell, from Branwell to Anne, from Anne to Charlotte, and from Charlotte to Emily. (May Sinclair, *The Three Brontës*, 1912, p. 7)

³ Clement K. Shorter, *The Brontës and Their Circle* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914), p. 164. This is a reissue of the work originally published in 1896 with the title *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle*. It is usually known by this title today.

⁴ I have always noticed the presence of Margaret Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, and while Anne is obviously of greater interest, I am referring here to how Jane Austen constructs the world of her novel around the emotions and behaviors of the two elder sisters (Elinor who represents “sense” and Marianne who is all “sensibility”) and has little room for those of the younger Margaret. In a “sense,” this is how Anne Brontë has appeared *within* the context of the overall Brontë story whenever my attention turns to reading the earliest of biographers. Thanks to the lively efforts of Emma Thompson, screenwriter for the 1999 *Sense and Sensibility* movie, Margaret Dashwood’s profile has risen in recent decades. I am aware that there may be some misplaced and needlessly stretched “sensibility” here, and clearly the real Anne Brontë is far more important than the fictional Margaret Dashwood!

Catherine Rayner will have more to say on this later when she looks at Anne’s “place” in the family as the youngest sibling.

⁵ Please find bibliographical information on each of these works in our comprehensive bibliography at the end of our book. Not all these works can still be found, and I was fortunate to get those that now can’t in the early 1990s close to when they were first published.

⁶ Winifred Gérin in her biography of Anne noted in a quasi-complimentary way that

It is time the ashes were shaken off Anne’s rags, that she was raised from her humble position on the hearth and seated—if not on a throne, then at least on a stout oaken stool—whether beside, behind or before her sisters matters little—but assuredly where the Immortals sit. (My emphasis added)

Gérin seems to be saying two things here—that Anne deserves better but more that of a full and reflective moon to her sisters’ fiery suns.

⁷ In his *Conversations in Ebury Street* (1924), George Moore has the following illuminating conversation with his friend Edmund Gosse:

Gosse

I will admit that I have often wondered why criticism should have raised up thrones for Charlotte and Emily, leaving Anne in the kitchen.

Moore

A sort of literary Cinderella.

Gosse

A blindness of fifty years of which you have no cause to complain, since it has called you to fulfill the part of the fairy godmother. (George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street*, 1924, p. 260)

George Moore has a strong reputation among Anne Brontë's more relieved and ardent admirers, and both he and his commentary figure prominently throughout this work. Although not as enthusiastic about *The Tenant*—I discuss later in my essay on the novel—it is his extraordinary remarks about *Agnes Grey* that really put Anne's first work "on the literary map" as it were. Here is something what he had to say about the novel:

Agnes Grey is a prose narrative simple and beautiful as a muslin dress. I need not remind you, Gosse, that it's more difficult to write a simple story than a complicated one. . . . the first sentences, the eating of a beefsteak is among the first, convince us that we are with a quick, witty mind, capable of appreciating all she hears and sees; and when Agnes begins to tell us of her charges and their vulgar parents, we know that we are reading a masterpiece. Nothing short of genius could have set them before us so plainly and yet with restraint— . . . it is the one story in English literature in which style, characters and subject are in perfect keeping. In writing it Anne's eyes were always upon the story itself and not upon her readers; a thought does not seem to have come into her mind that a reader would like a little more drama, a little more comedy, that a picnic or a ball would provide entertainment. Whilst writing about Agnes Grey's first set of pupils she had in mind Agnes's second set, and was careful that the first situation should lead up to the second. (George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street*, 1924, p. 258)

⁸ Thus, Charlotte almost barges her way into Emily's privacy by "accidentally lighting" on her poetry and Branwell's indiscretions, behaviors, and tortured employment history understandably caused chaos and instability in the household. Emily and Anne were seen as "twins" by Ellen Nussey and as collaborators in writing about their fantasy Gondal world; they shared "diary papers" every four years or so. Meanwhile, Charlotte and Branwell worked together in their fantasy world of Angria. Any "separate" biography of the siblings has to take these communal spats, collaborations, and influences into account.

⁹ Ellis Chadwick believes that it was Emily who was the “moving spirit” behind the sisters getting published as she was “determined to try to direct their talents into other channels than teaching.” Thus, it was “probably Emily who saw a means of earning money by their pens, before Charlotte mentioned it.” (Ellis Chadwick, *In the Footsteps of the Brontës*, Forgotten Books, 2012, p. 298.) This seems unlikely even if we *were* to set aside Charlotte’s claims in the 1850 “Biographical Notice” of her own responsibility; I have not seen this view of Emily’s “marshaling genius” expressed elsewhere in Brontë literature. I think she would have gone to see her publisher in London with Charlotte and Anne in July 1848 if this doubtful claim were to carry more weight.

¹⁰ Emily and Anne’s publisher, Thomas Newby, seemingly did not own the copyright of *Wuthering Heights* or *Agnes Grey*, and so this “transfer” to Smith, Elder & Co. must have taken place comparatively smoothly. At least, I have not seen any evidence that Newby challenged what happened. He probably didn’t own the copyright of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* either, which makes Charlotte’s wish that the novel “not be preserved” as in republished by Smith, Elder & Co. even less defensible.

¹¹ Charlotte Brontë, “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell.” This attached preface to the 1850 Smith, Elder & Co. edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* figures prominently in this anthology.

With no supporting evidence at all, May Sinclair in *The Three Brontës* (1912) describes Anne’s role in her 1845 “Diary Paper” as that of someone who was as “naïve as a little nun.”

¹² Ellis Chadwick, *In the Footsteps of the Brontës* (Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 357. What a contrasting image! One could just as easily argue that neither sister entirely slept nor stayed awake. It is more than likely that they experienced both periods of wakefulness and drowsiness. I know from personal experience trying to sleep (but finding it very difficult to do so) on overnight Amtrak trains that both states will bedevil the trip. For her part, Charlotte tells Mary Taylor in her September 4, 1848, letter that she and Anne were “whirled up by the Night train to London” before proceeding in “queer, inward excitement” to her publishers at 65 Cornhill.

¹³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (Smith, Elder & Co, 1914), p. 360.

¹⁴ Many early discussions of Charlotte seemed to revel in the implied idea that she was constantly miserable along her pathway to her ultimate destiny as a writer and to deserved “greatness.” Reading works by May Sinclair, Marion Harland, and Ellis Chadwick as part of my preparation for *Walking with Anne Brontë* helped to remind me of just how exaggerated, hyperbolic, or embellished these early hagiographers could be! Yet, I fully recognize that much of this irritation is due to my wish to defend Anne’s personal and literary interests and *not* because I think that any of these writers failed in their chosen responsibility of cherishing Charlotte’s memory. I cannot, for example, disagree with Ellis Chadwick’s perceptive assessment that “*The Professor* and *Shirley* were made, whilst *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* were *born*.” (Ellis Chadwick, *In the Footsteps of the Brontës*, Forgotten Books, 2012, p. 318.) I *can*, however, disagree with the same writer’s claim (p. 308) that Anne was “inferior to her more gifted sisters” or her implied suggestion that this could all be explained by her being the “pious member of the Brontë family.” You don’t have to be especially religious to take issue with this or be upset if it were even true.

Then there is the awful May Sinclair who had this to say about Anne:

This delicate thing was broken on the wheel of life. They say of Anne perpetually that she was “gentle.” In Charlotte’s sketch of her she holds her pretty head high, her eyes gaze straight forward, and you wonder whether, before the breaking point, she was always as gentle as they say. But you never see her in any moment of revolt. Her simple poems, at their bitterest, express no more than a frail agony, an innocent dismay. That little raising of the head in conscious rectitude is all that breaks the long plaint of Agnes Grey. (May Sinclair, *The Three Brontës*, Houghton Mifflin, 1912, p. 42)

¹⁵ Timothy Whittome, “The Impressive Lessons of *Agnes Grey*,” *Brontë Society Transactions* 21.1/2 (1993), pp. 33–41.

¹⁶ Please see Nick Holland’s blogpost on the first reviews surrounding the publication of *Agnes Grey* (with *Wuthering Heights*) in December 1847:
<http://www.annebronte.org/2018/12/09/the-publication-and-reviews-of-agnes-grey/>

¹⁷ May Sinclair’s 1914 “Introduction” to the J. M. Dent edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Agnes Grey* (1922). Unfortunately, Sinclair finds Anne’s insight to be superior to her ability to “create the illusion of reality.”

¹⁸ This observation is from Emily’s stunning poem “To Imagination” (September 3, 1844); this has always illuminated the darker pathways of my way through life with the famous second verse being among the more revealing of those showcasing Emily’s self-awareness and attitude toward life:

*So hopeless is the world without
The world within I doubly prize
Thy world, where guile and hate and doubt
And cold suspicion never rise—
Where thou and I and Liberty
Have undisputed sovereignty.*

¹⁹ See my “Denied! Failing Cordelia: Parental Love and Parental-State Theft in Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Court” trilogy that I published under my alternate Simon Cambridge pen name.

Reactive attachment disorder (RAD) is hugely challenging for adoptive parents to deal with. The parenting literature is more hopeful than it is prescriptive of guidelines guaranteed to work. At its heart is the refusal of a child to bond or attach with their adoptive parents based on negative lessons absorbed during an early childhood defined more by a neglect of their needs than by having parent(s) willing or able to close the “attachment cycle.” My “Cordelia books” explain more about this from my perspective as a self-taught parent and not from that of any trained psychologist or therapist.

²⁰ This is all complicated by the fact that some Brontë critics and admirers are clearly glad that the sisters failed as pupils, teachers, and governesses for otherwise they would not have written the famous novels that we all love today. For May Sinclair in *The Three Brontës* (p. 7), this destiny to become writers “began with their babyhood.” While this “failure couched in a sense of alternate superior destiny” readily applies to Charlotte and Emily, it is less clear that it describes Anne or defines how she viewed herself. I like to think that she would have found the time to write even if

she had continued being a governess after 1845. I would suggest that Anne's destiny was to *educate*; if this meant wanting to write instructive novels and compose thoughtful poetry centered on working one's way through the issues of the day *in addition to* actually teaching, then so much the better. Then there is the additional question of Anne's feelings surrounding motherhood and how this might have impacted her ability to write. I explore some more of this topic later.

²¹ Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), p. 237.

²² Given how some of Anne's own poetry was poorly edited by Charlotte as part of the republished 1850 Smith, Elder & Co edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* and how *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was cruelly "mangled" in the truly awful 1854 Thomas Hodgson one volume *Parlour Library* edition of the novel, this discussion is not as superfluous as it might first appear. Adelle Hay in chapter 3 ("Anne Edited") of *Anne Brontë Imagined* covers this topic brilliantly and is skeptical that Anne's editors captured "her voice and originality." She extends this discussion to how Charlotte also "edited the details" of her youngest sister's life. I hope I have adhered to Adelle's advice and maintained the full spirit of my coauthors' essays.

For further reference here, Christine Alexander and Margret Smith in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (p. 497) note that "in about 1854" Newby sold the copyright of *The Tenant* to Thomas Hodgson. From Hodgson, copyright passed to "Darton & Co. before at last being purchased in 1859 by Smith, Elder & Co. who, nevertheless, still followed the text of the corrupt *Parlour Library* edition." The authors note that the American Harper imprints of 1857, 1858, and 1864 carried the complete text of 1848.

²³ It is notable that while Emily and Anne have their admirers as the compatible "twins" of the Brontë family and Emily and Charlotte have their devoted conjoined "fanbase" if we can call it that (but it is an ugly way of describing it), I haven't come across anyone willing to declare themselves for Charlotte and Anne as a personal or literary "grouping." It does seem to be the case, though, that while many see Charlotte as their "obvious" choice and a few herald Emily as their "I really do admire her, but..." choice, others are not quite sure if they allowed to confess that Anne is their favorite; some seem barely confident enough in their admiration to see her as someone who can be mentioned in the same sentence as her more famous sisters. I guess I would say that while it is fine to have a favorite or two among the Brontës, it is less fine to see *only* one or only two of the sisters as worthy of notice. This seems unfair and unjustified.

²⁴ This glorious and anguished hope is from a letter to Ellen Nussey that Charlotte wrote, August 7, 1841. Charlotte is reacting to Mary Taylor's report of the sights and sounds of Brussels. One can only imagine how she would have reacted to all the exuberant holiday posts of Facebook! Like I am now, she would probably be filled with much envy. Thank you to Ellis Chadwick for drawing my attention to this letter (*In the Footsteps of the Brontës*, p. 188).

²⁵ Please see Charlotte's "Prefatory Note to 'Selections from Poems by Ellis Bell'" that was included in the Smith, Elder & Co. 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey*.

²⁶ Such is the world of literary archaeology with respect to our more famous and interesting writers! These quirks of Emily and Anne's joint "diary papers" in 1834 and 1837 have spurred interest, bafflement, and amusement in equal measure. This bemusement has extended to their adult 1841 and 1845 "diary papers" that the sisters wrote separately. It is not as if neither girl had received any

education and Anne was a governess of some years standing by 1845! Emily, meanwhile, had been taught in Brussels!

²⁷ This is a reference to how Charlotte wished to be viewed by London society after the publication of the Bells' novels in 1847 and 1848.

²⁸ May Sinclair in *The Three Brontës* (p. 36) believes that "Mrs. Oliphant [who] censured Emily for the [rapid] manner of her dying ... might as well have censured Anne for drawing out the agony." This is as appalling as her added comment that Anne "was gentle to the end [and] utterly submissive[, giving] death no trouble."

Please see more on the twists, turns, and hopes of the last six months of Anne's life in Brenda's next introductory essay.