

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



THE
BRONTËS
勃朗特姐妹

HEATHER GLEN 编



64
上海外语教育出版社
SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

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剑桥文学指南之四十

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出版发行：上海外语教育出版社

（上海外灘） 邮编：200083

电话：021-8532000（总机）、32021815（发行部）

电子邮箱：bookinfo@efep.com.cn

网址：http://www.efep.com.cn http://www.shfep.com

1561.064

上海外灘古德士

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1561.064



外教社

上海外语教育出版社

（上海外灘） 邮编：200083

737452

0806/08

6278

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

勃朗特姐妹 / (英) 格伦 (Glen, H.) 编. — 影印本.

— 上海: 上海外语教育出版社, 2004

(剑桥文学指南)

ISBN 7-81095-200-5

I. 勃… II. 格… III. ①勃朗特, C. (1816~1855) — 文学研究 —

文集 — 英文 ②勃朗特, E. (1818~1848) — 文学研究 — 文集 — 英文

③勃朗特, A. (1820~1859) — 文学研究 — 文集 — 英文 IV. I561.064-53

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2004) 第017414号

图字: 09-2004-451号

出版发行: 上海外语教育出版社

(上海外国语大学内) 邮编: 200083

电 话: 021-85425300 (总机), 35051812 (发行部)

电子邮箱: bookinfo@slep.com.cn

网 址: <http://www.slep.com.cn> <http://www.slep.com>

责任编辑: 汪义群

印 刷: 上海古籍印刷厂

经 销: 新华书店上海发行所

开 本: 889×1194 1/32 印张 8.5 字数 331 千字

版 次: 2004 年 8 月第 1 版 2004 年 8 月第 1 次印刷

印 数: 2 100 册

书 号: ISBN 7-81095-200-5 / I · 009

定 价: 16.80 元

本版图书如有印装质量问题, 可向本社调换

出版前言

《剑桥文学指南》是上海外语教育出版社从海外引进的一套研究、介绍外国文学的丛书，内容涉及作家、作品、文学流派、文学史等诸多方面。作者均为该领域有着较深造诣的专家、学者。

《勃朗特姐妹》便是该丛书中的一本。

勃朗特姐妹在英国文学史上具有极为独特的地位，三姐妹每人都有令人赞叹的作品：夏洛蒂·勃朗特的《简·爱》、《雪莉》、《维莱特》、《教师》，艾米莉的《呼啸山庄》，安妮的《艾格妮丝·格雷》和《怀尔德菲尔府的房客》等共七部小说。在19世纪以前的英国，女性特别是女性作家一直不受公众的重视，而文学更被认为不是也不可能是“女人做的事”。勃朗特姐妹的出现打破了这种局面。她们不仅敢同传统的思想进行抗争，并且取得了辉煌的成就。几部小说的出版便是极好的例证。小说在最初出版时，她们仍是使用了男性笔名。然而她们将女性思想融入作品当中，用自己那流畅的语言将女性心中的希望和头脑中的思想现于笔端。在勃朗特的世界里，女性不再是闭锁在家庭小天地里的男人的附庸，而是有思想有个性的完整的人。这种突破性的思想在19世纪初的英国是非常难能可贵的。历史上还未有如此令人惊奇的姐妹，富于才华却又英年早逝（即便是最年长

的夏洛蒂·勃朗特也只活了三十九岁)。

一直以来,研究勃朗特姐妹尤其是夏洛蒂和埃米莉的著作层出不穷,这些著作分别从不同的角度对她们的作品进行阐释,对作品中有争议之处也给予了不同的看法。本书所汇集的是近些年来对勃朗特姐妹作品的评论。本书共收录了十篇论文,第一、二篇对勃朗特姐妹的生平尤其是在霍沃斯的童年生活作了回顾,这些生活片断为她们以后的文学创作打下了坚实的基础。第三篇则是侧重于对她们的诗歌的分析。四至七篇是对具体作品的比较分析:从最初出版的三部作品谈到较少受人关注的《雪莉》和《维莱特》等。勃朗特姐妹的作品是女性的作品,在第八篇中,作者凯特·福林特对作品里的女性作了逐一阐述。而约翰·梅纳德则在第九篇里从哲学的高度提出了她们作品中宗教的作用。多少年来,勃朗特故居游人不断,勃朗特姐妹成了人们心目中的神话,如何对这一现象作出解释呢?帕茜·斯通曼在最后一文给出了她的看法。这些论文的作者都是当代研究勃朗特的专家,相信丰富的资料、深刻的内涵和细致的索引能给各位读者以指导。

本书的读者对象为大学外语教师,外国文学研究人员,外国文学专业的研究生、博士生,以及具备了较高英语阅读能力的外国文学爱好者。

上海外语教育出版社

2003年10月

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page vii</i>
------------------------------	-----------------

Introduction	I
HEATHER GLEN	
1 The Haworth context	13
JULIET BARKER	
2 'Our plays': the Brontë juvenilia	34
CAROL BOCK	
3 The poetry	53
ANGELA LEIGHTON	
4 'Three distinct and unconnected tales': <i>The Professor</i> , <i>Agnes Grey</i> and <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	72
STEVIE DAVIES	
5 'Strong family likeness': <i>Jane Eyre</i> and <i>The Tenant of</i> <i>Wildfell Hall</i>	99
JILL MATUS	
6 <i>Shirley</i> and <i>Villette</i>	122
HEATHER GLEN	
7 'Getting on': ideology, personality and the Brontë characters	148
RICK RYLANCE	

CONTENTS

8	Women writers, women's issues KATE FLINT	170
9	The Brontës and religion JOHN MAYNARD	192
10	The Brontë myth PATSY STONEMAN	214
	<i>Further reading</i>	242
	<i>Index</i>	248

ILLUSTRATIONS

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Haworth Parsonage in the 1850s. From an ambrotype in the Brontë Parsonage Museum. Reproduced by courtesy of the Brontë Society. | page 28 |
| 2. Some of the little Glass Town volumes. Brontë Parsonage Museum. Photograph by Simon Warner. Reproduced by courtesy of the Brontë Society. | 36 |
| 3. Watercolour known as 'The North Wind', by Emily Brontë. Once in possession of the Heger family; present location unknown. Reproduced as frontispiece to <i>Brontë Society Transactions</i> II, 1949. Reproduced in this volume by courtesy of the Brontë Society. | 56 |
| 4. A young military man. Pencil drawing by Charlotte Brontë. Brontë Parsonage Museum. Reproduced by courtesy of the Brontë Society. | 103 |
| 5. John Martin, <i>Belshazzar's Feast</i> . Mezzotint (1830). | 134 |
| 6. Mrs Gaskell's drawing-room, 84 Plymouth Grove, Manchester. Reproduced by courtesy of Manchester Central Library. | 139 |
| 7. 'Christmas Dinner at Haworth Parsonage', <i>Punch</i> 25 December 1935. Reproduced by courtesy of <i>Punch</i> . | 229 |
| 8. 'Come to me – come to me entirely now': Jane and Rochester in the garden. Fritz Eichenberg, illustration to <i>Jane Eyre</i> (New York: Random House, 1943), facing p. 190. | 232 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

9. Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon as Catherine and Heathcliff on the hilltop, from the 1939 film *Wuthering Heights*, directed by William Wyler. With acknowledgement to the Samuel Goldwyn Company. 234
10. Catherine and Heathcliff's last embrace. Japanese picture-book edition of *Wuthering Heights* (1989). 237

HEATHER GLEN

Introduction

The Brontë sisters are not obviously difficult writers. Indeed, they may seem all too easily accessible. Generations of readers have thrilled to the passion of Cathy and Heathcliff, identified with the sufferings of Lucy Snowe and Agnes Grey, succumbed to Mr Rochester's dark allure. These are not texts which seem to require elucidation, but stories which millions have urgently, if often incoherently, felt to be speaking of and to their own most intimate concerns. And if – as Charlotte Brontë acknowledged, in the Biographical Notice with which, in 1850, she prefaced her sisters' novels – their strangeness has needed explanation, explanation has seemed readily to hand. Since the publication of that Notice, and of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* seven years later, the key to the Brontës' works has been found – straightforwardly or more indirectly, both by ordinary reader and professional academic – in the peculiar circumstances of their authors' brief and tragic lives. The story of those lives has, indeed, assumed an almost mythic place in the English cultural imagination: after Shakespeare's Stratford, Haworth Parsonage is England's most visited literary shrine.

Yet this passionate appropriation, this confident biographical interpretation, have in some ways been a barrier to understanding. Readers of Jane Austen have long been aware of the distance between her culture and their own, of the ways in which scholarship can bridge that distance and enable them to grasp nuances and significances which might otherwise go unremarked. Readers of the Brontës – compelled, perhaps, by those apparently universal themes of childhood suffering and romantic love, of hunger and deprivation and yearning desire – have not, on the whole, felt this distance. Yet even universal themes have particular historical inflections. A central premise of this *Companion* is that to see the Brontës clearly we must see them in their cultural difference, not simply as speaking of that which we already know, or of subjective experience easily assimilable to ours, but from and of a world as foreign as it is familiar, one whose preoccupations and discourses are tantalisingly different from ours.

What is to be gained by looking at 'the Brontës' not as three (or five) individual, and very different, writers, but together, as a group? The simplest answer is that from the time of the sisters' first venture into publication, as 'Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell', the Brontës *have* been thus seen: that even as they have drawn distinctions between them, common reader and academic critic alike have been sharply or confusedly aware of those shared characteristics which set their writings apart from other writings of their time. As Charlotte Brontë's 1850 preface to her sisters' works indicates, theirs are regional novels: self-consciously different from such metropolitan works as those of Dickens and of Thackeray. Their protagonists are not, centrally, the privileged classes, but men and women who must make their own way in the world – unconnected, poor and plain. The concentration is less on a world of social interaction than on intense subjective experience; less, it sometimes seems, on culture than on nature – on what Charlotte Brontë called, in a discussion of Jane Austen, 'what throbs fast and fully, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life' (*CBL* 11, 383). And if in this the Brontës are somewhat different from other Victorian novelists, they are different too in their passionate individualism, their defiance of social and moral convention, their focus on rebellion and desire. 'Coarse', each was labelled by her contemporaries: 'blasphemous', Charlotte and Emily were called. It is clear that in their dealings with sexuality and with religion all three are more searching, more exploratory than most of their contemporaries were prepared to be. Such qualities as these in their writings have led to their grouping both in popular consciousness and in literary histories: it seems not unreasonable to try to understand those writings by exploring the cultural influences and life experiences which all three sisters shared.

Yet as this *Companion* will suggest, there are rather more interesting reasons for considering the Brontës together than this. If any literary works might be said to issue from the same context, these are they. Most of the surviving juvenilia, much of the poetry, five of the seven published novels, were written, literally, together: by three women living in close proximity, in the confined space of an early Victorian household and the emotional intimacy of an extraordinarily devoted family, bound together by common interests and experiences, accustomed from earliest childhood to discussing the process of literary composition, even to sharing a fantasy world. Yet the differences between their works are radical, and striking: arguably far more so than the similarities which their closeness might explain. To consider these differences is to gain an unparalleled insight into the complex and creative and unpredictable ways in which a writer may not merely reflect, but imaginatively reflect upon her world. Indeed, it is arguable that one can trace

within the works of the Brontë sisters not just three quite distinctive modes of engagement with what may from a distance seem common preoccupations, but a complex, creative dialogue with one another: a dialogue which began in childhood and which for the survivor continued even in the last of her works.

This volume both draws upon and questions that long tradition of biographical reading which has dominated discussion of the Brontës, especially of Charlotte and Anne. (The difficulty of reading *Wuthering Heights*, with its multiple narrators, in this way, has led to a different kind of fascination with Emily's enigmatic life.) Chapters 1 and 2 sketch in that common matrix of place, of family history, of shared imaginative 'play', out of which the sisters' creative achievement grew. Each of these chapters considers some of those facts of the Brontës' lives which have fascinated generations of readers; but each shows also how those facts themselves might point beyond narrowly biographical interpretations of their works.

The myth of the Brontës as isolated individual geniuses has partly depended on a firm belief in Haworth's remoteness from the world. But as Juliet Barker suggests in the first essay in this volume, Haworth in the early nineteenth century was not the 'remote moorland village' which Charlotte Brontë once called it, but an industrialising town. Many of its problems, as inescapable to those who lived there as the stench which pervaded its streets, were the problems of the nation at large: poverty, insanitary housing conditions, no safe water supply. But Haworth had also a small but growing number of middle-class families, and a lively social and cultural life of which the Brontës partook. Their world, indeed, was not confined to Haworth, even in their early years. Each, as Barker shows, went elsewhere for education of various kinds. Moreover, there were always books and journals in the parsonage, whether purchased by their father or borrowed from elsewhere. In the 'History of the Year', which the child Charlotte wrote at thirteen, the periodicals she reads and the opinions of those who write for them are as vividly present to her as that which actually happens in 'the kitchen of the parsonage house'.¹

From childhood, each of the Brontës was not merely a reader but a writer; and a highly self-reflexive one. Their surviving childhood manuscripts evince a sharp awareness of the literary culture of their day: a culture not merely of romantic expressiveness but of ironic self-presentation, of debunking, sardonic humour, and of lively controversy. It was in imitation of this culture that their earliest 'books' were produced. These tiny 'printed' volumes are not autobiographical outpourings but, as Carol Bock demonstrates, sophisticated works of art. They display an acute and often comic consciousness of their own status as fictions, in their joking and wondering references to the

great creating Genii (the Brontë children themselves), whose fiat has made possible the existence of all the 'plays'. The multiple narrators of *Glass Town*, with their competing versions of events, give evidence of the children's awareness, from the beginning of their writing lives, of the ways in which fiction enables something quite other than a monologic perspective on the world. And in this, they point suggestively forward to that in the later novels which perhaps most sharply questions any attempt to read them as disguised autobiography: their sophisticated use of a variety of narrative personae, their play with different voices and narrative points of view.

The Brontë sisters' poetry has its root in those youthful plays. In chapter 3, Angela Leighton considers these poems and that first, joint attempt at publication, *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. These are simple, unadorned lyrics, in the simple 'plain-song' language – as Swinburne was later to call it (*CH*, 412) – of romantic lyric and Wesleyan hymn. Here, surely, if anywhere, one hears directly the accents of each sister's intimate voice, speaking of personal experience in a straightforward confessional way. Yet the truth, as Leighton suggests, is very different from this. The original speakers of many of these poems were the characters of Gondal and Angria, their stories of heroism and passion, of adultery and betrayal, very far from anything that happened in their creators' actual lives. For the purposes of publication the sisters removed all reference to the melodramatic sagas out of which their verses had sprung. Thus decontextualised, these spare, 'abstract' lyrics (as Charlotte Brontë called Emily's) have an enigmatic quality which even contemporaries noticed: 'No preface introduces these poems to the reader', began the volume's first review (*CH*, 59). Drawing on that 'web' of childhood, yet emptied of narrative cues, they demand a more rigorous reading than their surface simplicity might suggest. And such a reading discloses, in Emily Brontë's poetry, a strenuous engagement with metaphysical questions – of time, of change, of embodiment, of mortality, of imaginative transcendence – quite different from that of any other poetry of the nineteenth century. 'The tone of all these little poems is certainly uniform', wrote a reviewer of the first edition (*CH*, 63), but the modern reader is more likely, Angela Leighton suggests, to concur with Charlotte's awed sense of Emily's absolute originality, and of the very different nature of their powers.

There follow three essays on the novels; not, as has been customary in discussions of 'the Brontës', considering the work of each sister separately, but grouping them together in the order in which they were composed. In chapter 4, Stevie Davies discusses the three novels with which the three sisters hoped to make their debut as professional novelists. *The Professor*, *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* were sent out together in 1846 as 'three distinct

and unconnected tales' which might, Charlotte suggested, be published 'as a work of 3 vols. of the ordinary novel-size' (CBL 1, 461). The last two novels *were*, of course, published as just such a 'work of 3 vols.': it is suggestive to reflect on how different both novels might have appeared to readers turning straight from the 'purposeless power' of *Wuthering Heights* (CH, 228) to Anne's 'more acceptable' tale (CH, 219) of virtue rewarded and happiness won. If *The Professor* remained unpublished until after its author's death, it was conceived and written at the same time as the other two. Each, as Stevie Davies shows, presents a quite distinctive face to the reader. In each one hears the accents of a clear individual voice. Yet if they are thus 'distinct' they are not exactly 'unconnected'. As contemporary reviewers registered, in speaking of the likeness between 'the brothers Bell' – by some they were thought to be possibly 'a single personage' (CH, 230) – they seem to be differently inflecting the same subject-matter, imagery, concerns.² Setting them side by side one catches tantalising hints of a dialogue – 'snatches' of that 'conversation' in the dining-room of Haworth Parsonage, when the sisters, at the peak of their creative collaboration, read aloud from and debated 'the stories they were engaged upon'.³

Chapter 5 deals with the novels which followed this first attempt at fiction for publication, both apparently written between the summers of 1846 and 1847, Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Each rather differently evokes that Regency world of aristocratic sexual profligacy which, depicted in such works as Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron* (1830), had fascinated the youthful Brontës: each offers a scathing portrait of the celebrated masculinity of that world – the chastened Rochester; the dependent, helpless Huntingdon. Each also evokes the Protestantism in which the sisters had been reared: its defensive, triumphant individualism, its pressing sense of the immanence of heaven and hell. Each has at its centre a woman caring for herself – earning her own living, learning to resist passion and preserve her integrity in a world of patriarchal power. And in each, that heroine is a visual artist: not simply a moral exemplar, but one whose expressiveness is celebrated in suggestively subversive ways. Yet as Jill Matus suggests, the 'strong family likeness' which contemporary reviewers discerned is also revelatory of difference – like 'the eyes ... of Catherine Earnshaw' gazing disquietingly at Heathcliff from the different faces of her daughter and her brother's son (WH, 322). To set these novels side by side is to see the strengths of each more sharply: *Jane Eyre*'s innovatory reworking of melodrama and romance into a psychologically acute, historically specific new realism; *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s powerful, reflective exposure of the implications of contemporary marriage laws and social mores. It is also to see more sharply how

each writer transforms and reworks the materials she draws upon, in order to articulate her own characteristic vision of individual and social possibility in the England of her time.

Chapter 6 deals with the surviving sister's two final, very different works. *Shirley*, too, is set in the early years of the century. But it seems at a far greater remove from the stirring romanticism of Scott and Byron than do *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, or *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Its world is the 'real, cool, and solid' world of early industrial Yorkshire, 'unromantic as a Monday morning' (S, 5); if it does, despite this disclaimer, present romantic aspiration, it is aspiration ironically seen. Alone among the Brontës' published novels, it uses an impersonal, uncharacterised narrator, who maintains a sardonic, and sometimes elegiac, distance from the striving, competing, desiring characters who populate the fictional world. *Villette*'s is a more sombre, and apparently more constricted, narrative, of loneliness, depression, despair. It might seem to mark a return to the first-person narratives of the sisters' earlier years, albeit in a darker key. But the world which 'passe[s] before' its narrator 'as a spectacle' (V, 175) is also quite unlike that of any of the sisters' previous novels: not a place of violence and death and hunger, of distant horizons and desolate moors, but of solid, unromantic bourgeois comfort and prosperity. These novels were both completed when their author

almost despaired, because there was no one to whom to read a line, or of whom to ask a counsel. *Jane Eyre* was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of *Shirley*.⁴

Yet as Kathleen Tillotson puts it, 'some part of the web was still weaving, even in Charlotte's latest, loneliest works'.⁵ In my essay I argue that these two final Brontë novels participate no less than the others in that extraordinary creative dialogue which all the sisters shared; that the narrative strategies developed in those early childhood 'plays' still here seem to be shaping their author's imaginative understanding of a rapidly changing world.

In the seven short years between 1846 and 1853 the scribblers who had created *Glass Town* and *Angria* and *Gondal* became professional writers. They produced, between them, some of the finest poetry in the language, and seven extraordinary novels. For them, it seems, from childhood, the fictive provided a space within which they could articulate a developing understanding of the society in which they lived. And if their writings are more self-reflexive, more disinterestedly intelligent, than biographical readings have tended to suggest, they are also far more wide-ranging in their intellectual power and reach. They do not simply speak, narrowly, of the sisters' personal concerns: they can be seen to reflect and reflect upon some of the most pressing issues of their day. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 discuss some

of those issues, and explore the ways in which each of the Brontës, very differently, engaged with them in her work.

A central concern, in all of the Brontës' novels, is with the struggles of their protagonists to survive and to make their way in the world. 'Mary Ann could scarcely read a word, and was so careless and inattentive, that I could hardly get on with her at all', says Agnes Grey, of one of her attempts to succeed as a governess (AG, 21). 'I shall get on', insists Crimsworth to his brother, as the latter taunts him with his poverty (P, 16). 'I cannot get on. I cannot execute my plans', cries the frustrated entrepreneur, Robert Moore (S, 25). In chapter 7, Rick Rylance discusses what it meant in the early nineteenth century to speak of 'getting on'. The term, much used in the period – Ruskin was later to devote a whole section of *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866) to 'the Goddess of Getting-on'⁶ – primarily signified making one's way in the world. This was a constant pressing concern for the educated children of an impoverished clergyman – a father whose rise from humble beginnings provided a striking example of the possibility of getting on. 'Who ever rose in the world without ambition?' asked Charlotte, appealing to her aunt for money to go to school in Brussels in 1841, so that she and her sister Emily might be better equipped to start a school and gain 'a footing in the world'. 'I want us *all* to get on. I know we have talents and I want them to be turned to account.'⁷ Rick Rylance considers the ways in which the Brontë sisters' novels explore a whole constellation of issues raised in early nineteenth-century England by the rhetoric of 'getting on': the relation between private self and public self-image, the meaning of 'character' and of individual 'independence', the repulsion and the fascination of the figure of the 'self-made man'. Within this analysis, features of the novels which might have seemed to reflect merely private concerns begin to appear as sharply, provocatively interrogative of the ideology of their time.

Questions of character and social mobility were, as Rylance suggests, bound up with questions of gender. In early nineteenth-century England, a woman was hardly expected to 'get on' in the same way as a man. 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be' wrote Southey to Charlotte Brontë in March 1837, when she asked for his advice on pursuing a literary career (CBL 1, 166). Yet, as Kate Flint points out, women were in the Brontës' lifetimes entering the literary marketplace in increasing numbers. Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell were all acutely aware that the subject of the woman writer was one of the issues of the day. But literature for them was not merely a career. It was a space of possibility – a 'free place', Mrs Gaskell called it – within which they could explore and play with the constraints and conditions of their world.⁸ Woman's relation to literature appears within their novels as appropriate, empowering,