A COMPANION TO

THE BRONTËS

EDITED BY
DIANE LONG HOEVELER
AND DEBORAH DENENHOLZ MORSE

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A Companion to the Brontës

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Introduction

Deborah Denenholz Morse
and Diane Long Hoeveler

The art and lives of the Brontës have fascinated readers and scholars alike since Elizabeth Gaskell published *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in 1857. The story of the three sisters writing in isolation on the Yorkshire moors took deep root in literary history, and has been irresistible to generations of Brontëans. Charlotte's own public and private writings on her sisters after their deaths, particularly her characterization of Emily as "a native and nursling of the moors," encouraged the Brontë mythos. Despite the occasional foray into myth debunking—most recently and cogently represented by Lucasta Miller's 2004 *The Brontë Myth*—Brontë readers still feel an intense need to visit Haworth. They must see not only the wild moors and the churchyard, with its huge gravestones at oblique angles, but also Charlotte's impossibly small wedding dress and Emily's mastiff Keeper's brass collar, the locks of Brontë hair, including that of the mother who died so tragically, leaving the six small Brontë children bereft. Charlotte's dress conjures up the smallness of the fictional Jane Eyre, of Lucy Snowe—and also the tiny woman Charlotte Brontë herself, who donned this dress to marry her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls, and whose happy marriage ended in her death from phthisis and severe nausea of pregnancy less than nine months after that wedding day. The brass collar reminds readers of Gaskell's biography, of her stories about Emily's intense relation to her fierce dog, a possible canine prototype for Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. The locks of hair remind readers of *Wuthering Heights* of the light and dark tresses that Nelly twists before enclosing them in the locket on Catherine Earnshaw's dead body, and of the chiaroscuro of the second Cathy's hair with Hareton's as they lean together over their reading. Readers and scholars equally besotted with George Eliot (and particularly with *Middlemarch*) do not feel the same urgent need to go to Nuneaton—although they might write books like Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* or Barbara Hardy's *Dorothea's Daughter*. Brontë Studies have always been rooted in biography and located in a particular place, the Yorkshire moors.

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The problems with Brontë biography began with Gaskell's brilliant hagiographic portrait of Charlotte in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Since that germinal work was published, with its suppression of the intense emotion Charlotte felt for Constantin Heger, its misguided representation of Patrick as wildly eccentric, its wholly negative portrayal of Branwell, and its near elision of Charlotte's two genius sisters, there have been several biographies, which culminate in Juliet Barker's definitive *The Brontës: Wild Genius on the Moors* (1994/2010). Indeed, much as this book has contributed to the debunking of Brontë myth, its new title, altered from the simple *The Brontës* of the original 1994 edition, plays upon that very myth. As Simon Avery comments ruefully in this volume, "… the notion of the Brontës as untutored geniuses, isolated in the parsonage at the top of the steep Haworth main street and escaping to the moors from which those astonishing texts *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* seemed to emerge unbidden, has been particularly hard to dislodge." In Lisa Jadwin's essay, "The Critical Recuperation of and Theoretical Approaches to the Brontës," she remarks that "early questions about the writers' identities, exacerbated by the siblings' use of pseudonyms, gave rise to a tradition of biographical criticism that persisted well into the twentieth century." However, in "The Biographical Myths and Legends of the Brontës," Sarah Maier reminds us that "more recent biographies have made clear attempts to redefine the Brontës, not as stranded, isolated geniuses of the moors but in such a manner as to present them as nineteenth-century intellectuals engaged with writing since young adulthood …." Carol Davison, in "The Brontës and the Death Question," explores another aspect of this mythos when she challenges the conventional view of the Brontës as "fragile victims of a scourge" rather than "as uncommon survivors who heroically held death at bay … the devastating loss of their mother and two eldest sisters also granted them personal and unique insights into the Death Question, crucial life events that consolidated their association with death in the cultural consciousness."

Nevertheless, given the historic focus upon the imbrication of the Brontës' life and art, successive waves of Brontë scholarship have tried to veer away from this intimate relation between biography and text. The feminist scholarship that emerged after the 1979 publication of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*: *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) largely focused upon commonalities between the Brontës' work and that of other Victorian women writers. Margaret Homans in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (1980), for instance, explores Emily's identity as a Victorian woman writer of Romantic poetry, while Rachel Brownstein in *Becoming a Heroine* (1982) turns her attention to the feminist aspects of Charlotte's *Villette* in comparison to other nineteenth-century texts. Feminist biographies included Stevie Davies's 1983 *Emily Brontë: The Artist as a Free Woman* and Lyndall Gordon's 1994 *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life*. Feminist scholarship beginning with Elizabeth Langland's biography *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (1991) and most concentrated in the only scholarly collection on Anne's work, *The Literary Art of Anne Brontë* (2001), discovered the intricacies of Anne's fierce calls for women's rights.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1985 *Critical Inquiry* essay "*Jane Eyre* and Three Texts of Imperialism" is the touchstone for the next wave of Brontë scholarship: postcolonial readings. Jean Rhys's 1967 novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which imagines the Jamaican history of *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason and gives her a voice to tell her own story, was an impetus to

postcolonial critiques beginning with Spivak's, despite her contention that Rhys merely tells the English colonial story over again in the voice of the white Creole woman of the planter class. In the 2004 book *Charlotte Brontë*, Carl Plasa traced Charlotte's engagement with race and slavery issues from her juvenilia through *Villette*. (In this volume, Ken Hiltner traces the feminist/postcolonial critical history in relation to *Jane Eyre*.) Emily's writing was next in line for postcolonial critics, with Maja-Lisa Von Schneidern in her 1995 *ELH* article "*Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool Slave Trade" and Christopher Heywood in the Introduction to the 2002 Broadview edition of *Wuthering Heights* viewing Heathcliff as a slave, an identity depicted in Adam Low's screen adaptation "A Regular Black" and Andrea Arnold's 2010 film *Wuthering Heights*.

Successive waves of theory-based cultural studies scholarship into the second decade of the twenty-first century have focused upon trauma, mental and physical illness, and the body—and these studies brought scholars back to the intimate connection between the Brontës' lives and their work. Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996) provides insights into Charlotte's knowledge of mental disorders, while the work of Stevie Davies and Philip Wion on Emily and trauma in relation to her mother's early death has been particularly enlightening. Beth Torgerson in her 2005 book *Reading the Brontë Body* has written the only full-length study on all three Brontës' works in relation to both their own lives and to their knowledge of Victorian diseases and contagion. It is a short step from these critiques to the 2015 material culture study of the Brontës, Deborah Lutz's *The Brontë Cabinet*: *Three Lives in Nine Objects*, that brings us round full circle to Brontë biography. Lutz's book dramatizes the history of the Brontës' lives (with a focus upon the writing sisters, the "three lives" of her title) through an examination of significant material objects in the Brontë Parsonage Museum, including Emily's mastiff Keeper's brass collar, Charlotte's ink-stained portable desk, Anne's sampler, Branwell's walking stick, and Charlotte's bracelet made of the intertwined hair of Emily and Anne.

We too return in this volume to an inclusive interpretation of the Brontës that often focuses upon biography and place as well as on historical circumstance. Not only are the lives and art of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne under consideration, but the lives and work of the entire Brontë family, all of whom were writers. Dudley Green reflects upon Patrick's poetry, campaigning articles, and letters, while Karen Laird discusses the Brontë father's letters among those of his wife, his son, and his famous daughters—including Charlotte's missives of unrequited love to Constantin Heger, her former teacher in Brussels, letters not published until 1913. Laird, who examines Branwell's letters, is one of several scholars who consider Branwell's life and work, first given comprehensive attention in Juliet Barker's 1994 biography. Julie Donovan discusses Branwell's poetry and verse drama, seeking "to avoid engulfing Branwell in the story of his sisters and his own personal tragedy." Nancy Workman analyses Branwell's paintings and drawings among those of his sisters; as she argues, "visual culture engaged the young Brontës … drawing or painting accompanied their first literary undertakings and in Branwell's case, largely continued through his short life."

In her discussion of the Brontës' physical and mental health as it impinged upon the sisters' "transformative and creative process," Carol Senf insists upon "a larger context that includes their father and brother." Beverly Taylor in her discussions of race, slavery, and the slave trade in the Brontës' work contemplates Branwell's influence in the Angrian

juvenilia, and Christine Alexander, in her capacious study of the Brontës' juvenilia, as a matter of course examines Branwell's contributions to that Brontëan genre. Other essays that focus upon the Brontë sisters but discuss the lives and work of Patrick and Branwell include Carol Davison's "The Brontës and the Death Question," Abigail Burnham Bloom's "The Brontës and Popular Culture," and Sarah Maier's "Biographical Myths and Legends of the Brontës." Deborah Denenholz Morse's "Imagining Emily Brontë" considers Denise Giardina's 2009 historical novel *Emily's Ghost*, in which "Patrick is Juliet Barker's reconstructed father (rather than Gaskell's eccentric, irascible Patrick), a loving and erudite man who was very proud of his brilliant daughters." Simon Avery, in "Politics, Legal Concerns, and Reform," explores the Brontës' "political awareness …. In this reading, the often-overlooked writings of Patrick and Branwell are seen to be more significant than they are often acknowledged to be." Avery's work also includes equal consideration of Anne, the at times still ignored youngest Brontë sister: "Emily and Anne's … establishment of the alternative realm of Gondal marked a very different line of political thinking which would be crucial for their mature work, especially in terms of its interrogation of gender relations and patterns of socialization."

Historically, Anne is the next Brontë to be left out of scholarly studies until fairly recently. It is not so very long ago that Elizabeth Langland wrote her feminist biography *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (1991). There is still only one collection of essays devoted to Anne's work, the 2001 volume *The Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, already mentioned in this essay—although there are intimations of new collections on Anne for her 2020 bicentenary. Our volume includes not only two essays focused entirely on Anne's novels, Judith Pike's essay on *Agnes Grey* and Kari Lokke's on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but also many essays in which Anne's work is considered equally alongside Charlotte's and Emily's. John Maynard explicates the poetry of all three Brontë sisters, giving serious attention to Anne's work: "Taken as a poetic oeuvre … Anne's output shows the same combination of quiet, serious, and moral intent and striking emotional strength that we find in her two fine future novels." Maynard finds that Anne's use of the Romantic ballad form is political: "In poems in and out of Gondal, Anne used the form with an implication that, though no revolutionary, she spoke as a poet for the deep feeling and concerns of the people as a whole."

Indeed, of some essays in our volume, such as Judith Wilt's "Reading the Arts in the Brontë Fiction," it could be argued that Anne's work is given even more attention than Emily's or Charlotte's. Wilt analyzes reading—including the sensory experience of reading—in relation to aesthetics and instruction in all of the sisters' novels, but her argument culminates in a study of Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and a comparison back to Emily's *Wuthering Heights*: "The complex "framing" of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 'contains' readers looking at paintings and paintings looking at readers, while enforcing on the reader of these nested narratives the leaning-in of both mind and body that has fascinated painters of reading over the centuries … ."

As Lisa Jadwin points out in her essay "The Critical Recuperation of and Theoretical Approaches to the Brontës," the turn to Anne's writings was a part of feminist scholarly endeavor. Jadwin points out that Anne's "works received increasing critical attention as the twentieth century progressed and the Brontës' works attracted the attention of feminist critics, who read them as narratives of female empowerment." Tara MacDonald's "Class and Gender in the Brontë Novels," [which] examines "the Brontës' representations of characters

who … don't fit neatly into their prescribed class and gendered identities," concludes with an exploration of the wealthy Helen Graham's erotic relationship to the farmer Gilbert Markham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Lucasta Miller examines the Brontës' reading of *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* magazines, and argues that "it was their continued, if conflicted, immersion in the literary culture of the 1820s and 1830s which led to their books being labeled 'coarse' by Victorian critics."

Although one of our projects is to consider the Brontës together and within their many contexts, it is also our aim in this volume to study each Brontë sister as a great writer in her own right. To this end, a good deal of attention is given to each novel written by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, as well as to the poetry of each sister, discussed most fully in Maynard's essay. In her analysis of *The Professor*, Tabitha Sparks views *The Professor* as an early Victorian precursor to George and Weedon Grossmith's 1892 *Diary of a Nobody*: "Pooter's assimilation of the values of the rising lower bourgeois aligns with Crimsworth's wholesale adoption of early Victorian, utilitarian 'Progress', and both fictional autobiographers provide their readers with an ironic index of a moment in Victorian masculine and professional life." Margaret Markwick, using reader-response theory, writes an essay focused upon our first and second readings of *Jane Eyre*. Markwick explains how the significance of these readings coalesces around Jane's and Charlotte's emphasis on forgiveness: "Here we find the melding of the two themes, the satisfying love story of a mature woman acknowledging the importance of sexual arousal and finding happiness with the man she loves, and who loves her in return, and an account of a spiritual journey from unbelief to a profound and sincere faith based on forgiveness." Herbert Rosengarten writes about *Shirley* as a troubled "novel of ideas" that does not quite cohere: "What does connect the novel's private and public worlds, however, is the larger subject of the relations between capital and labour examined in the struggle over Hollow's Mill, a conflict of values that forms the recurring and unifying motif holding *Shirley* together and giving the novel a place within the subgenre of Victorian industrial fiction." Penny Boumelha argues that in *Villette*, Brontë adopts and alters a familiar biographical structure: "Its first-person narration makes complex use of the triple role of Lucy Snowe as protagonist, observer and narrator to reflect on the novel's relationship to traditions of representation of the inner lives and social plots of women."

Wuthering Heights is most fully considered in Louise Lee's essay on Emily's only extant novel. (Since the publication of Juliet Barker's biography, some Brontëans wonder if there was once another novel, and whether it might perhaps some day be unearthed.) Lee posits this response to the notorious difficulties of analyzing *Wuthering Heights*: "I want to suggest two conflicting and contradictory motions: the author deliberately disrupts her story, while her readers resolutely put it together. For reading is both the problem of the novel, and also its resolution." Other essays focus largely on *Wuthering Heights*, sometimes in relation to *Jane Eyre*, as in Amy J. Robinson's "Journeying Home: Jane Eyre's and Catherine Earnshaw's Coming-of-Age Stories." In her essay, Robinson charts the bildungsromans of these two Brontë protagonists, concluding that "during their journeys, both Jane and Catherine find a true home only as they leave behind the artificial settings associated with culture and patriarchal society and substitute them for the natural worlds of Ferndean and the moors of Wuthering Heights, respectively." Diane Long Hoeveler, in her exploration of the Gothic in Brontëan fiction, includes analysis of Emily's novel

among those of her sisters: "*Wuthering Heights* employs the Gothic through its use of prescient dreams, a disputed inheritance, violence against women and animals, coffins with loose hinges, haunting ghosts and perhaps vampires, and repetitious narratives of fantasy and trauma." As Hoeveler argues, "The Gothic aesthetic and its genre conventions pervaded the writings of the Brontë sisters from their very earliest readings and writings as adolescents to their last pieces of fiction." Tom Winnifrith critiques several film adaptations of both *Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre*, finding them ultimately not quite satisfying as "translations" of the great novels themselves: "In my old fashioned way I prefer the original texts to modern adaptations, and am glad that looking at films and television drove me back to study the words of Charlotte and Emily Brontë."

Anne's two novels provoke new readings from Judith Pike and Kari Lokke. Pike does a reckoning of all of the errors that "are rampant in regard to Anne's legacy." These mistakes include Charlotte's about Anne's age at her death, an error engraved in Anne's original tombstone and in the original memorial plaque in Haworth Parish Church. Pike goes on to explain how "just as Anne's tombstone has been plagued by errors, neglect and oversights, so too has her literary legacy." In her exploration of *Agnes Grey*, Pike discovers a more defiant Anne than the one portrayed since Charlotte's friend Ellen Nussey's remarks about "dear, gentle Anne." Pike declares that Anne's "defiant courage was evident not only in her literary works but in her life, and especially in her final days." Kari Lokke, writing on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, enters the scholarly debate about the relation of the novel's form—Helen's diary enclosed within Gilbert's letter to his brother-in-law Halford—and Anne Brontë's narrative intentions. Lokke reflects upon "the congruencies and tensions between Anne Brontë's central aims … [of] promoting reform in gender relations and models of masculinity while at the same time encouraging personal, spiritual transformation" and ultimately concludes that *Tenant*'s "dialogic, open form encourages the reader to imagine social and spiritual transformation as possible both within and outside the frame of the novel."

Kari Lokke's emphasis upon formal aspects of the Brontës' work is taken up by a number of scholars in our volume. Amy Robinson is interested in Charlotte's and Emily's experimentation with fairytale and Gothic/Byronic patterns imbricated with realism "to chart the coming of age of their heroines." While Diane Long Hoeveler studies the formal Gothic inheritance of the Brontë novels, Lucasta Miller includes the influence upon Brontëan form in her analysis of the Brontës' reading of 1820s and 1830s periodicals. Christine Alexander explores the literary innovations in the Brontës' juvenilia, and John Maynard thinks about both conventional and unconventional poetic forms in the Brontës' poetry. Beth Lau, in "Marriage and Divorce in the Novels," considers the failed marriage plot in the Brontë sisters' works. She argues that "all the Brontë novels challenge or undermine the courtship plot and expose problems in marriage as it was legally defined and culturally practiced in their lifetimes, including the impossibility of dissolving unhappy unions."

Lau's engagement with the political agitation for women's rights—and in particular for married women's rights—also places her analysis in a group of essays that are focused upon cultural studies of the Brontës. Besides the work already mentioned in this Introduction, these essays include Miriam Burstein's on the Brontës and religion; Brandon Chitwood on the Brontës and film adaptations; Elisha Cohn on the intellectual and philosophical

contexts of the Brontës; Alexis Easley's examination of the Brontës' engagement with the literary marketplace from 1846 to 1860; and Carol Senf's essay, "Physical and Mental Health in the Brontës' Lives and Works." Edward Chitham provides the Irish backgrounds to the Brontës' lives and work, beginning with Patrick's Irish origins. Thus, we find ourselves back with Brontë biography once again, and back with place, with Ireland and then with Yorkshire. Ann Dinsdale's authoritative piece, "The Brontë Parsonage, the Society, and the Preservation of Brontëana," traces the emergence and continuity of the institutions devoted to the Brontës. Dinsdale records the passion of Brontë readers and scholars, the generosity of donors with Brontë possessions, and the occasional perfidy of those who acquired Brontëana. Her essay perhaps documents most fully the intricate relation of the Brontës to biography and especially to place, to the parsonage, to the churchyard—and to the Yorkshire moors.

Part I

Imaginative Forms and Literary/Critical Contexts

1
Experimentation and the Early Writings

Christine Alexander

Juvenilia, or youthful writings, are by their nature experimental. They represent a creative intervention whereby a novice explores habits of thought and behavior, ideas about society and personal space, and modes of literary expression. It is a truism to say that youth is a time of exploration and testing. Any child psychologist will tell you that the teenage years in particular are a time of trial and error, a time when limits are tested in order to push boundaries and gain new adult freedoms. Juvenilia embody this same journey toward so-called maturity, involving the imitation and examination of the adult world. And because early writing is generally a private occupation, practiced without fear of parental interference or the constraints of literary censorship, the young writer is free to interrogate current political, social, and personal discourses. As writing that embraces this creative and intellectual freedom, Charlotte Brontë's juvenilia are a valuable source for investigating the literary experimentation of an emerging author seeking to establish a writing self.

This chapter will examine the ways that Charlotte Brontë used her authorial role to engage with the world around her and to test her agency in life and literature. The first focus will be on the importance of a self-contained, paracosmic, or imaginary world for facilitating experiment and engagement with political, social, and historical events. The second will be on the way Brontë experimented with print culture and narrative to construct a self-reflexive, dialectic method that allowed her to interrogate both the "real" world and her paracosmic world. Her intense initial collaboration with her brother Branwell—"rivalry" is perhaps more appropriate to describe the competitive tone of their writing—laid the foundations for Charlotte's conversational method; but she soon experimented in early adolescence with multiple dialogues among her own characters and authorial personas that led to a habit of discourse that is both self-reflexive and inter-textual. Finally, the chapter will explore dialogic experimentation in Brontë's later novelettes, where she is testing not only her heroines' moral identities but also her own emotional,

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intellectual, and social parameters. Her writing interrogates the self and enacts elements of the bildungsroman in an effort to gain greater psychological realism.

Paracosmic Experimentation and Colonial Expansion

Crucial to Brontë's experimentation as a young author is her creation of an autonomous imaginary world or paracosm[1] as a distinctive representation of adult or Other experience. Paracosms constitute alternative universes in miniature of the real literary, social, and political world: "spaces for construing and 'playing out' selective real and fantastic events and ideas circulating in the contemporary British consciousness" (Cohen and MacKeith 22). They are a particular feature of play in literary culture, usually practiced in youth. Brontë herself called the process "making out" (Stevens 160), and together with her siblings[2] she created the imaginary world of Glass Town, a federation of kingdoms that later included the new kingdom of Angria. Over a period of some twenty years, Brontë participated in and developed a complex world of interrelated characters and events that both mirror and imaginatively reorder knowledge of the "real" world she had gleaned from books, magazines, newspapers, and her limited experience of life. This imaginary world was readily committed to paper, and the resulting manuscripts document Charlotte Brontë's intense intellectual engagement with life beyond her parsonage home. The paracosm allowed her to participate in events not normally encountered in childhood. As a self-contained world, it also afforded her the space to experiment with initiative and power she was otherwise denied as an adolescent girl. In a private world shared only with siblings, she could become author and creator: she called herself "Chief Genius Tallii," one of four Brontë Chief Genii (modeled on the *Arabian Nights* and the Greek gods), who presided over a virtual world by protecting heroes, directing mortal affairs, and intervening in the plot of their imaginary world for fun. As author, she could "play" with power and direct social and political events.[3]

The 1830s, when the bulk of her early manuscripts were written, were years of enormous social and intellectual ferment in Britain. Brontë's paracosmic world expresses the tremendous energy of this post-revolutionary period of empire building and expansion by land and sea. It also allowed her to enact in her writing the excitement of the growing periodical press, especially *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the personality cults it fueled. As an all-powerful narrative "Genius," she could appropriate current events and create with immunity conversations that can be seen to function "as an index to historical culture" (Chandler 282). The genesis of this engagement with political, social, and literary culture of the period was the "Young Men's Play" and several other plays that the Brontë children acted out physically, before committing the results to paper several years later. Eventually these plays coalesced into the paracosmic worlds of Glass Town and Angria.

Together with her siblings, and chiefly in partnership with Branwell, Brontë experimented with exploration and territorial expansion, testing her own version of military and mercantile enterprise. The catalyst for the Young Men's Play was the purchase of twelve toy soldiers for Branwell's twelfth birthday in June 1826 (Charlotte was thirteen). Inspired by their father's interest in the Peninsular Wars (1807–1814) and guided by newspaper reports and journal articles on exploration and colonialism, the Brontë children sent the

"Twelves" (as they called the soldiers) to discover new territory and establish a British colony in an imaginary Africa. On the basis of an article in *Blackwoods*, with an accompanying map (Brontë 1991, 2[1]: frontispiece), they settled their soldiers around the delta of the Niger in West Africa. Their well-used *Grammar of General Geography* by Revd. J. Goldsmith reinforced European attitudes to territorial expansion and the need to civilize the "many blank spaces on the earth," as Joseph Conrad's Marlow puts it in *Heart of Darkness.*[4] Thus, the four leaders of the Twelves, sponsored by each of the four Brontë creators, become rulers of a federation of lands centered on the city of Great Glass Town (later called Verdopolis). As colonizers, they encounter the indigenous Ashanti and war ensues, inspired by reports of the Ashantee Wars of the 1820s. Complex private lives are invented for the "chief men": the Duke of Wellington (Charlotte); Napoleon, later Sneaky (Branwell); Parry (Emily), and Ross (Anne), characters modeled on the two greatest antagonists of recent history in Europe and two famous Arctic explorers. As soon as their heroes had been given identities, it was fitting that they should be provided with books, both to entertain them and to record their progress. A written culture replaced the children's physical play. Miniature booklets to match the size of the wooden toy soldiers were produced, beginning the richest record we have of youthful literary activity.

What can be seen at first as a paracosmic exercise in colonial aggression and European expansion gradually becomes a critique of Europe itself and in particular of France and the various "kingdoms" of the British Isles. In landscape, social custom, and culture, Wellingtonsland is Charlotte's Tory stronghold in the south of England; Parrysland represents the north with its Yorkshire puddings, stone walls, and dull landscapes;[5] Sneakysland is the equivalent of Scotland; and Rossesland is Wales. There is also Frenchyland with its capital Paris, an island to the south and the political base of the Glass Town Republican Party. Paris with its "dark Revolutionary Coteries" is Branwell's domain, constantly satirized by Charlotte for its "wickedness, rioting, idleness and grandeur," opinions she has gleaned from the Tory *Blackwoods* (Alexander and Smith 2003, 316). The sadistic French character "Pigtail" is typical of the "low villains" who terrorize Paris and prey on orphan children; and the foppish narrator of Charlotte's "Journal of a Frenchman"[6] is ridiculed for his vanity: "I first washed myself in rose-water with transparent soap, then got myself shaved till my chin was smoother than satin: next my cheeks received a fresh bloom by the addition of a little rouge." Etiquette at the Tuileries Palace is critiqued with considerable aplomb, and Charlotte amusingly adopts a pro-republican stance, mocking Branwell's republican enthusiasm following his reading of Sir Walter Scott's sympathetic *Life of Napoleon*:

> I found that the greater part of the company were of the ancien regime & that Bonaparte was almost universally detested. this a little disconcerted me for I had almost adored him but nevertheless I heard all with complaisance & said nothing. Wine however soon heated my head & loosened my tongue. it waged glibely about the glory of the French arms, old womeish Boubons—&c. &c &c with many other things that I should now be glad to recall. Some old Prigs laughed at me as a young enthusiast & anger having gained ascendency over Reason.

The fourteen-year-old creator of this "young enthusiast," as Brontë calls her Frenchman, was later to address the conflict between passion and reason in *Jane Eyre.*

As Carol Bock (2002, 34) argues, a "striking feature of the Brontës' early writing is its stunning representation of the culture of their times." Action is centered in Verdopolis, the great capital city of the Glass Town Federation, an imaginary London based on the theatrical architectural paintings of John Martin, whose engravings hung on the walls of the Brontës' home. Its name suggests a city of glass, insubstantial, and translucent (originally derived from "Verreopolis … being compounded of A Greek & French word to that effect": Brontë 1987, 1: 298). However, we are assured it is not simply a dream world but "the commercial metropolis of the world," a working city where "lofty mills and warehouses piled up storey above storey to the very clouds, surmounted by high tower-like chimneys vomiting forth the huge columns of thick black smoke" (Brontë 1987, 1: 139). Visions of glittering aristocrats and their entourages amidst public buildings "resplendent with grace, symmetry, majesty and proportion" are juxtaposed beside vignettes of strike action by disgruntled workers, protesting against one of "those vile rumbling mills," its master, and "the incessant crash of its internal machinery" (Brontë 1987, 2[1]: 26–27). Such scenes are depicted in terms reminiscent of the attack on Rawfolds Mill in Liversedge (11 April 1812) during the Luddite Riots; they foreshadow the raid on Robert Moore's mill in *Shirley*. The central incident of another story reenacts the "Peterloo" massacre of 1819 (Alexander and Smith 2003, 366–367). Characters and incidents from the Peninsula Wars, assassination attempts, Chartist and other insurrections, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, concerns over the price of cotton on either side of the Atlantic, and debates between the Americans John Quincy Adams and General Andrew Jackson, questions of slavery and suttee, and myriad other topical political events inform the action of the saga.

In a paracosmic world, however, contemporary events are enhanced, remade, and complicated by imagination. The Glass Town Federation and the new kingdom of Angria, that Charlotte eventually awards her conquering hero Zamorna and adopts as her center of interest, bear little resemblance to Africa itself. The constant threat of the Ashantee tribes reminds us of contemporary imperialism, but the occasional "African" place names and exotic scenery owe as much to fairy tale, *Tales of the Genii*, and the *Arabian Nights* as they do to geographical descriptions of Africa. It is the names, places, and events associated with Wellington and Napoleon that are mapped on to the African colony. Even Quashia, the only indigenous African to be fully characterized in the saga, is associated with Wellington. Just as the historic Duke adopted the son of a chief in the Indian wars, so Charlotte's Wellington adopts Quashia Quamina, who later rebels, aligns his warriors with the republican rebellion of Northangerland, and lusts after the Queen of Angria, reflecting a nineteenth-century British conception of African racial degeneracy.[7] This single example demonstrates the intricate association within the ever-expanding paracosmic saga between fictional and historical characters, constitutional and republican rivalries, Victorian anthropological anxieties, and the young author's own particular response to such issues.

Throughout her saga, Brontë continues her experiment to fictionalize history. The central plot of the imaginary world is the struggle for power by rival aristocratic characters whose tangled love affairs and political intrigues reflect those of contemporary politicians and heroic figures of the period, not least Lord Byron, who replaced Scott as the main single influence on the juvenilia. The four kings of the Glass Town Federation form pacts like those that were brokered in Europe by the Quadruple Alliance after the defeat of Napoleon; but the situation is complicated by Branwell's introduction of a new hero,