THE BRONTÉS IN CONTEXT

Very few families produce one outstanding writer. The Brontë family produced three. The works of Charlotte, Emily and Anne remain immensely popular, and are increasingly being studied in relation to the surroundings and wider context that formed them. The forty-two new essays in this book tell ‘the Brontë story’ as it has never been told before, drawing on the latest research and the best available scholarship while offering new perspectives on the writings of the sisters. A section on Brontë criticism traces their reception to the present day. The works of the sisters are explored in the context of social, political and cultural developments in early nineteenth-century Britain, with attention given to religion, education, art, print culture, agriculture, law and medicine. Crammed with information, The Brontës in Context shows how the Brontës’ fiction interacts with the spirit of the time, suggesting reasons for its enduring fascination.

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For kind permission to reproduce the illustrations listed above, and for supplying photographs, the editor wishes to thank Mr Simon Warner (Figure 2), the National Portrait Gallery, London (Figures 13–15), and the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth (all remaining pictures).
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Marianne Thormählen
Lund, Sweden
Chronology

Compiled by Marianne Thormählen, with frequent recourse to Edward Chitham, *A Brontë Family Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). The comprehensive chronology in Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith’s *Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (Oxford University Press, 2003) also assisted. Except where special reasons make such information useful, no precise dates are given for the historical and literary events entered under relevant years.

1777
17 March Patrick Brunty/Branty/Prunty born at Imdel (Emdale), County Down, Ireland.

1783
15 April Maria Branwell born at Penzance, Cornwall.

1802
Peace of Amiens creates a brief lull in the war between Britain and France (broken by Britain’s declaration of war on France in May 1803).

September
Patrick Brontë enters St John’s College, Cambridge, as a sizar. Changes his name from ‘Branty’ to ‘Brontë’.

1804
Napoleon becomes Emperor of the French. William Pitt is made Prime Minister.

William Blake’s *Jerusalem* and *Milton* published.

1805
Napoleon defeats the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz. Battle of Trafalgar. Death of Lord Nelson.

1806
Napoleon closes Continental ports to British trade. Death of William Pitt.

April
Patrick Brontë takes his bachelor’s degree.

Summer
Patrick Brontë ordained. First curacy, at Wethersfield, Essex (until 1809).

1807
Abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire.

1808
Sir Walter Scott’s *Marmion* published.
Chronology

1812
Britain at war with the USA. Napoleon retreats from Russia. First two cantos of Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* published. Charles Dickens born.

Spring
Luddite riots in Yorkshire, near Hartshead where Patrick Brontë is curate. Attempted murder of a mill-owner (William Cartwright).

29 December
Marriage of Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell.

1814
Napoleon abdicates and is exiled to Elba. War with the USA ends. Lord Byron’s *Lara* and *The Corsair* published, also Scott’s *Waverley*.

January
Maria Brontë born.

1815
Napoleon defeated at Waterloo and exiled to St Helena. Congress of Vienna redraws map of Europe; restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France. Corn Laws introduced in the UK, forbidding the importation of cheaper grain from abroad. Patrick Brontë’s *The Cottage in the Wood* published.

February
Elizabeth Brontë born.

May
Brontë family move to Thornton, where Patrick Brontë has been appointed curate.

1816
Jane Austen’s *Emma* and S. T. Coleridge’s *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* published.

21 April
Charlotte Brontë born.

1817

26 June
Patrick Branwell Brontë born.

1818
Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published, also Byron’s *Beppo*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Scott’s *Heart of Midlothian* and John Keats’ *Endymion*. Patrick Brontë’s prose tale *The Maid of Killarney* published. Advertised in *Blackwood’s* (April).

6 January
Arthur Bell Nicholls born.

30 July
Emily Jane Brontë born.
1819 ‘Peterloo Massacre’: troops shoot at a mass meeting of workers. The Poor Relief Act passed. Queen Victoria, Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) and John Ruskin born.
Byron’s Don Juan, cantos i–ii, published, also Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor and Ivanhoe.
Chapel of Haworth resists appointment of Patrick Brontë as perpetual curate.
1820 Death of King George III and accession of the Prince Regent as George IV. Trial of Queen Caroline.
Keats’ best-known poems published, also Charles Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer, P. B. Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound and Thomas Malthus’ Principles of Political Economy.
17 January Anne Brontë born.
April Brontë family move to Haworth following Patrick Brontë’s appointment as perpetual curate.
1821 Death of Napoleon on St Helena. Greek War of Independence begins.
Byron’s Cain and Don Juan, cantos iii–v, published, also Thomas De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium Eater, Scott’s Kenilworth and Shelley’s Epipsychidion and ‘Adonais’ (the latter following the death of Keats).
Spring Miss Elizabeth Branwell arrives in Haworth to help look after Mrs Brontë, who fell ill in late January, and the family.
15 September Death of Mrs Brontë, probably from uterine cancer.
1824 George Birkbeck founds first Mechanics’ Institute (later Birkbeck College) in London.
July Maria and Elizabeth Brontë go to the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge.
10 August Charlotte Brontë goes to Cowan Bridge.
25 November Emily Brontë goes to Cowan Bridge.
Chronology


6 May  Maria Brontë dies of pulmonary tuberculosis, having been brought home from Cowan Bridge by her father in February.

1 June  Patrick Brontë takes Charlotte and Emily home from Cowan Bridge. They are taught at home by their father and aunt until 1830.

15 June  Elizabeth Brontë dies, also of pulmonary tuberculosis, after just over two weeks at home.

1826  Power-looms destroyed by unemployed weavers. Patrick Brontë brings back toys for the children from Leeds, including the toy soldiers for Branwell which inspire the ‘Young Men’s Plays’, the inception of the Brontë juvenilia.

1827  University College London founded. Death of Beethoven. John Keble’s *The Christian Year* published, also Scott’s *Life of Napoleon*; Scott acknowledges his authorship of the Waverley novels. Brontë children’s writing takes off. Branwell’s ‘Battell Book’, his first manuscript, dates from this year.


1829  The passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act, supported by Patrick Brontë, enables Roman Catholics to hold public office and own property. John Peel sets up the Metropolitan Police in London. Thomas Carlyle publishes *Signs of the Times* in the *Edinburgh Review*. James Mill publishes *Analysis of the Phenomenon of the Human Mind*. 
Brontë children productive, ‘Branwell’s Blackwood’s Magazine’ testifying to the influence of Blackwood’s on the children at least from this point. The children are given art lessons by John Bradley of Keighley.

1830
Death of George IV and accession of his brother William IV. ‘July Revolution’ in France leads to the accession of Louis Philippe. Pressure for parliamentary and social reform in the UK; a resisting Wellington resigns as Prime Minister and is replaced by the Whig Lord Grey. Stephenson’s ‘Rocket’ wins speed contest. Greek independence achieved. Cholera epidemic (1830–2).

Fraser’s Magazine begins. Carlyle’s On History published, also William Cobbett’s Rural Rides and Thomas Moore’s Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of his Life. Publication of Auguste Comte’s Cours de philosophie positive begins, also of Sir Charles Lyell’s Principles of Geology.

1831
Charles Darwin sets off on his Beagle expedition. ‘Swing Riots’ against the mechanization of agriculture and resulting job losses. House of Commons passes Reform Bill, but Lords veto it. Sir James Clark Ross locates the magnetic North Pole.

17 January
Charlotte Brontë goes to the Misses Wooler’s school at Roe Head, near Mirfield.

May
Aunt Branwell subscribes to Fraser’s Magazine.

1832
The Reform Bill is passed, extending franchise and improving representation in Parliament (abolition of ‘rotten boroughs’).

Deaths of Scott and Goethe.

Summer
Charlotte Brontë returns to Haworth from Roe Head.

1833

Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus published (1833–4), also Hartley Coleridge’s Poems and Charles Lamb’s Last Essays of Elia.

Patrick Brontë joins the Mechanics’ Institute at Keighley.
### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Melbourne has brief spell as Whig Prime Minister; Robert Peel’s Tory government takes over. New Poor Law leads to the establishment of workhouses. ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’ sentenced to seven years’ transportation. Houses of Parliament destroyed by fire. Slavery abolished throughout the British Empire. Deaths of S. T. Coleridge and Charles Lamb. Harriet Martineau’s <em>Illustrations of Political Economy</em> published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Melbourne Prime Minister again. Robert Browning’s <em>Paracelsus</em> published. Branwell Bronte’s ambition to join the Royal Academy of Arts remains unrealized; he also writes to Blackwood’s proposing that he be taken on to replace James Hogg. 29 July Charlotte Bronte goes to Roe Head to teach, Emily accompanying her as a pupil. Autumn Emily returns to Haworth and is replaced at Roe Head by Anne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Chartist movement begins. Dickens’ <em>Sketches by Boz</em> published, also A. W. N. Pugin’s <em>Contrasts</em>. Charlotte Bronte teaches at Roe Head, unhappily. Writes to Robert Southey telling him of her ambition to become a famous poet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Death of William IV; accession of Victoria. Benjamin Disraeli elected to Parliament. Carlyle’s <em>The French Revolution</em> published; serial publication of Dickens’ <em>Oliver Twist</em> begins. Southey replies to Charlotte Bronte encouraging her to write poetry for its own sake.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>After an illness, Anne Bronte leaves Roe Head School.</td>
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<td>1838</td>
<td>Great Western Railway opens. Isambard Kingdom Brunel designs the <em>Great Western</em>, the first steamship built to cross the Atlantic. First Afghan War breaks out. People’s Charter set up by the Chartists. The Anti-Corn Law League created, to promote free trade. Dickens’ <em>Nicholas Nickleby</em> published. Johann Strauss and his orchestra perform in Halifax.</td>
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Chronology

Roe Head School moves to Dewsbury Moor; Charlotte continues to teach. Branwell sets up as a portrait painter in Bradford (until February 1839).

Autumn
Emily Brontë teaches for a couple of months at Law Hill, near Halifax.

1839

1840

May
Anne Brontë takes up post as governess to the Robinson family at Thorp Green.

1841
Sir Robert Peel (Conservative) becomes Prime Minister and begins fiscal and budgetary reform work. Carlyle’s On Heroes and Hero-Worship and Newman’s Tract xc published. Punch founded. Charlotte Brontë spends most of the year working as governess to the White family in Rawdon.

April
Branwell Brontë is transferred to Luddenden Foot station.

5 June

1842
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Charlotte and Emily Brontë go to Brussels, to learn and teach at the Pensionnat Heger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Branwell Brontë dismissed from railway post.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>William Weightman, the Haworth curate, dies of cholera.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 October</td>
<td>Aunt Branwell dies aged sixty-six, leaving legacies to her nieces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 November</td>
<td>Charlotte and Emily return to Haworth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Charlotte Brontë returns to Brussels alone. Branwell Brontë joins his sister Anne at Thorp Green, as tutor to the Robinsons’ son.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Mary Taylor leaves for New Zealand.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
May
Arthur Bell Nicholls comes to Haworth as curate under Mr Brontë.

June
Anne Brontë ends five years of work as a governess at Thorp Green.

July
Branwell Brontë dismissed from his post as tutor at Thorp Green. Drinks heavily.

October
Charlotte Brontë discovers her sister Emily’s poetry.

1846
Famine in Ireland continues. Corn Laws repealed in May. Peel’s ministry falls, succeeded by John Russell’s Whig government. Attempt made to introduce compulsory national education, a scheme supported by Patrick Brontë. Serial publication of Dickens’ *Dombey and Son* begins. George Eliot’s translation of D. F. Strauss’ *Das Leben Jesu* published, also Edward Lear’s *Book of Nonsense*.

January
Emily Brontë writes ‘No Coward Soul Is Mine’.

28 January
Charlotte Brontë contacts the publishing firm Aylott and Jones about the publication of a book of poems by all three ‘Bells’.

Spring
Branwell Brontë’s condition deteriorating, according to Charlotte’s letters.

May
*Poems* by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell published.

July
Favourable reviews of the *Poems* in *The Athenaeum* and *The Critic*.

August
Patrick Brontë is operated on for cataracts in Manchester, accompanied by Charlotte, who begins to write *Jane Eyre* while attending him. Attempts to place *Agnes Grey*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Professor* with publishers made over a period of several months.

1847

Spring
Anne Brontë works on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.
July  T. C. Newby agrees to publish *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.

August  Smith, Elder & Co. refuse to publish *The Professor* but encourage Charlotte Brontë to submit a three-decker novel. Charlotte sends them the just-completed *Jane Eyre*.


December  Newby publishes *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* under the pseudonyms Ellis and Acton Bell.


Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* published, also G. H. Lewes’ *Rose, Blanche and Violet*. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* and Dickens’ *Dombey and Son* published as books. Serial publication of Thackeray’s *Pendennis* begins. J. A. Froude publishes *The Nemesis of Faith*.

June  Publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

July  Charlotte and Anne Brontë visit London to prove the existence of separate ‘Bells’ to their publishers.

24 September  Death of Branwell Brontë from ‘chronic bronchitis – Marasmus’ (doctor’s certificate).

19 December  Death of Emily Brontë from pulmonary tuberculosis.

Dickens’ *David Copperfield* begins serial publication. Matthew Arnold’s *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* published, also Kingsley’s *The Saint’s Tragedy*, volumes 1–11 of Macaulay’s *History of England* and Ruskin’s *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

January

Anne Brontë’s decline in health confirmed by surgeon’s examination.

25 May

Anne and Charlotte Brontë, with Ellen Nussey, arrive in Scarborough, hoping for a beneficial effect on Anne’s health.

28 May

Death of Anne Brontë in Scarborough. Funeral two days later.

8 September

James Taylor of Smith, Elder & Co. comes to Haworth to collect the manuscript of *Shirley*, which was completed in August.

26 October

*Shirley: A Tale* published by Smith, Elder & Co.

December

Charlotte Brontë spends first half of the month in London, meeting Thackeray, Harriet Martineau and various people connected with the literary scene.

1850


J. E. Millais paints *Christ in the House of his Parents* and D. G. Rossetti exhibits ‘Ecce ancilla Domini’. Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ* launched. Tennyson made Poet Laureate after Wordsworth’s death. Dickens begins the periodical *Household Words*. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* published, also Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* and Tennyson’s *In memoriam*. Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* posthumously published.

March

Charlotte Brontë spends time with the educationist Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth and his wife.

June

Charlotte spends most of this month in London. Portrait drawn by Richmond.
August Charlotte meets Elizabeth Gaskell while staying with the Kay-Shuttleworths.

December Smith, Elder & Co. reissue *Wuthering Heights, Agnes Grey* and poems by Emily and Anne, with a ‘Biographical Notice’ by Charlotte Brontë. Charlotte spends a week with Harriet Martineau.

1851

Great Exhibition in London from May to October. Louis Napoléon’s *coup d’état*, in which he dissolved the Constitution of France, subsequently approved by plebiscite. William Thompson (later Lord Kelvin) publishes first and second laws of thermodynamics. Gaskell starts publication of *Cranford*. In the USA, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* appears. Part 1 of Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* published. Turner dies.

April Charlotte Brontë considers possibility of marrying James Taylor but decides against it.

June Charlotte spends most of the month in London, meeting Thackeray, hearing F. D. Maurice and Cardinal Wiseman preach and visiting the Great Exhibition. Also sees ‘Rachel’ act and visits phrenologist (with George Smith) for a character reading.

1852


March Charlotte Brontë finishes the first volume of *Villette*.

Summer Patrick Brontë in poor health, suffering from, among other things, a minor stroke.

November Charlotte finishes *Villette*.

December Arthur Bell Nicholls proposes to Charlotte. Patrick Brontë violently opposed.

1853

Another cholera epidemic. Inept diplomacy has Britain ‘drifting’ towards war with Russia. Much popular feeling against Prince Albert.