

Brontë Family:

An Inventory of Their Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

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| Creator: | Brontë Family |
| Title: | Brontë Family Collection |
| Dates: | 1833-1858 |
| Extent: | 2 boxes (.83 linear feet) |
| Abstract: | The Brontë sisters: Charlotte, 1816-1855; Emily, 1818-1848; and Anne, 1820-1849; and their brother Patrick Branwell, 1817-1848, did not publish extensively, but most of what they did write has entered the canon of classic western literature. The small Brontë Family collection is largely composed of holographic works by the siblings, and a few of their letters. A musical score written by Ernest Powell for one of Emily's poems is also included, as are a few letters by acquaintances. |
| Call Number: | Manuscript Collection MS-00526 |
| Language: | English. |
| Access: | Open for research |

Administrative Information

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| Acquisition: | Acquired as part of the Hanley, Stark, and Wrenn Collections. One item from Maggs Bros. Ltd. purchase, 1965. |
| Processed by: | Chelsea S. Jones, 1999 |
| Repository: | Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin |

Biographical Sketches

Patrick Brontë (1777-1861)

Patrick was the eldest of ten children born to a poor Irish family in County Down, Ireland. He attended Cambridge University with the sponsorship of a local clergyman. In 1806 he was ordained in the Church of England and took his first position in Essex. He advanced through a series of curacies to a position in Bradford where he met his future wife, Maria Branwell. They married, with the grudging permission of her comfortably middle-class parents, in 1812.

Settling first in Hartshead and then Clough House, the couple had their first two daughters, Maria and Elizabeth in 1814 and 1815. A promising position brought them to Thornton where their remaining children, Charlotte (1816), Patrick Branwell (1817), Emily (1818), and Anne (1820) were born. In 1820, the whole family moved to Haworth in Yorkshire where Patrick received a lifetime appointment as curate. Sadly, Mrs. Brontë did not live to enjoy the comfort of the secure position, dying in 1821, possibly of cancer. The two eldest daughters fell ill at boarding school and died within months of each other in 1825.

Charlotte Brontë, 1816-1855

Charlotte attended the Clergy Daughter's School along with her older sisters but returned home upon their deaths in 1825. The next 20 years were devoted to studying, educating her siblings, and a few short terms as a governess. Meanwhile, when she was at home she enjoyed an active creative life with her sisters and brother in which they invented an imaginary world and wrote stories and poems about the people who lived there. Financial support from relatives allowed Charlotte to study for almost two years in Brussels, with the thought of opening her own school with her sisters. When the school failed to work out, she began to cast about for other ways for the family to earn a living.

In 1845 she discovered some poems written by Emily and conceived the idea of the sisters publishing some of their writing. Assuming the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, their *Poems* were published in 1846. Undeterred by the lack of response, or revenue, engendered by this first attempt, Charlotte went on to write and publish *Jane Eyre* in 1847. Buoyed by the critical acclaim achieved by *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte wrote *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853). In 1854 she married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholas. After a brief but happy marriage, Charlotte died in 1855.

Patrick Branwell Brontë, 1817-1848

As the only Brontë son, Branwell was slated to be successful and provide support for his sisters. Besides tutoring in the classics from his father, Branwell also received painting lessons and in 1838 he set out to be a portrait painter in Bradford. This venture failed and, like Charlotte, Branwell tried tutoring to pay his way. After a five month post in 1840, he took a job as a railway clerk. After a promotion in 1842, his career was cut short when he was let go for discrepancies in his accounts.

1843 found Branwell returned to tutoring, but he was dismissed in 1845, possibly for an inappropriate relationship with his employer's wife. This event seemed to send Branwell into a decline. He made an attempt to support himself by writing, but despite publishing several items, was not able to earn enough. He began drinking and taking opium and ran up debts. Instead of supporting his sisters, he became a burden to them. His emotional distress was aggravated by an undiagnosed case of tuberculosis and by early 1848 his health had deteriorated to the point where he could no longer care for himself. He died at home at the age of thirty-one.

Emily Brontë, 1818-1848

Educated mostly at home, Emily Brontë had only a little formal education, attending Roe Head School in 1835 while Charlotte was a teacher there. She left after only a few months, too home-sick to stay. Despite her minimal formal education, Emily gained a teaching post in Halifax in 1838, but left after six months, again due to debilitating home-sickness. After Halifax, Emily generally stayed at home, managing the household for her father until 1842 when she joined Charlotte to study in Brussels. When the sisters returned home for their Aunt Branwell's funeral, Emily stayed with their father when Charlotte returned to Brussels.

When she wasn't working, Emily, like her sisters, wrote. She participated in the imaginative stories and wrote the poetry which inspired Charlotte to publish *Poems* (1846). Once the sisters decided to attempt writing for publication, Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847) which received almost as much attention as *Jane Eyre*. Emily's writing career came to an abrupt end when she contracted tuberculosis from her brother. Refusing medical attention until it was too late, she died in 1848, three months after Branwell, at the age of thirty.

Anne Brontë, 1820-1849

The youngest of the Brontë children, Anne was also educated largely at home, though she attended Roe Head School, after Emily left, for three years. Though the youngest, Anne spent the most time actually employed, taking one governess post in Yorkshire for the year of 1839 and then moving to a post near York where she stayed for five years. She was joined in York by Branwell in 1843 when the family took him on as a tutor. Anne left this post in 1845, shortly before Branwell was dismissed.

Returning home, Anne joined in Charlotte's efforts to publish their work and began working on a novel. *Agnes Gray* (1847), published in a single volume with *Wuthering Heights*, was largely overlooked by critics. Undiscouraged, Anne wrote a second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) which received a great deal of critical attention, primarily negative reactions to the brutality described within. Like her sister and brother, Anne's writing career was cut short by illness. Having contracted tuberculosis, probably from her brother or sister, Anne died in 1849.

Sources

Dictionary of Literary Biography -- Volume 21: Victorian Novelists Before 1885. Ira B. Nadel and William E. Fredeman, Eds. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983).

White, Katheryn. *The Brontës.* (Sutton Publishing: England, 1998).

Scope and Contents

The holograph works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë make up the bulk of the small Brontë Family Collection, 1833-1858, along with works by Anne and Patrick Branwell Brontë. The collection is organized into two series: Series I. Brontë Family Works and Letters, 1833-1858 (1.5 boxes) and Series II. Works and Letters by Others, 1850 (.5 box). This collection was previously accessible through a card catalog, but has been re-cataloged as part of a retrospective conversion project.

The Brontë Family Works and Letters Series is divided into five subseries, arranged alphabetically by family member name: Subseries A. Brontë, Anne, 1836-1838; Subseries B. Brontë, Charlotte, 1833-1853; Subseries C. Brontë, Emily, 1837-1842; Subseries D. Brontë, Patrick, 1850; and Subseries E. Brontë, Patrick Branwell, 1834-1836.

Anne Brontë's writings are represented by typescripts of three poems and a list of characters she used in her stories and poems of the fictitious land of Gondal. The Charlotte Brontë subseries is more robust with holograph versions of "The Green Dwarf," "Julia," and "Something About Arthur." Also present is a letter to William Smith Williams, her publisher. Contained in the Emily Brontë subseries are two holograph poems and an essay in French.

The men of the Brontë family are represented in the final two subseries. Patrick Brontë's subseries contains a letter to an unknown recipient, while the Patrick Branwell subseries holds a holograph poem, a short story titled "A Narrative of the First War by Harry Hastings," and a commonplace book in which Patrick Branwell contributed four pages of poetry and sketches.

The Works and Letters by Others Series contains a musical score written by Ernest Powell for a poem by Emily Brontë and a biographical essay on Charlotte Brontë by Harriet Spofford. Also present are two letters, including one from Mary Taylor, one of Charlotte's life-long friends.

Related Material

Other materials associated with the Brontës may be found in the following collections at the Ransom Center:

- Coleridge, Hartley
- Morley, Christopher Darlington
- Nussey, Ellen

- Ratchford, Fannie Elizabeth
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Index Terms

Correspondents

Spofford, Harriet

Taylor, Mary

Williams, William Smith

Subjects

Authors, English--19th century

Brontë, Anne, 1820-1849

Brontë, Charlotte, 1816-1855

Brontë, Emily, 1818-1848

Brontë, Patrick, 1777-1861

Brontë, Patrick Branwell, 1817-1848

England--Social life and customs--19th century

English literature--19th century

Love stories

Document Types

Commonplace books

Series I. Brontë Family Works and Letters, 1833-1858

Subseries A. Brontë, Anne, 1836-1838

Three poems, bound typescript copies, 13pp

**box 1
folder 1**

Verses by Lady Geralda (1836)

Alexander and Zenobia (1837)

A Voice from the Dungeon (1838)

Untitled list of characters appearing in her stories and poems of Gondal, holograph, nd, 1p

**box 1
folder
2**

Subseries B. Brontë, Charlotte, 1833-1853

Works

Exercices sur les participes, holograph, 1840, 22pp

**box 1
folder 3**

"The Green Dwarf," holograph, 1833, 26pp

folder 4

"Julia," holograph with author emendations, 1837, 33pp

folder 5

"Something about Arthur," holograph, 1833, 25pp

folder 6

Letters

Taylor, James, 10 holograph letters, 1849-1851

**box 1
folder 7**

Williams, William Smith, holograph letter, 1853

folder 8

Subseries C. Brontë, Emily, 1837-1842

"But the hearts that once adored me...", holograph poem, nd, 1p

**box 1
folder 9**

Lettre d'un frère à un frère, holograph, 1842, 1p

folder 10

"The organ swells, the trumpets sound...", holograph poem, 1837, 1p **folder**
11

Subseries D. Brontë, Patrick, 1858

Letter to an unknown recipient, 1858 **box 2 folder**
1

Subseries E. Brontë, Patrick Branwell, 1834-1846

"...As lifeless as before. She thought that confusion crossed her dying mind,"
holograph poem, nd, 1p **box 2**
folder
2

Commonplace book of Mary Pearson with four holograph pages by Brontë, includes
three sketches, 1846, 4pp **folder**
3

A Narrative of the First War, holograph signed Henry Hastings, 1834-1836, 20pp **folder**
4

Series II. Works and Letters by Others, 1850

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Powell, Ernest, musical score for "Lullaby to A.A." by Emily Brontë, nd, 1p | box 2 folder 5 |
| Spofford, Harriet, "Charlotte Brontë," holograph essay in bound notebook, nd, 80pp | folder 6 |
| Stanford, Derek, typescript letter to <i>The Methodist Recorder</i> , nd, 2pp | folder 7 |
| Taylor, Mary, holograph letter to Charlotte Brontë, includes a typed transcript, 1850 | folder 8 |