

Brontë Studies in Japan⁽¹⁾

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Preface

I feel very honored to have this chance to speak to the Brontë Society of Australia. This is, in fact, my second visit to Australia. I came here seven years ago to see Dr. Alexander when I translated her book *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*. This critical study has been highly evaluated within the international field of Brontë studies. In Japan also, we had long waited for its translation to be published. The publication of the Japanese edition opened up the juvenilia field in Japan and helped establish the excellent reputation that Dr. Alexander now enjoys in Japan. The Brontë Society of Japan invited Dr. Alexander as a special guest speaker for its 10th anniversary conference in October 1995. I cannot emphasize enough the significance of Dr. Alexander's visit to Japan since it opened up a new era of Brontë studies in the field of early Brontë writings. I feel very honored to have been able to make a small contribution to this.

(1)

Today, I would like to talk first of all about the Brontë Society of Japan and then about my own research and my current project.

The Brontë Society of Japan is a major Japanese academic society and has about 350 members all over Japan. Its headquarters is located in Komazawa University in Tokyo and it has a branch office in Tezukayama-Gakuin University in Osaka. There are also similar academic societies for novelists and poets such as Hardy, Mrs. Gaskell, Woolf, Yeats, Joyce and others. But these societies are only for academics and not open to the general public. One thing unique about the Brontë Society of Japan is that it is open to anyone—layman or specialist—who loves the Brontës. This principle was reaffirmed when the Brontë Center evolved into the present Brontë Society with a famous Japanese woman novelist, Taeko Kono, as its first president. Under her leadership, the Brontë Society held a Brontë exhibition in Tokyo and Osaka sponsored by the Seibu Group which produced a Japanese film version of *Wuthering Heights*. This project was very significant because it has made the Brontë Society

known to the general public and accordingly a large number of people became members of the Brontë Society. Membership fees and donations now support the Brontë Society and its various activities.

Now, I would like to talk about the academic activities of the Society. These include an annual meeting, publication of both a newsletter and journal, a published collection of Brontë-related materials, and seminars held for the general public. At the annual meeting, research papers are read by post-graduate students, university academics, and sometimes general members who have passed the standards set by the board of the Brontë Society. In the past, there have been presentations by a psychoanalyst and a musician.

The biggest project carried out by the Brontë Society so far is the publication of a complete Japanese edition of the Brontës' work. The total 12-volume Japanese edition was completed in January 1997. I have to mention that the translation of literary and academic works is regarded as an important aspect of academic study in Japan. Translations have played such a big role in Japan that, I should say, there exists a field of study about the translation of, for example, Shakespeare. As for the Brontës, however, there were virtually no translations except for *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. In the past, a publishing project was launched but this had to be stopped mainly for financial reasons. The publishing of the complete Japanese edition of the Brontës' work was a special project to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Misuzu-Shobo publishing company, one of the major publishers in Japan. I am sure that this complete edition will give a great impetus to Brontë studies in Japan.

The Japanese edition included one volume from the Angrian stories. I would like to add that I am now starting a new project of translating some other important works selected from Dr. Alexander's edition. The title of these works are 'The Green Dwarf', 'The Secret', 'A Leaf from an Unopened Volume' and 'The Spell'. They will be in two volumes and the whole project will be completed in August 2000 when you celebrate the Olympic Games here!

(2)

Now, I would like to move on to my own research. I am now engaged in writing a book on the Brontë juvenilia which is going to be published in April 1998. This project was inspired by Dr. Alexander's critical study which I mentioned before.

My book consists of two parts. Part 1 traces in detail the outline of the early writings by Charlotte and Branwell. This became possible thanks to Dr. Alexander's editing work of Charlotte's juvenilia and also to Professor Collins and Professor Neufeldt who have edited some of the prose work and poems by Branwell. I also collected copies of the transcripts of Branwell's manuscripts from the Brontë Museum in Haworth. The early writings, especially those in the first and second period, were written under a close collaboration between Branwell and Charlotte. What I have tried to make clear in Part 1 is the sequences of the stories and their relationship to each other.

Part 2 focuses on the development of Charlotte's technique as a writer. First I tried to follow

the formative process of Charlotte's love-theme through an analysis of the development of heroes and heroines in Charlotte's juvenilia. I discussed in detail the Duke of Zamorna, the Earl of Northangerland, and six heroines. During the process, I realized that there were few happy marriages in Charlotte's juvenilia. I think that this might offer new interpretations about Charlotte's later novels which end with happy marriages, except for *Villette*. I also found a theme of mistresses which recurs throughout Charlotte's juvenilia. This theme culminates when Elizabeth Hastings faces temptation by William Percy in 'Captain Henry Hastings' which later developed into *Jane Eyre*. This theme has to be discussed in relation with Charlotte's later novels and it will take me some time to present a more concrete view.

The second half of part 2 focuses on Charlotte's narrative method. This is the main topic I would like to talk to you about today.

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In 1829, when Charlotte gave the first written account of the Brontë juvenilia, she called them 'our plays'. From this epithet, we can infer that their stories were dramatic productions which were performed in the presence of an audience, the Brontë children themselves. The word 'play' also reminds us that the juvenile stories originated as a childhood game which required the participation of all players. In this make-believe game, they played the roles of producer, actor, and audience. From the very beginning, the Brontë children were conscious of the audience and competed with each other for a better performance.

As the original wooden soldiers got lost one by one, the children got free from various restrictions and the stories came to be read instead of performed on the stage. The children were now storytellers and a reading public as well. Charlotte and Branwell issued a literary magazine which was named after the real *Blackwood's Magazine* for the hypothetical reading public in the imaginary town called 'Glasstown'. It is really amazing how well they acted as professional editors although they were just twelve and thirteen years old at that time. As Carol Bock points out in her critical study entitled *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience*, through reading *Blackwood's Magazine*, Charlotte learned that 'literature was, first and foremost, a game of pretense played by both writers and readers'⁽²⁾.

The most important thing, Charlotte realized, is not to find one's authentic voice, but to engage the reader in imaginative play-acting. We can give many examples to show that Charlotte had a very sophisticated strategy to get the reader involved in the fiction-making process. Here, I would like to discuss two works which were written in the first and second periods. These two works are good materials for seeing Charlotte's narrative method and the framework structure which dominates her work.

The first one is 'The Adventures of Mon Edouward de Crack' written in 1830 when Charlotte was fourteen years old. The story itself is a simple adventure story about a boy who lives in 'Frenchieland', one of the islands in 'The Glasstown Saga'. He goes up to its capital city of Paris but is robbed of all his money and has to work at a pub. He leads a miserable life which

is totally different from what he had expected. One day, he is carried away by an eagle to the Palace of the Genii and later he wanders into a beautiful forest. He walks and walks and finally reaches a big industrial town where he is employed as a factory worker and leads a happy life there. The story shows a strange mixture of two elements: fantasy and realism. From this brief outline I have presented, most of you might have been reminded of *The Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor*. But the background of the whole story is described quite realistically. The readers of Glasstown can easily recognize that the owner of the pub where Edouward was forced to work is Pig Tail whose real occupation is to dig up dead bodies. The policeman who helped Edouward escape from the killers and introduced him to the owner of the factory is the Marquis of Douro, the President of the Glasstown Parliament.

Although the story is a fantasy, the society in the background is the 'real' Glasstown. I said 'real' now, but to whom is it real? In order to answer this question, we have to go back to the two prefaces for this story. The first preface is by CW, the initials for Lord Charles Wellesley, the younger brother of the Marquis of Douro. He writes as follows:

My motive for publishing this book is that people may not forget that I am still alive, though a good way from Ashantee. The personages spoken of will easily be recognized by the reader.⁽³⁾

Charles apparently addresses the readers of Glasstown who, he thinks, are whimsical and easily forget him. He tries to draw people's attention to him by stimulating their curiosity. Here is a hypothetical inter-relationship between the reading public who seek for scandals and the professional writer who makes his living by entertaining them.

The other preface is by CB. CB are the initials for Charlotte Brontë, but we cannot identify CB as Charlotte herself so simply. Initials were often used among women novelists in the late 18th century and the early 19th century before they started to use men's names as their pen names in order to avoid the double standard for women novelists. This raises another question about the reason why Charlotte continued to use male narrators in her early writings. Here, however, I would like to stick to the point that Charlotte was trying to play the role of the fictitious author CB, who records the time required for this story as follows:

I began this book on the 22 of February 1830 and finished it on the 23 of February 1830, doing 8 pages on the first day and 11 on the second. On the first day I wrote an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening. On the *third* day I wrote a quarter of an hour in the morning, 2 hours in the afternoon and a quarter of an hour in the evening, making in the whole 5 hours and a half.⁽⁴⁾

How hardworking! I am ashamed of myself in comparison! But I was a bit relieved when I found one small childlike mistake: the third day should be the *second* day. This dry description by the professional author CB is for the other reading public who supports the fictional world

of Glasstown, that is, Branwell, Emily, and Anne. This means that there is another framework which surrounds the fictitious world of Glasstown.

The argument I wish to propose here is that, through presenting two prefaces by double authors, Charlotte emphasizes the fictitious storytelling situations depicted in her early narratives. Unlike her brother, who sadly confused fiction and reality, Charlotte was interested in the relationship between the actual and the imagined in her fiction. In her later work, she tends to use various narrative techniques that remind the audience of the storytelling situation such as addresses to the reader, embedded tableaux, unreliable narration, frame tales and so on.

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What I would like to discuss next is an example of a frame tale, one found in the story 'A Leaf from an Unopened Volume'. This was written in 1843 but the time set in the story is 1858, which means this is a prophetic story instead of a record of past events. Before getting into the details of the story, I would like to ask you to see the title-page. According to the title-page, the whole story was told by 'an Unfortunate Author', edited by Charles Wellesley, and sold by Sergeant Tree. There is no CB or Charlotte Brontë on the title-page.⁽⁵⁾ and the real author is completely hidden behind the scenes. We first read the following preface by Sergeant Tree who lives on the Bibliostreet in Verdopolis:

The extraordinary nature of the following pages made me hesitate at first whether I should publish them. But having understood that a cheap edition, in numbers, of the same work was being struck off in a neighboring printing press, I determined to run all hazards in order to gratify the public curiosity. Besides, I considered that such parts as were most likely to offend the persons here alluded to are put so far beyond all belief or possibility by glaring inaccuracies of date that no one could be much annoyed at them.⁽⁶⁾

Sergeant Tree is the son of Captain Tree, a former pen name which Charlotte used. This son, not so talented as his father, is a publisher and book-shop owner in Verdopolis. So, we are already within the story and are supposed to understand that the story has some intentional modifications.

Next comes the INTRODUCTION. Although it has no signature, we can see that the author is Charles himself. Charles, however, disowns all responsibility for this story. He tells how, on returning home to the Thornton Hotel where he was then living, he found a stranger in his chair and was 'compelled' to copy down the manuscript read by this 'Unfortunate Author'.

After his lengthy preface, the story finally starts. The time of the story is set 24 years in the future and the Duke of Zamorna is now the Emperor Adrian whose reign covers all African nations. He is now over 40 years old and has six sons and one daughter. The story develops centering on the love affair between the Emperor's second son, Adrian Percy and the mysteri-

ous woman, Zorayda. The story reveals the antagonism within the royal family and the past conduct involving the secret marriages of the Emperor and his father in law, the Earl of Northangerland. The author not only reports the brutal acts which the Emperor took against the Ashantee, the native Africans, but also predicts the bloody execution of the eldest son of the Emperor and the tragic end of the Emperor himself.

Who is this author that can foretell the decline of the Empire which is to take place 24 years later? There is no clue to his/her identity in the story. When Charles finished writing down the story and raised his head, the man had already disappeared. Some think that he might be Branwell because he alone can foretell the future of the Angrian Legend as a partner to Charlotte.⁽⁷⁾ Furthermore, the description of this unfortunate author reminds us of S'Death, the vicious character created by Branwell.

We can also imagine that the unfortunate author is non-existent, an imaginary character created by Charles himself. Charles who has long been repressed by the powerful brother, the Duke of Zamorna, has a strong motivation to get revenge under the cover of 'the unfortunate author' in order to avoid all responsibility. He has already slandered his brother in 'Albion and Marina' by changing the ending of the story. In 'A Leaf from an Unopened Volume', although the date is changed and the people are camouflaged, it is apparent that the real intention of the author is to indict the moral corruption of the Duke of Zamorna.

But is that the only reason why Charles made up the unfortunate author? The story ends like this:

Here the voice of my dictator suddenly ceased. I looked up. The chair where he had been seated was vacant. I glanced round the room: nothing was visible. I rose, opened the door and looked out into the corridor. All there, however, was still and silent. No step sounded on the stairs, no movement in the lobby. And from that hour to this I have never either seen or heard of the unfortunate author whose manuscript is here submitted to a discerning public.⁽⁸⁾

This conclusion corresponds with the introduction and now the framework of the story is complete. Until then, the reader had been reading the story by the Unfortunate Author without being conscious of Charles, the mediator. There is only one time that the reader is reminded of the presence of the Unfortunate Author when he left because of the daybreak when he finished dictating the first part. And now at the very end of the story, Charles reappears indicating the possibility that the story is all sham or just a fantasy he has devised. Now the reader encounters another framework set by Charles himself. In other word, Charles succeeds in engaging the reader in his fictional world. After revealing the frame structure of this work, Charlotte Brontë reveals herself by writing her signature at the very end.

I have discussed two works by Charlotte to show that she was fascinated with the storytelling process itself and used her writings as a means to explore that interest. Although we often have been led to believe that Charlotte's juvenile stories were evasive or compensatory products, the escapist daydreams of a fervid imagination, we have to pay more attention to the fact that she

had a keen sense of audience and of the performative aspects of storytelling. As her numerous pseudonyms suggest, she quite self-consciously adopted the role of story-teller when she put her pen to paper.

I hope this short talk has given you a general understanding of the Brontë Society in Japan and of my own research work on the Brontë Juvenilia. I would like to stop here, then, and invite your questions and comments. Thank you.

Notes

- (1) This short paper was presented for the Conference of the Brontë Society of Australia which was held on the 28th October 1997 at New College, the University of New South Wales, Australia.
- (2) Carol Bock, *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller's Audience* (University of Iowa Press, 1992), p.14
- (3) 'The Adventures of Mon Edouard de Crack', *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), ed., Christine Alexander, Vol.1: 1826-1832, p.134
- (4) *Ibid.*
- (5) Title-page of 'A Leaf from an Unopened Volume'.
- (6) 'A Leaf from an Unopened Volume', *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë, op.cit.*, Vol.2: 1833-1834, Part1, p.323
- (7) Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.122
- (8) *Ibid.*, p.377

A Leaf from an
Unopened Volume
Or
The Manuscript of
An
Unfortunate Author.

Edited
By
Lord Charles Albert
Florian Wellesley

Published by
Sergeant Tree

January the 17th
1834