

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) and the Education of Women in the 19th Century

David A Reibel
Tübingen (Germany) and York (UK)

Readers are often struck by Charlotte Brontë's concern with language both overtly, and in her use of it. There is no higher testimony than the following reaction from William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) on first reading *Jane Eyre* in 1847:

Who the author can be I can't guess — if a woman she knows her language better than most ladies do, or has had a 'classical' education ... — the style very generous and upright so to speak. ... (Letter of 23 October 1847 to William Smith Williams (1800-1875), literary agent.)¹

Thackeray, an accomplished journalist and satirical writer, artist / illustrator and successful novelist, would have sensed Charlotte Brontë's deliberate and careful attention to these matters. Elsewhere he remarks:

The good of *Villette* [1853] in my opinion Miss is a very fine style; and a remarkable happy way (which few female authors possess) of carrying a metaphor logically through to its conclusion. (Letter of 11 March 1853 to Lucy Baxter (1837-1902), writer on art.)²

Charlotte Brontë's Schooldays

Anyone reading the biography of the Brontë family will also be struck by the children's precocious interest in affairs of the world, and their evident wide reading. Yet it comes as some surprise to learn that when she arrived at Roe Head School on 17 January 1831 at the age of 15, Charlotte Brontë was not prepared as were the other scholars. The best contemporary testimonies come from her fellow-pupils Mary Taylor (1817-1893) and Ellen Nussey (1817-1897), who was to become a life-long friend and confidant. Mary Taylor recollects:

... She looked a little, old woman, so short-sighted that she always appeared to be seeking something, ... She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish [*sic*] accent. ... We thought her very ignorant, for she had never learnt grammar at all, and very little geography. (Mary Taylor, Letter [Memoir of Charlotte Brontë], Gaskell/Shorter 1920:101.)

¹ *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, collected and edited by Gordon Norton Ray (1915-1986). Four volumes. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945-1946. Reprinted New York: Octagon Books, 1980. Volume II (1945), pp 318-319. Excerpted in *The Brontës. The Critical Heritage*. Edited by Miriam Farris Allott. London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p 70. On Williams and his assistance to the Brontë sisters in their publishing ventures, see Allott, pp 14-16 *et passim*.

² See Ray, Volume III (1946) pp 232-233, partially reproduced in Allott (1974), pp 197. By this date, Thackeray had met Charlotte Brontë on two occasions.

Mary Taylor's concern about grammar and geography directly parallels that of Mrs. Garth in *Middlemarch* (Book III. 'Waiting for Death'. Chapter 23; also Chapter 24).

Ellen Nussey corroborates Mary Taylor's impressions:

... Some of the elder girls, who had been years at school, thought her ignorant. This was true in one sense; ignorant she was indeed in the elementary education which is given in schools, but she far surpassed her most advanced school-fellows in knowledge of what was passing in the world at large, and in the literature of her country. She knew a thousand things unknown to them. ... (Ellen Nussey, 'Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë.')

³

In contradistinction to the perceived gaps in Charlotte Brontë's schooling, both Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey mention her extensive knowledge of passages of poetry and scripture, which she could recite by heart.

She would confound us by knowing things that were out of our range altogether. She was acquainted with most of the short pieces of poetry that we had to learn by heart: would tell us the | authors, the poems they were taken from, and sometimes repeat a page or two, and tell us the plot. (Mary Taylor in Gaskell/Shorter 1920:102. Shorter 1908:I:80-81)

I must not forget to state that no girl in the school was equal to Charlotte in Sunday lessons. Her acquaintance with Holy Writ surpassed others in this as in everything else. She was very familiar with all the sublimest passages, especially those in Isaiah, in which she took great delight. (Nussey/Shorter 1908:I:91)

Proficiency in learning (memorization) was highly admired and valued both for its usefulness, and for the evident pleasure it might bring to both learner (reciter) and audience. Evidently, Charlotte Brontë was both diligent and proficient at the task.

She was only three half years at school. In this time she went through all the elementary teaching contained in our school books. She was in the habit of committing long pieces of poetry to memory, and seemed to do it with real enjoyment and hardly any effort.' (Nussey/Shorter 1908:I:89)

According to Nussey, academic accomplishments and honours were shared by Mary, Charlotte and herself:

She [Mary Taylor] was not talkative at school, but industrious, and always ready with lessons. She was always at the top in class lessons, with Charlotte Brontë and the writer; seldom a change was made, and then only with the three — one move. ... Then a time came that both Charlotte and Mary were so proficient in

³ By 'E'. *Scribner's Magazine*. Volume II. 1871. Reprinted in the Brontë Society's *Transactions*, Part X. 1899. Also reprinted in Gaskell/Shorter 1908:I:86. According to Gérin (1967:1, 22), the deficiencies were identified when Charlotte Brontë enrolled at Cowan Bridge primary school at age 8 and had been addressed by the programme of study drawn up for her by her father; her reputation may, then, have preceded her, perhaps unfairly, to Roe Head School.

school room attainments there was no more for them to learn, and Miss Wooler set them Blair's *Belles Lettres* to commit to memory. We all laughed at their studies. Charlotte persevered, but Mary took her own line, flatly refused, and accepted the penalty of disobedience, going supperless to bed for about a month before she left school. When it was moonlight, we always found her engaged in drawing on the chest of drawers, which stood in the bay window, quite happy and cheerful. Her rebellion was never outspoken. She was always quiet in demeanour. Her sister Martha, on the contrary, spoke out vigorously, daring Miss Wooler so much, face to face, that she sometimes received a box on the ear, which hardly any saint could have withheld. Then Martha would expatiate on the danger of boxing ears, quoting a reverend brother of Miss Wooler's. (Ellen Nussey's 'Reminiscences', in Shorter 1908:I:428-429)

These "school room attainments" might well have been committing to memory the contents of the various school books used. Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* must however have been a considerable mouthful to memorize, even in the form of some *Abridgement*, of which at least two dozen editions by at least six publishers appeared before and after 1800.⁴ Was Miss Wooler desperate to find some task that would not be so quickly completed that she would have to cast around for another one? Charlotte Brontë's "perseverance", like Mary Taylor's refusal, could just as well be evidence of defiance or stubbornness intent on proving her ability to accomplish the task set. The task itself was no more an imposition than giving a proficient classical scholar (school boy) some difficult Latin or Greek author to memorize or to construe. Memorization has formed the basic method of inculcating knowledge, whether the rules of English, or of Latin, grammar, from time immemorial, and in widely separated ages and cultures.

Some idea of the prevalence of the teaching of the precepts of prescriptive grammar, and the methods employed, may be gained from the following excerpt from Nussey's narrative. After expatiating on Charlotte Brontë's "conscientious diligence" (86) in "fulfilment of duties" (89), or in "accomplish[ing] the appointed tasks of the day" (86), she continues:

Miss Wooler had two badges of conduct for her pupils which were wonderfully effective, except for the most careless. A black ribbon, worn in the style of the Order of the Garter, which the pupils passed from one to the other for any unladylike manners, breach of rules, or incorrect grammar. Charlotte might, in her very earliest school-days, have worn 'the mark,' as we styled it, but I never remember her having it. The silver medal, which was the badge for fulfilment of duties, she won the right to in her first half-year. This she never afterwards forfeited, and it was presented to her on her leaving school.⁵ (Nussey 1899:89, Chapter V. 'School-Days at Roe Head', quoted in Shorter 1908:I:84-92).

A fictional version features in Mary Taylor's novel, *Miss Miles or A Tale of Yorkshire*

⁴ See the numerous editions listed in *BMGCPB* under Blair. In the original two-volume edition (1783), it represented many pages of text, and in a typical early 19thC edition (that of 1814) it contained 397 plus 403 pages, also in two volumes.

⁵ It is now in the Brontë Museum at Haworth. On the concept 'incorrect grammar', see Appendix II.

Life 60 Years Ago, published in 1890.⁶ The novel abounds in dialect writing, giving a good account of the language that the author and Charlotte Brontë were no doubt exposed to as children and young adults. One may imagine also that they were very proficient in it. Sarah Miles, the protagonist, has been sent to a local school. The whole narrative seems to be based on composite impressions of Roe Head School and its famous scholars, the material used with creative imagination, humour, and artistic irony.

Miss Bell [the proprietress] appeared, called her, and showed her a lesson to be learned by heart. Sarah sat down with it, and a parsing class was summoned. Sarah listened with intense curiosity to all that went on. She had formed the idea that the mystery she wished to penetrate might, perhaps, be learned at school, but not in the lessons. These were given to make the girls appear what they were not — to get like her sister Jane. But parsing was something new to her. (1990:89)

... rousing her neighbour's attention, she asked —

“What's a preposition?”

“A preposition!” said Miss Dunn [a very proper fellow pupil], with a pause of astonishment. “It's a part of speech.”

Sarah considered the answer, and then asked —

“What's a part of speech?”

“It's a word.”

“Any word?”

Miss Dunn nodded.

“Then poker is a part of speech?”

“Yes, it's a substantive.”

“What's a substantive?” ...

“You must learn grammar, and then you'll know.”

“What's grammar?”

“You have one in your hand.”

For the first time Sarah looked at her book with the intention of learning her lesson. She “went at it” as she had done at the difficult business of entering the warehouse. It did not occur to her to indulge in the peevish exclamations that were rather in fashion among the pupils, such as, “Oh! what a long piece! I'm sure I can never learn it. Miss Bell, may I learn half? It's too much, I declare,” and so forth. In due time she astonished Miss Bell by calling out from her seat —

“Please 'm, I know my lesson.”

She said it perfectly. Miss Bell was puzzled, and thought it was as well that the girl had chosen to learn, as there seemed to be no way of making her if she had chosen otherwise. (1990:91-92)

Genre painting like this corroborates the circumstantial evidence of the historical record about how grammar and the other subjects must have been taught. As for the extra learning (memorization) task that Miss Wooler set Charlotte Brontë and Mary Taylor, Blair's *Lectures in Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* formed part of the teaching of English essential to all who wanted to have a full grammatical and stylistic command of the

⁶ London: Remington & Co., Publishers. 1890. Reissued in paperback: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press. With an Introduction by Janet H[orowitz] Murray (*b* 1946). 1990. Chapter VII. ‘Daylight To Fight By’.

standard language as it was then understood. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th president of the USA (1861-1865), owned a copy.

Further information about early days at Roe Head School, Charlotte Brontë's later life and her continuing friendship with Ellen Nussey, including the unedifying story of how Ellen Nussey was induced to part with her precious Charlotte Brontë correspondence by the unscrupulous Clement King Shorter (1857-1926) and the notorious forger Thomas James Wise (1859-1937), is to be found in Whitehead's very fine original study (1993), based in part on previously unconsulted documents.

As the record shows, the accomplishments of education — good speech, good grammar, good handwriting, good spelling, good deportment, polite manners, a knowledge of French, perhaps also Italian, geography, history, arithmetic, singing (including sight-reading), music (piano), sewing, drawing, 'Holy Writ' and the catechism etc are not to be despised, and are, even if only potentially, as in the case of women, more, not less, useful than a classical education, as many 17th and 18thC critics of men's classical education and learning make plain, eg John Locke (1632-1704), in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).⁷

Finally, perhaps I may be allowed a conjecture or two on Charlotte Brontë's person and language, as reported by Mary Taylor.

The short-sightedness, if uncorrected by glasses, might account for her ability to do very fine work up close, such as is found for example in the very miniscule manuscript writing in the Glass Town magazines. Compare this passage from Ellen Nussey's account:

... She did not play or amuse herself when others did. When her companions were merry round the fire, or otherwise enjoying themselves during the twilight, which was always a precious time of relaxation, she would be kneeling close to the window busy with her studies, and this would last so long that she was accused of seeing in the dark... (Nussey/Shorter 1908:87)

Her lack of interest in the more energetic play of her fellow pupils, combined with her application to her studies, and her ability to do work close up (as she would have to do) in dim lighting, giving an enhanced image, amount to a dubious compensation for short-sightedness. Branwell's short-sightedness points to the possible hereditary nature of this (recessive?) visual defect.

The "Irish accent", and "ignorance [of] grammar" would be consistent with the circumstances of upbringing. Old-fashioned linguistic norms, such as the sisters and their brother might have 'inherited' from parents, servants, and local Yorkshire dialect speakers, would be sufficient to account for both impressions in Mary Taylor's account, especially if she herself had received a more up-to-date, 'modern' earlier education. Such instances of linguistic lag can be found to this day in Britain among persons brought up by older relatives, or in isolated circumstances, even though they may have attended boarding schools. Brief attendance at Cowan Bridge primary school would not necessarily mitigate these linguistic features.

⁷ See Cruse 1930, Chapter V, 'The Schoolroom'.

Charlotte Brontë and her Books

On enrolling at Roe Head School, Charlotte Brontë must have been given a small library of essential school books, a number of which are preserved in the Brontë Parsonage Museum Library, Haworth, Keighley, West Yorks; they all bear her autograph signature and the date January 17, 1831 (for some inexplicable reason Mrs Gaskell gives the date in Gaskell/Shorter 1920:100 as January 19, 1831):

Lindley Murray (1745-1826), *English Grammar, Adapted to the Different Classes of Learners* ... 30th Edition. London: Longman [et al]; York, T. Wilson [etc], 1818.

J. F. Tocquot, *A New and Easy Guide to the Pronunciation and Spelling of the French Language: to which are added, lessons on etymology, [etc]*. London, 1806 This is the only edition recorded in the *BMGCPB*. The inside front cover of Charlotte Brontë's copy bears the following hand-written inscription:

Like a vision came these sunny hours to me.
Where are they now? They have long since joined
the past eternity.⁸

[Marc Antoine Porny, pseudonym of Antoine Pyron du Martre], *Grammatical Exercises, English and French...* By Mr. Porny, French-Master at Eton-College. London, 1810.

William Pinnock (1782-1843), *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London, 1830. This is the only edition recorded in the *BMGCPB*. Pinnock was an indefatigable writer and compiler of school books on a wide range of subjects.

[Miss] Richmal Mangnall (1769-1820), *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions For the Use of Young People; with a Selection of British and General Biography, etc, etc.* ... London, 1813. First published Stockport, 1800.

Soon to join the collection was:

Le Nouveau Testament ... Edinbourg, 1829 Received as a prize from Miss Wooler, the proprietress of Roe Head School, on December 24, 1831.

French, English, geography, and history, the Bible, all seem appropriate school subjects, then as now.

Mangnall's *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions* underwent numerous reprints, revisions by subsequent editors and imitators of this widely used textbook. It applied the method long in use of teaching history, geography, grammar, and of course religion by means of a kind of catechism of (short) question and (often long) answer. The idea was to cram as much 'information' into small minds as quickly as possible.

⁸ Cited by Rebecca Fraser in her biography, *Charlotte Brontë* (1988:62, Chapter IV, "The Misses Wooler's School at Roe Head").

Lindley Murray, *English Grammar, Adapted to the Various Classes of Learners...* This finding can be supported by an interesting piece of circumstantial evidence.

An entry in the Catalogue of Printed Books in The Library, Friends House, Euston Road, London, lists what appears to be Charlotte Brontë's copy of the *English Grammar...* of Lindley Murray (1745-1826), the American Quaker who moved to York in 1784 and was set to work by William Tuke (1732-1822) in the production of school books that would uphold the twin Christian principles of 'piety' and 'virtue'.

The entry is taken from a bookseller's catalogue of sometime before WW II, and is entered in the Catalogue on a white card, which indicates "items of which we note the existence, but do not hold". (This information is due to Joseph Keith, Friends House Library; letter of 21 February 1989.) It reads as follows:

117 Murray (Lindley) English Grammar adapted to the different | classes of Learners. Sm. 8vo., original sheep, little worn, autograph signature of "Charlotte Brontë, | Jan. 17th, 1831," inside cover. 6 guineas York, 1818 | *** One of a set of schoolbooks purchased upon her arrival at Roehead.

Unless this "autograph signature" is an ingenious hoax (I have no idea as to the whereabouts of this book), it shows that Charlotte Brontë also received or had purchased for her this other indispensable school book.

The date "1818" in the entry shows that this was either the 30th or 31st Edition of Murray's *English Grammar*. R. C. Alston 1965:94 lists only the 31st Edition as located. Further information about the printing history of this work is available from the Impression Books in the Longman Archive at Reading University Library, giving the printing details and costs of every book printed by or for Longmans and Partners from 1797 up to very recent times. Impression Book No 6 contains the following two entries for 1818:

1818 | Mar 31 Murray's Gram 12^o. 30th. edit 10 000 + 178 [copies] | Print as before... 426 15 10. (**Impression Book No 6** p 153.) 1818 | Sept Murray's Gram 12^o 31st edit 10 000 + 195 [copies] | Printing as before... 426 15 10. (**Impression Book No 6** p 202.)

The entry in the bookseller's catalogue evidently gives the format erroneously as "Sm. 8vo". The octavo *Grammar* was in fact the two volume edition first published in 1808, with the *Grammar* in Volume I, and the *Exercises* and *Key* in Volume II.

The *Abridgment* to Murray's *Grammar* was regularly reprinted in editions of 12 to 16 thousand plus copies, four or five times a year in the period we are considering. Murray had sold the copyright for the complete package of *Grammar*, *Exercises* and *Key* to Longman & Partners in 1797 for £700, and for the *Abridgment* for £100; he did not make a penny from these works after that, but continued to revise the *Grammar* until his death on 16 February 1826. The work was widely pirated, especially in America, as it seems that no international copyright was recognized in the USA until 1891.

The significance of the choice of the *Grammar*, which was changed slightly by Murray

from edition to edition, is that the *Abridgment* contained only the major rules without analysis or comment, and was suitable for instruction in less demanding circumstances, *eg* village schools, or “the minor schools, and for those who use it as introductory to the larger work [*ie* the *Grammar*]”; while “The duodecimo Grammar, and the Exercises and Key are suited to academies [as *eg* Roe Head], and for private learners. The octavo edition claims the attention of persons, who aim at higher attainments in the language; who wish for an extensive and critical knowledge of the subject. To many it will serve as a book of reference; in ascertaining what is proper, and correcting what is erroneous, in English composition.” (Elizabeth Frank, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Lindley Murray*... York 1826:260-261.) This is rather disingenuous of Elizabeth Frank, Murray’s amanuensis and self-appointed literary executrix, as she imagined herself, since the octavo grammar contained little that was different from the *Grammar* etc, but looked impressive if not pretentious in a country-house binding.

A North-American Parallel

A near-contemporaneous North-American illustration of the universality of rote learning is to be found in an episode of *Nature and Human Nature* by Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865).⁹ (See the article (1890) by George Clement Boase (1829-1897) on Haliburton in *DNB*.) Haliburton was the first writer to use American dialect and, according to Artemus Ward, founded the American school of humour. Among others, he wrote ‘The Clockmaker, or the Sayings and Doings of Sam Slick of Slickville’ (1836, 1838, 1840).

Sam, the protagonist, is a picaresque rogue, and the humour is in the dialect writing, which witnesses 19thC North-American dialect forms not recorded elsewhere, as is shown below. These forms can be related to their cognate standard forms by simple rules of pronunciation and derivation.

“ ‘Sam,’ she said, ‘you was always the most impedit, forredest, and pertest boy that ever was, and travellin’ hain’t improved you one mite or morsel.’

“ ‘I am sorry I have offended you, Liddy,’ sais I, ‘but really now, how do you manage to teach all them things with hard names, for we never even heard of them at Slickville? Have you any masters?’

“ ‘Masters,’ said she, ‘the first one that entered this college would ruin it for ever. What, a man in this college! where the juvenile pupils belong to the first families — I guess not. I hire a young lady to teach rudiments.’

⁹ Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865). 1859. *Nature and Human Nature*. By the Author of “Sam Slick, the clockmaker” etc. etc.

[Epigraphs on title page:]

Hominem, pagina nostra sapit.—MART.

[‘Our page tastes of the man.’ Marcus Valerius Martialis (c40-c104 AD / CE), *Epigrams*. Book X. 4. 10.]

Eye nature’s walks, shoot folly as it flies,

And catch the manners living as they rise.—POPE.

[Alexander Pope (1688-1744), *An Essay on Man* (1733-1734), Epistle I, ll 14-15]

[Frontispiece:] Female Colleges. [Woodcut cartoon of flock of overexcited nubile female pupils at Lydia’s College. John Leech (1817-1864); L. H. Baker [Engraver]]
London: Hurst and Blacket, Publishers. Successors to Henry Colburn.

“ ‘So I should think,’ said I, ‘from the specimen I saw at your door, she was rude enough in all conscience.’

“ ‘Pooh,’ said she, ‘well, I have a Swiss lady that teaches French, German, Spanish, and Italian, and an English one that instructs in music and drawing, and I teach history, geography, botany, and the sciences, and so on.’

“ ‘How on earth do you teach them all?’ said I, ‘for it puzzles me.’

“ ‘Between you and me, Sam,’ said she, ‘for you know my broughtens up, and it’s no use to pretend — primary books does it all, there is question and answer. I read the question, and they learn the answer. It’s the easiest thing in the world to teach now-a-days.’

“ ‘But suppose you get beyond the rudiments?’

“ ‘Oh, they never remain long enough to do that. They are brought out before then. They go to Saratoga first in summer, and then to Washington in winter, and are married right off after that. The domestic, seclusive, and exclusive system, is found most conducive to a high state of refinement and delicacy. I am doing well, Sam,’ said she, drawing nearer, and looking confidential in my face. ‘I own all this college, and all the lands about, and have laid up forty thousand dollars besides;’ and she nodded her head at me, and looked earnest, as much as to say, ‘That’s a fact, ain’t it grand?’ (p 194)

Anachronisms

Finally, one may note that the language of even such a relatively recent writer as Charlotte Brontë can be subject to the same anachronistic and ahistorical grammaticality judgements usually reserved for writers of much earlier stages of the language, such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, or OE texts. Christine Alexander’s *Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë 1834-1835* (1991) has the following admonition:

As in volume I, an effort [*sic!*] has been made to preserve the shape of each manuscript. ...

Charlotte Brontë’s punctuation has improved since the earlier manuscripts of 1828 but she still has trouble with apostrophes ... Her capitalization is still haphazard ... At times she appears to be imitating eighteenth-century usage in capitalizing certain nouns, but this is so inconsistent as to make the preservation of irregular capitals meaningless. ... |

... The frequency of common mistakes [in spelling] in her manuscripts ... makes the preservation of such errors on a large scale unacceptable ...

Charlotte Brontë still uses ‘&’ and ‘and’ interchangeably, often in the same sentence ... These inconsistencies have also been regularized.

Where a word has some local meaning in the text, however, Charlotte Brontë’s variant spellings ... [of] all archaisms, obsolete words and rare usages are retained [*eg beaufet for buffet, scymitar, variants of curtsy*]. These reflect the ambiguities and inconsistencies of language use in her time. ...

... with the earlier manuscripts it was more difficult to distinguish between archaisms and simple spelling errors ... [etc etc] (Alexander, 1991. Volume II: ‘Textual Introduction’, pp xxiv-xxvi.)

“From such efforts to ‘preserve the shape of each manuscript’ may the Good Lord deliver us!” — as some character in one of Charlotte Brontë’s novels might have

remarked, if she had got hold of this. Either one prepares a diplomatic edition recording the mss as extant, or one prepares a publisher's edition such as Charlotte Brontë herself would no doubt have wished for these texts, if she had not decided instead to burn them.

The Rev William Walter Skeat (1835-1912), commenting on the editorial practices of the Anglo-Saxon scholars of his day (the second half of the 19thC) rightly calls this kind of editorial intervention *perversity* (Skeat 1887; see Appendix I.). The expression “the ambiguities and inconsistencies of language use in her time”, even if restricted to these few spellings, as well as others like them, is another instance of the belief — in this case anachronistic — that earlier stages of the language exhibit a variability, an inconsistency and unsettledness, or even a lack of logic and construability, that is absent from (because it has been eliminated from) the present-day language. The more reasonable explanation in the case of the juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë is that what is discussed in these three pages reflects Charlotte Brontë's very wide reading and precocious literary awareness on the one hand, coupled with remnants of the consequences of the previous lack of formal education (‘grammar’) noted by her fellow scholars when she arrived at Roe Head School in January 1831. One also wonders if the “school room attainments” for which she won such high honours from Miss Wooler exhibited similar such “ambiguities and inconsistencies”.

Appendix I: On the Editing of Ancient MSS

The multi-version editions of the Anglo-Saxon translations of the Gospels by The Rev William Walter Skeat (1835-1912) seem to have been the first scholarly diplomatic editions that meet just about all criteria for presenting the Old English texts as they stand in the MSS. While being scholarly, they are at the same time accessible. The printing and production are exceptionally clear and easy to read and to use, and can be highly recommended. Skeat's summary statement on editing is instructive, and applies just as well to some of today's editorial practices as it did to those of his own time.

The fact is, that the method of editing old MSS. has, during the last thirty years, undergone a very great change. The principles by which an editor should be guided are now very different from what they used to be. To put it in the most striking manner, we may say that an editor's duty, at the present moment, is supposed to consist in an endeavour to represent the peculiarities of the MSS. in the most exact and accurate manner; he is expected to assume that the scribes meant what they wrote, and he must not venture to make any correction without giving due notice. It might be thought that such a proceeding is simple and obvious; but it is quite certain that such was not what was expected of an editor thirty or forty years ago. On the contrary, he was then expected to *edit* his MS.; and this meant, that he was to *modernize* the MS. in every conceivable way, by the use of every method which his ingenuity could suggest. He was not to reproduce the MS. as it stood, but only as it might be supposed to stand after being so altered as to make it acceptable to a modern reader. It is surprising how much change could be introduced by such perversity; and I shall now proceed to shew how it was done. [which he does.] (Preface to St Matthew's Gospel, 1887, p viii)

What Skeat quite rightly calls *perversity* is still the goal or aim of many present-day

editors; these practices must therefore have some function for both the editor and the reader, however, which causes them to be rediscovered by successive generations of scholars, whose work must then be undone by those in search of the original text.

Appendix II: The Concept of Grammar

Nussey's expression "incorrect grammar" could be interpreted to mean either a vulgarism (associated with the speech of the lower orders), or a dialect form, or else an error in construction — an 'impropriety' resulting from the misapplication or non-application of one of the 'rules' of the standard, *ie*, the speech, and especially the writing, of the educated middle or gentlemanly classes. It was this latter, and not vulgarisms or dialect forms, that were the target of the numerous prescriptive traditional grammars that came into their own in the second half of the 18th century. As Lowth (1762) and many others observed:

It is now about fifty years since Doctor Swift made a public remonstrance, addressed to the Earl of Oxford, then Lord Treasurer, concerning the Imperfect State of our Language; alledging in particular, "that in many instances it offended against every part of Grammar".

By "language" Lowth could only have meant the literary written language of the day, and by "grammar" he meant those self-evident principles enumerated by Blair (1783:I:180-181):

All the rules of Latin syntax, it is true, cannot be applied to our Language. Many of those rules arose from the particular form of their Language, which occasioned verbs or prepositions to govern, some the genitive, some the dative, some the accusative or ablative case. But, abstracting from these peculiarities, it is to be always remembered, that the chief and fundamental rules of syntax are common to the English as well as the Latin Tongue; and, indeed, belong equally to all Languages. For, in all Languages, the parts which compose Speech are essentially the same; substantives, adjectives, verbs, and connecting particles: And wherever these parts of Speech are found, there are certain necessary relations among them, which regulate their syntax, or the place which they ought to possess in a sentence. Thus, in English, just as much as in Latin, the adjective must, by position, be made to agree with its substantive; and the verb must agree with its nominative in person and number; because, from the nature of things, a word, which expresses either a quality or an action, must correspond as closely as possible with the name of that thing whose quality, or whose action, it expresses. Two more substantives, joined by a copulative, must always require the verbs or pronouns, to which they refer, to be placed in the plural number; otherwise, their common relation to these verbs or pronouns is not pointed out. An active verb must, in every Language, govern the accusative; that is, clearly point out some substantive noun, as the object to which its action is directed. A relative pronoun must, in every form of speech, agree with its antecedent in gender, number, and person; and conjunctions, or connecting particles, ought always to couple like cases and moods; that is, ought to join together words which are of the same form and state with each other. I mention these, as a few exemplifications of that fundamental regard to syntax, which, even in such a

Language as ours, is absolutely requisite for writing or speaking with any propriety.

Self-evidently, then, it was not Latin that furnished the Universal Grammatical principles that were then applied to English, but rather that Latin, like English, was subject to and adhered to them, only, as we might say, more so. Universal Grammar was the superordinate set of grammatical relations. James Harris defines Universal Grammar as follows (Harris 1752:11):

GRAMMAR UNIVERSAL; *that Grammar*, which without regarding the several Idioms of particular Languages, *only respects those Principles, which are essential to them all* [.]

Where we today might say that what Latin and English have in common must be stated in terms of some lowest common denominator, Blair and Harris interpret this denominator as being a maximal set of grammatical relations based on the twin cornerstones of traditional grammar, government and agreement.

The following passage from James [Augustine Aloysius] Joyce (1882-1941) is an independent confirmation of the importance of grammatical form in the educational curriculum of the second half of the 19thC.

I looked at the lamp which she told me came into his mind but merely as a passing fancy because he then recollected the morning littered bed etcetera and the book about Ruby with met him with pike hoses [*sic*; *sc* horses] in it which must have fell down sufficiently appropriately beside the domestic chamberpot with apologies to Lindley Murray. (*Ulysses* (1922) 16.1470-1475)¹⁰

The ambiguous syntax of the first half of the sentence would have met with Murray's decided disapproval, in any case. The extract begins with a citation of the fifth line of the first stanza (up to ... *told me*) from the poem, 'The Song of O'Ruark, Prince of Breffini', in *Irish Melodies* (1807-1834), by Thomas Moore (1779-1852), with music by Sir John Andrew Stevenson, Mus. Doc. (?1760-1833).

The effect is created by beginning the sentence with a clause as grammatical subject to the verb phrase *came into his mind*, which in any normal construction would have to begin with the subordinating connective *that* since it is initial in the main clause, but as it is a quotation and behaves syntactically like an ordinary noun phrase, it is not introduced by *that*, creating an expectation, which is then interrupted, that it is a main clause — a fine example of the so-called 'garden-path phenomenon'. The effect is heightened by omitting the original parenthesizing commas in Moore's poem around *she told me*: "I looked at the lamp which, she told me, ...". Once again we see the superiority of the artist in making use of one of the linguistic effects that constitute the staple fare of, in this case, psycholinguistic research, but composed with consummate skill. This example is superior in structure and interest to the clumsy examples normally used for psycholinguistic research purposes.

¹⁰ This reference is due to Oliver Grannis. See also: Stanislaus Joyce (1884-1955). 1958. *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*. Edited by Richard Ellmann (1918-1987). London: Faber and Faber Limited.

Murray would also have found the whole mad scramble, for that is what it is intended to be, at the end of the sentence, a succession of adverbs and prepositional phrases paratactically adjoined to each other without connectives, to lack grammatical propriety and perspicuity. The past participle *fell* for *fallen* is specifically condemned:

3. As the perfect participle and the imperfect [tense: *ie* the simple past tense *aka* preterit(e)] are sometimes different in their form, care must be taken that they be not indiscriminately used. It is frequently said, “He begun,” for “he began;” ... the participle being here used instead of the imperfect tense: and much more frequently the imperfect tense instead of the participle: as, “I had wrote,” for, “I had written;” ... “The sun has rose;” “*risen.*” (Murray, *English Grammar*. Syntax. Rule XIV. Note 3.)

Cf also this sentence for correction from the *Exercises* to this Rule:

If some events had not fell out very unexpectedly, I should have been present.

Past tense (preterite) for past participle and *vice versa* were part of the stock devices for representing vulgar or uneducated speech, from the beginning of the 19thC on, and were very common in educated writing (and as we may surmise also in educated speech) in the 17thC, 18thC, and early 19thC. The letters in the Tuke Family Papers in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York, abound in the construction, ‘have wrote’.

Joyce’s training in English language, composition, and grammar is fully detailed in the following valuable and original study, which contains a reference to “Magnall’s [*sic*] *Questions*” (p 43), but none to Lindley Murray’s *English Grammar*:

Sullivan, Kevin. 1958. *Joyce among the Jesuits*. New York: Columbia University Press. Reprinted 1967. Reprinted Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press. 1985. Motto on title page:

You allude to me as a Catholic ... | now you ought to allude to me | for the sake of precision | and to get the correct contour on me, | you ought to allude to me as a Jesuit. | —JAMES JOYCE

Bibliography, References and Further Reading

Alexander, Christine [Anne]. 1991. *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë 1834-1835*. Volume II: The Rise of Angria 1833-1835. Part 2: 1834-1835. Oxford: Published for the Shakespeare Head Press by Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Cruse, Amy [A.] [Barter, afterwards] (b 1870). 1927. *The Shaping of English Literature and the Reader’s Share in the Development of Its Forms*. London; Bombay; Sidney: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd.

In the making of a country’s literature two classes of people are concerned—the writers and the readers, or hearers; and though the writers must

of necessity take the more important part, the readers are not without influence. What they ask for the writers take care to supply. ... |

This book is an attempt to tell the story of English readers from the days of the [Anglo-]Saxons to the end of the eighteenth century ['thirteen hundred years']. It is of necessity merely an outline, the outstanding epochs only being considered. Incidents have been adapted and fictitious characters, scenes, and incidents introduced for purposes of illustration. (Preface pp 3-4)

Has 32 Chapters, each treating some important type of text or reader, in chronological order from the earliest OE times to the end of the 18thC. Based on extensive familiarity with literature about literature, including diaries, letters, biographies, and other ephemera. This means that she covers aspects of English literature not ordinarily dealt with in other studies until much later, such as 'The Schoolboy and his Books' (Chapter IX, pp 68-77); 'The University Student' (Chapter X, pp 78-87); 'Women Readers' (Chapter XIX, pp 164-172), or 'Children's Books' (Chapter XXXII, pp 290-303). Has 33 plates of 'Illustrations' of pages from books discussed, pictures and paintings, music, etc. Index but no bibliography or references in the text besides names of authors and titles of sources.

——— 1930. *The Englishman and His Books in the Early Nineteenth Century*. London; Bombay; Sidney: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd.

His of course subsumes *hers*. 'No history of literature can be complete unless it takes account of the readers as well as of the writers.' (Chapter I. Introductory p 9) 'This book takes up the story [from the end of the 18thC in Cruse 1927 above] and carries it to the accession of Victoria.' (Preface p 3) [Queen Victoria (Alexandra Victoria, 1819-1901; reigned 1837-1901).] Has 32 Illustrations (photographic plates). Index but no bibliography or references in the text besides names of authors and titles of sources. See especially Chapter V. 'The Schoolroom' (pp 78-92); Chapter VII. 'The Young Gentleman at the University' (pp 108-126). On Lindley Murray see the following references: Chapter IV, 'The Clapham Sect' (see *Papers and Diaries of a York Family*, William Gray; Faith Gray), p 65; Chapter V, 'The Schoolroom' (Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*; Mrs Garth, Chapter 23 of *Middlemarch*), pp 87-88; (Lindley Murray's *English Reader* of 1800 [*sic*]), pp. 89-90; Chapter XVII, 'Drawing-Room Books' (William Makepeace Thackeray's commonplace on Lindley Murray and *who* or *whom*), p 285.

——— 1935. *The Victorians and Their Books*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Published in the USA as: *The Victorians and Their Reading*.

This book is concerned with that side of the history of literature which tells of the readers rather than of the writers of books. It attempts to show what books, good and bad, were actually read by the Victorians during the first fifty years of the Queen's reign, what they thought of them, and how their reactions influenced the future output. The material has been drawn from the biographies, autobiographies, correspondence, novels, essays, periodical literature of the time. (Preface [p 5])

Treats the period from the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 to the Golden Jubilee in 1887. Has 19 Chapters dealing with a variety of aspects of readers and the read during that period in more or less chronological order. See especially Chapter XVI. 'The New Woman' (pp 337-363); Chapter XIV. 'The Young Victorian's Library' (pp 386-311) for a mention of William Pinnock (1782-1843), Richmal Mangnall (1762-1820), 'Mrs Markham', pseudonym of Elizabeth Penrose (1790-1837), and others, who are referred to by name (meaning of course their school-books) by many well-known literary and educational figures. Very well researched with a constant stream of useful references to persons and sources without further identification. Has 19 Chapters on a wide variety of literature and its readers, based on an extensive number of sources: literature, diaries, letters, and other ephemera. Covers many topics not treated in the usual history of English literature, such as the humour magazine *Punch* (Chapter XVIII). Index but no bibliography or references in the text besides names of authors and titles of sources.

——— 1938. *After the Victorians*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

This book continues the story of English readers from 1887 [where Cruse 1935 leaves off] to the outbreak of the Great War [1914]. It does not pretend to give an account of the writers of that period, nor does it attempt to give any criticism of their works—except so far as this is contained in the opinions of contemporary writers. It devotes considerable space to some writers [eight named authors] who do not appear or have only slight mention in Histories of English Literature; and this because these writers, in their day, were read by a large proportion of the English public—a larger proportion, in some cases, than read the works of their great contemporaries. (Preface [p 5])

Treats many topics not normally covered in histories of English literature, such as 'The Feminists' (Chapter IX, pp 126-137), 'Crime Fiction' (Chapter X, pp 138-148), or 'The New Journalism' (Chapter XIV, pp. 191-204). Has Index but no bibliography or references in the text besides names of authors and titles of sources.

Fraser, Rebecca. 1988. *Charlotte Brontë*. London: Methuen.

Gaskell, Mrs (Elizabeth Cleghorn) [*née* Stevenson (1810-1865)]. 1857. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Two Volumes. London: George Elder & Co. 1857. Chapter VI. — New Edition: *The Life ...* by Mrs. Gaskell. With an Introduction and Notes by Clement K[ing] Shorter [(1857-1926)]. London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1900. *The Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and her Sisters*. The Haworth Edition. Reprinted London: John Murray. 1920. 'Mary's Letter' reprinted in: Clement K. Shorter. *The Brontës. Life and Letters*. Being an attempt to present a full and final record of the lives of the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë from the biographies of Mrs. Gaskell and others, and from various hitherto unpublished manuscripts and letters. Two Volumes. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Gérin, Winifred. 1967. *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. Reprinted with corrections. 1968.

Lowth, Robert (1710-1787). 1762. *A Short Introduction to English Grammar: with Critical Notes*. London.

Miller, Elaine. 1989. 'Through All Changes and Through All Chances: The relationship of Ellen Nussey and Charlotte Brontë.' In: *Not a Passing Phase. Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840 -1895*. London: The Women's Press Ltd. Lesbian History Group, 29-54. Reprinted and updated edition. 1993.

As Miller points out, the suggestion of a lesbian relationship between the two, as inferred by feminist and lesbian revisionist critics, is not entirely new.

Murray, Janet H[orowitz] (b 1946). 1990 'Introduction' to the paperback edition of Mary Taylor's novel: *Miss Miles or A Tale of Yorkshire Life 60 Years Ago*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murray's introduction quotes the central portion of the passage reproduced above (pp 2-3) beginning "Then a time came ...", and ending: "... happy and cheerful.". She then comments as follows:

The fifteen year old's rebellion displays character traits Mary would affirm throughout her life [eg she emigrated to New Zealand; became a notable feminist and champion of women's rights] — a surprisingly serene disregard for authority, a scorn for useless busywork that was often recommended for women, and a clearly felt need for meaningful activity. (Introduction, p viii)

"Useless busywork ... for women" seems rather harsh, a generalization from the specific proposition that one is either unaware of or unwilling to admit: that the task might have had a purpose. Notice the equivocal use of *recommended*, the more general term, which is entailed by *prescribed*, which Murray may have in mind, but cannot attest, although it might easily be deduced from the other circumstantial details given of Miss Wooler and her methods.

This is a good example of the ahistorical anachronistic feminist critique of women's education applied mechanically to a lost tradition, without understanding the context. It is also a good example of the innumerable journalistic inventions that one encounters in such biographical notes and in full-scale biographies of famous figures as well, based on collating and conflating times, persons, places, information, anecdotes, and incidents, which originally had nothing to do with each other, and, by juxtaposing them, bringing them into a false relationship they never originally enjoyed.

Murray's underlying idea is that most women's education must have been 'useless busywork'. The education itself cannot be blamed or made responsible for the fact that English society had as yet no place or rôle for the educated woman except as school mistress or governess. Later Victorian patterns of education for women who were going to take over important rôles in running a household needed more than 'useless busywork'. (On which, see Rowbotham 1989). And of course, once women had the education, they carved out their own rôles, provided that they had the social standing and the financial means.

Peters, Margot. 1973. *Charlotte Brontë. Style in the Novel. (1816-1855)*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press; London: The University of Wisconsin Press, Ltd.

The main aim of this work is a critical reassessment of Charlotte Brontë, treating literary critical values along with language, but with a fair amount of useful linguistic analysis. See especially Chapter 2. 'Syntactic Inversion: Poetic and Perverse', which gives many telling examples of her usage.

Rowbotham, Judith. 1989. *Good Girls Make Good Wives. Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Contents: Preface; List of [10] Plates (of book illustrations); Acknowledgements; Abbreviations; Introduction: A Good Dose of Jam: Girls' Fiction, 1840-1905; 1. *Household Fairy and Home Goddess: The Changing Feminine Stereotype*; 2. Religion as a Control on Reality; 3. Education for Model Maidens; 4. History with a Purpose; 5. Imperial Responsibilities and England's Daughters; 6. Vocations and Fit Work for Ladies; Conclusion: Self-sacrifice and Social Control; 15¼-page Bibliography of Works published to 1914; Index.

Her title might be an echo of *Good Wives* (1869), by Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), the sequel to her enormously popular *Little Women* (1868). See especially Chapter 3, Education for Model Maidens. Has excellent 15¼-page Bibliography of primary sources (Works Published to 1914) and Secondary Sources.

Shows how fiction reflected the dominant views about appropriate rôles for women, including their education, which was the matrix for the cultivation of grammar. Some idea of the effects of this linguistic (philological) study may be gained by the following remark:

In the additional interests of veracity, the dialogue of these books was almost invariably archaic: by Shakespeare out of Malory for those set in pre-seventeenth-century times; and by Gibbon out of Milton for the subsequent periods. Certain authors, notably Emily Holt [Emily Sarah Holt (*b* 1836)], were more assiduous than others in writing in such a style. For instance, the arrival of a new lady of the bedchamber to the Countess of Warwick in *Red and White: A Tale of the War of the Roses* [(1882)], is announced in distinctly tortuous form:

An't like you, Madam, your new chamberer that shall be, is now come.

The Lord Marnell, his daughter?

She, Madam. (p 38)

Thee's and thou's were almost invariably used in more intimate discussions by all authors writing stories set before 1750. Laboured though dialogue like this may sound, the very consistency of style in

these novels means that, with the addition of the footnotes and glossaries for unusual words, the prose is relatively easy to follow. Adult reviewers were sometimes a little amused, but concurred that the language made a valuable contribution towards the impact of these novels. ...

The books, it must be remembered, were written for a purpose where historical veracity was not an end in itself, but simply a medium through which a message was passed and given greater conviction. History was seen as a continuous process of improvement. ... (pp 150-151).

Despite the clumsiness, the quoted dialogue reveals considerable knowledge, however obtained, of forms from Earlier English which are all well attested, and used by *eg* Shakespeare. Whether or not they were all contemporary with each other, there may be more 'historical veracity' here than Rowbotham gives Holt credit for.

Shorter, Clement K. See Mrs Gaskell above.

Whitehead, Barbara (*b* 1930). 1993. *Charlotte Brontë and her 'dearest Nell'*. Otley, West Yorkshire: Smith Settle Ltd.

Wise, Thomas J[ames] (1859-1937); Symington, John A[lexander] (1887-1961). 1932. *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence*. Four Volumes. Oxford: Blackwell. Shakespeare Head Brontë. Publication date also given as 1931 or 1933.