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AFRICA AND SLAVERY IN THE BRONTË CHILDREN'S NOVELS

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The Brontë children wrote within the intellectual tradition associated with their father's patron, William Wilberforce; yet critical discussion of their writings has not hitherto compared this tradition to their portrayal of Africa in the *Juvenilia*, or their portrayal of English society in their novels of the 1840s. This article¹ will offer to bridge that gulf. One source of difficulty is the scanty heritage of writings by William Wilberforce himself; another is the Brontë family's reticence about their relationship to him. In addition, the Brontës were secretive about their own writings. The Brontës' reticence about Wilberforce is adequately explained by his position as Patrick Brontë's patron and hence as the founder of the Brontës' presence in England. However, I have argued elsewhere that the novels by the Brontë sisters in the 1840s, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, portrayed the phase in the history of the old Yorkshire West Riding when it became involved in sugar plantation ownership and domestic slavery in England.² For their themes and subject matter, these novels were clearly indebted to the reforms which the Wilberforce circle sought to achieve in English and colonial society. These reforms took place in a wide context of ideas and geographical settings, including Africa. These will be outlined here.

To a greater extent than most studies have suggested hitherto, the Brontë children drew their arguments, geographical settings and character types from the repertoire of texts and ideas which grew around the anti-slavery movement and the slave trade. The Brontës were restricted to the British sphere of influence on the African continent and in England; the extensive terrain covered by slavery in America lay outside their experience. However, like most writers in England during the nineteenth century, the Brontës left scanty clues about their historical and intellectual subject matter. Nevertheless, many of these have been conclusively deciphered. While many of their historical references leave no room for doubt, others are more deeply concealed. Despite careful concealment, most of the latter type are decipherable. The difficulty for literary and historical criticism is to assemble a coherent picture out of a seemingly confused mass of documents, and to trace the points

¹ This paper was given originally as part of a public lecture delivered in Hitotsubashi University under the auspices of the Jerwood Exchange between Sheffield University and Hitotsubashi University. For material cited or consulted in writing this article I thank the staff of Friends' House Library, London; the Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library; the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; the John Carter Brown Library of Brown University, Rhode Island; Yale University Libraries; the Brontë Parsonage Museum Library, Haworth; the Brotherton Library, Leeds; Sheffield University Libraries; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

² See my article: C. Heywood, 'Yorkshire Slavery in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Review of English Studies*, 38 (1987), pp. 185-198.

of correspondence and divergence between the novels and the reality which they sought to portray.

In their surviving writings, the Brontë children presented the main phases of the Wilberforcean and Emancipationist arguments about slavery. Most of these arguments had become standard by the end of the eighteenth century. They found triumphant expression in William Wilberforce's victory in Yorkshire at the 1807 election and in the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of the following year. This coincided with the period of Patrick Brontë's undergraduate years at Cambridge. A strong *prima facie* case exists for the supposition that his leadership in the formation of his children's novels and stories extended far beyond the often cited event of his return from Leeds with the set of toy soldiers which became 'The Men,' the founding characters of the *Juvenilia*. In their writings, Patrick Brontë's children dramatised current ideas about slavery in Africa and on the English mainland, and used the political names, the theoretical issues, and the details of topography and of parish history which he was well placed to collect and interpret for them.

To a greater extent than their admired precursor in the art of romantic historical realism, Sir Walter Scott, the Brontë children persistently concealed the sources and subjects of their stories. It may be assumed that their secrecy resulted from their having used confidential source material drawn from their father's experience of the mission field and from the Yorkshire parish histories which he knew. These were the two main theatres of Patrick Brontë's work in England. The exceptions to this general principle were *The Professor*, *Villette*, and *Shirley*, but in the latter, Charlotte traced the fragment of Yorkshire history in which her father had been personally involved, and in the others she wrote, as best she could, confessions directed towards her father to account for her difficult emotional life during her absence from Haworth. In all the phases of their writing careers, Patrick Brontë's children were directed by their father's experience and ideas, and they addressed their works and 'plays' to him. They remained, none the less, motivated by contrasted points of view and differing interpretations of history and regeneration in the individual and society.

This general outline accounts for two contrary pressures in the Brontë children's writings: towards concealment on the one hand, and on the other, towards authenticity, or accuracy. Under two forms of disguise, some readily penetrable and others less so, the references to warfare, settlement, and intrigue on the African continent in the writings of the Brontës' childhood (the *Juvenilia*) dramatised the Emancipationist reading of slavery as it affected Africa. Under thin veils of disguise, the *Juvenilia* cover the main theatres of Christian evangelisation in Africa from the seventeenth century onwards. The same forms of disguise which had been used in the *Juvenilia*, and the preoccupation with slavery, reappear in the Brontë children's writings of the 1840s. Their treatment of these themes included Biblical and mythological aspects of slavery. There is little room for doubt that in the 1840s, after they had abandoned their romanticised portrayals of an ideal Africa in its process of liberation from slavery, the Brontë children developed an allegorical technique for exploring the historical background of slavery and its patronage in the Cowan Bridge region.

This shift had its origins in the widespread debates of the Reform period about the origins of slavery: that is, whether it originated in Africa, or in the plantation system, or in the corruptions of Christian Europe.³ The Brontë children moved into the latter arena in their later writings, but in the case of Charlotte, substantial traces of the blame directed

by Anti-Emancipationist writers against Africa, on the grounds that slavery originated there, remain embedded in Charlotte's later writings. These do not appear in the writings of Emily, Anne and Branwell. Besides shifting the arena of their dramatisation of Emancipationist ideas in the novels of their brief maturity, the Brontë children dramatized the standard arguments of the Reform period about slavery, which stood as a metaphor for the plight of the poor, Asiatics, the Irish, females, and child labour within the factory system, as a consequence of the spread of machine production in alliance with plantation capital. Perhaps unexpectedly, the Brontë children emerge as social critics who used their local library resources and developed their father's and Wilberforce's ideas to dramatise the consequence of slavery in two continents.

Through the published resources available at the Keighley Mechanics' Institute Library, and at Ponden House,⁴ the Brontë children had access to a good reading background into African history, the slave trade, and the remedies in which Parliament had become involved. Many of these problems extended beyond the period of Abolition and Emancipation (1808–1838), into the period leading to the American Civil War. These problems, and the books and other documents expounding them, extended onwards into Yorkshire history and the parish histories which the Brontë children guardedly explored in their novels of the 1840s. The ideas and problems ranged from practical matters such as British naval supremacy and the justification for military intervention by British troops on the African continent, to theoretical and mythological problems relating to the alleged corruption of the sons of Ham and Japheth, the origins of depravity, and the achievement of salvation through faith, or grace, or deeds. The Brontë children were surrounded by an abundance of texts on all these matters. The available writings ranged from sermons and other occasional writings by their father and by his clergy associates, notably the Reverend Theodore Dury, Rector of St George's Parish Church, Keighley, and the Reverend William Carus Wilson, founder and

³ This extensive subject has attracted numerous studies. For a guide to material, see: Peter C. Hogg, *The African Slave Trade and its Suppression* (London: Frank Cass, 1973); also L. J. Ragatz, *A Guide for the Study of British Caribbean History, 1763–1834, Including the Abolition and Emancipation Movements* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932). For the beginnings of the resistance to slavery among European and American Christian communities, see especially: Henry J. Cadbury, *John Woolman in England, 1772. A Documentary Supplement* (London: Friends House, 1972); *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, edited by Phillips P. Moulton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Documents covering all aspects of the subject in its British dimension are included in: Michael Craton, James Walvin, and David Wright, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation, Black Slaves and the British Empire* (London: Longman, 1976). For a penetrating and massive study of intellectual debates in the West about slavery, see: David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966, and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972). Also: Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black, American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1968; and Baltimore, MD.: Penguin Books, 1971). All modern studies, the present one included, are in varying ways indebted to the foundation study of the problem by W. E. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1879* (first published 1896 by Harvard University Press; New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

⁴ The books available to the Brontës at Keighley and in the Haworth district are listed, but those available to them in two private collections, those of the Reverend Theodore Dury, Rector of St. George's Church in Keighley, and of the Taylor family of Gomersal, as well as in other houses or institutions, are not known. See: *Catalogue of Books Contained in the Library of Ponden House* (Keighley, 1899), Heaton Papers, Bradford City Libraries; and *Catalogue of Books in the Library of Keighley Mechanics' Institute* (Keighley, 1844, 1846, etc.), Keighley Public Library.

Principal of the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, to the major writings of the day by Macaulay, Brougham, Wilberforce, and others, in books and articles from the available Library collections. Uncertainty must be conceded at certain points about whether certain texts were available, or whether texts which were available were seen or used by the Brontë children. The general conclusion offered here will be that their reading was both wide and informed, and sustained by reflective conversation of high calibre. Where evidence about their reading is lacking, it can be suggested, the benefit of the doubt should be given in the direction of reading and knowledge, rather than ignorance, or coincidence, or incomprehension of their subject matter, as the foundations of the Brontës' literary art.

Besides appearing in books and articles which were available to the Brontës, Emancipationist ideas were represented by national figures with whom the Brontë family were personally involved. Wilberforce and Palmerston were personally linked to Patrick Brontë, the former as his patron during his years of study at St John's College, Cambridge, and the latter as an undergraduate contemporary.⁵ The Brontës' close reading to two leading newspapers published weekly in Leeds, the *Leeds Mercury* and the *Leeds Intelligencer*,⁶ must have led to their scrutiny of reports carried in these organs of the Parliamentary and other public debates on slavery, colonial expansion, and the reform of English society. Emancipationist idealism was rooted in the Nelson tradition and in British naval supremacy. Admiration for this tradition entered the Brontë family circle through Patrick's adoption of *Bronte*, the Dukedom in Sicily bestowed upon Lord Nelson after his victory at the Battle of the Nile, as an English equivalent for his family name, Brunty or Prunty.⁷ The Brontë children extended a similar principle into the naming of their characters. Generally, Irish, Yorkshire and Parliamentary links, with Emancipationist associations, underlie their choice of names for their fictional characters. The frequent appearance of the names Wellesley and Wellington in the *Juvenilia* celebrates the Brontë family hero, the Duke of Wellington, himself a distinguished member of an eminent Anglo-Irish family, the Wellesleys. The name Percy, which makes frequent appearances in the *Juvenilia* written by Charlotte and Branwell, evidently sprang from a similar admiration among members of the Brontë family for Thomas Percy. As Bishop of Dromore in County Down, Thomas Percy had a dual interest for the Brontës, since he was head of the Irish Protestant community and a founder of folklore and ballad research.⁸

A variety of disguises were used by the Brontë children in their choice of scenes and actions for all their writings. They disguised their settings even when these were clearly positioned on the African continent. The names of the principal characters in the *Juvenilia* are drawn from families connected to Ireland as well as England. A compound of historical and topographical accuracy, concealment, and an extravagant treatment of romantic in-

⁵ See: John Lock and W. T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow. The Life, Letters and Times of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, 1777-1861* (London: Nelson, 1965; London: Ian Hodgkins, 1979; and Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1979), pp. 18-20; and throughout. This major study has considerably altered the early conceptions of Patrick Brontë, which were based on the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1855), by Mrs Gaskell.

⁶ Lock and Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow*, op. cit.: numerous entries.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸ For a recent study of this major figure in the literary and ecclesiastical background on the Brontës, see: Bertram H. Davis, *Thomas Percy, A Scholar Cleric in the Age of Johnson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

trigue, marked the Brontë children's *Juvenilia* as well as their realistic novels of the 1840s. Charlotte and Branwell wrote stories set in a West African topography, but with a South African social and military background. It may be reasonably inferred from the evidence that the island setting of 'Gondal' disguised the use by Emily and Anne of themes and problems from the history of Ethiopia, which had a seventeenth-century missionary experience similar to that of Ireland. West African and South African settings are set out in works recording the travels in these parts by Mungo Park, Clapperton, and the Reverend John Campbell. All these were available in the Library of the Mechanics Institute at Keighley, and at Ponden House.⁹ Bruce's *Travels in Abyssinia*, a work which was available as well,¹⁰ goes some way towards explaining the probable use of Ethiopia, with its ancient capital Gondar, as a source for the name and history of Gondal. Another contribution to the literary tradition reflecting the European view of Ethiopia was Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), and its precursor, the *Voyage in Abyssinia* (1735), translated by Johnson from Joachim Le Grand's translation into French of the Portuguese Jesuit Jeronimo Lobo's account of his mission to Ethiopia during the middle quarters of the seventeenth century.¹¹ Neither work is listed among the books at Ponden House or at Keighley, but a *prima facie* case exists for supposing that these works were among books in the collection of the Reverend Theodore Dury, of Keighley, founder of the Mechanics' Institute Library and an encourager of the Brontë children's reading. His essay on the religious spirit at work in Ethiopia, published in 1829 in his children's magazine, *The Monthly Teacher*, incorporates the idea of the perfectibility of the sons of Ham,¹² a doctrine integral to Emily Brontë's argument in *Wuthering Heights*.

The cycle of stories or 'plays' developed by Charlotte and Branwell followed the main outlines of British antislavery and colonial activity in West Africa and in the Cape Colony, the Cape Province of the modern Republic of South Africa and of its precursor, the Union of South Africa. The method of disguise for this cycle, which combined lurid amours and metropolitan intrigues with an Emancipationist reading of African history, was to implant a military, social and administrative system taken from the Cape Colony as it stood around 1830, upon a map drawn from the West African coastline. By means of this disguise the Brontë children avoided becoming visibly involved with the principal spheres of action of the Missionary society which Wilberforce had founded in 1798, the Church Mission Society. The Bradford woollen industry became the principal support for the growing sheep farming and wool production industries of the Eastern Cape Colony after the arrival there of English farming settlers from 1820 onwards. This orientation would have influenced the Mission

⁹ For Keighley, see *Catalogue*, op. cit., items 47c, 208d, 26, 86d; for Ponden, see *Catalogue*, op. cit., pp. 35-6, items 1285 and 1303.

¹⁰ Keighley, *Catalogue*, op. cit., p. 19, item 27c.

¹¹ See: Samuel Johnson, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, edited by Joel J. Gold (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985; vol. 15 of the Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson), throughout.

¹² 'Ethiopia Stretching out her Hands to God,' *The Monthly Teacher*, vol. 4, No. 46 (October 1832), pp. 109-110. A sympathetic view of Africa and active hostility to slavery on the part of the Reverend Theodore Dury, editor and principal writer in this short lived but instructive Keighley journal, emerges from the article 'Slavery,' *The Monthly Teacher*, vol. 2, No. 24 (1830), pp. 142-3, and 'The Death of a Slave,' *ibid.*, vol. 2, No. 16 (April, 1830), pp. 37-39. The full text of an Emancipationist and Quaker classic by Hannah More, 'The Sorrows of Yamba,' was published in *The Monthly Teacher*, vol. 2, No. 15 (1830), pp. 32-36. Its last line, 'And the Weary Are At Rest,' from the book of Job, reappears as the title of Branwell Brontë's last novel.

sermon preached at Keighley in 1819 by Patrick Brontë.¹³ Although no text of this sermon has survived, his writings and ideas were of strong interest to his children. This family involvement in the Mission field undoubtedly influenced the Brontë children's use of Africa as a source for themes and settings in the *Juvenilia*.

In their handling of themes relating to Africa, colonisation, and the slavery question, the Brontë children conformed with the outlines traced in the books and journals available to them. The growth of colonisation in Africa out of the movement towards Abolition and Emancipation arose in part from the discovery that freed slaves would be killed or re-sold if they were returned to Africa, unless a colonial settlement had been formed to accommodate them: they had 'no other prospect upon rising, but falling into the hands of the same Rogues that sold them.'¹⁴ This collaboration between colonisation and Emancipation led to the formation between 1787 and 1808 of a militarily defended settlement at Sierra Leone and to the establishment of Liberia in 1815. The military occupation of the Cape Colony in 1806 and the control of Atlantic shipping by a naval squadron based at Simons-town were decisive factors enabling the Bill of 1807 to become the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1808. A condition in the terms of settlement by British emigrants in the Albany district of the Cape Colony in 1820 was that no slaves should be kept by the settlers.¹⁵ A vigorous spokesman for the extension of this collaboration between colonisation and Emancipation was Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, who defended it thus in his book of 1840, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*:

[. . .] if at this moment, when so many [. . .] motives invite them [i.e. Africans] to the diligent cultivation of their soil, they are visited, by a band of agricultural instructors, who offer at once to put them in possession of that skill in husbandry which the rest of the world has acquired, and they are enabled to till their ground in security, and find opened to them a conveyance for its productions, and a market for their toil; and if simultaneously with these advantages we furnish them with practical knowledge, and those mechanical contrivances which the experience of ages, and the ingenuity of successive generations, have by slow degrees disclosed to ourselves—I cannot doubt that those combined benefits and discoveries will furnish an immediate, as well as an ample compensation for the loss of that wicked traffic, which, if it has afforded profit to the few, has exposed the great mass of the inhabitants to unutterable wretchedness.¹⁶

In practice, colonial settlement proved impracticable in West Africa, and in South Africa it led to extermination for the San ('Bushman'), Creolisation for the Khoi ('Hottentot') and defeat, subjugation, displacement, and demoralisation for the Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) aborigines, wherever they encountered British and other European types of settle-

¹³ Lock and Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow*, pp. 190, 346.

¹⁴ John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies*, cited in Craton, Walvin, and Wright, *Slavery*, op. cit., p. 27. The latter work will be referred to here as 'Slavery.'

¹⁵ See: Guy Butler, *The 1820 Settlers* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1974), throughout.

¹⁶ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London, 1840), pp. 360–361. A spirited example of this widely canvassed view, and its bearing upon West African exploration and cartography, appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which the Brontës had available at the Keighley Library. See: James M'Queen, 'Geography of Africa,' *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 31 (Feb. 1832), pp. 201–216.

ment in South Africa.¹⁷ Doubts about the philanthropic efficacy of the British military and settler dominance in the Cape Colony were expressed from an early date by the Reverend John Philip, of the Church Missionary Society, and by the Scottish poet Thomas Pringle, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society and the founder of the South African literary tradition. These views were available from the mid 1830s concurrently with the optimistic theory of liberation through Christianisation and colonisation. The formation in 1838 of the Aborigine Protection Society, and the appearance in that year of a powerful attack on Christian pretensions to have achieved emancipation through colonization, in William Howitt's *Colonization and Christianity* (1838), contributed to a division in England between an older type of cultural imperialism, whose chief spokesman was Lord Macaulay, and the eventual emergence in the course of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of some semblance of respect for the ancient cultures of the colonised nations, Asia and Africa included.

As in many other matters, Emily Brontë occupied an enigmatic, but yet decipherable position in the handling of these themes and problems. The suggestion underlying this study is that she shared William Howitt's modern approach to the subject. Her handling of the history of Gondal points to the strong possibility that she shared Samuel Johnson's fusion, in *Rasselas*, of stoicism and the European tradition of writing about Ethiopia. However, Johnson's novel conceals the information clearly conveyed in the *Voyage to Abyssinia*, that slavery was practised in Ethiopia. In his novel, Johnson portrayed an idealised and literary Africa. The reference in Emily's 'Gondal' poem 'The Prisoner' to imprisonment and the 'agony' experienced 'When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,/ The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain'¹⁸ uses the standard Emancipationists' protest against the equating of the slave's position with that of a perpetual prisoner.¹⁹ In a handwriting which appears to be Emily's, the name 'Gondal' is written in above the name 'Gondar,' the ancient capital of Ethiopia, in the index to Goldsmith's *Grammar of General Geography* (1823), in the Brontë children's copy, which has survived.²⁰ Emily's definition of 'Gondal' as 'a large island in the north Pacific,' in what appears to be her entry in Goldsmith's book, corresponds to Japan, which shared with Ethiopia an unfortunate conflict between Jesuit and Dutch Protestant missionary interests in the seventeenth century. A parallel with Ireland is present as well. The definition given in Goldsmith of Japan (pp. 52-3) as a 'populous, and remarkable, Empire,' points to Japan as a possible model, but the conflict between Gondal and a southern neighbour, Gaaldine, points back to Ethiopia

¹⁷ For a classic of fiction dramatising this widespread view, see Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Also: Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936); J. B. Peires, *The House of Phalo* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984).

¹⁸ *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*, edited by C. W. Hatfield (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), No. 190, cited in Mary Visick, *The Genesis of Wuthering Heights*, 3rd edn. (Stroud: Ian Hodgkins; and Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1980), p. 16. The latter work includes a helpful Select Bibliography of studies of Emily Brontë in relation to *Wuthering Heights* and the 'Gondal' cycle.

¹⁹ 'By 1713 it had already been said that the slave trade encouraged wars and crimes in Africa, that enslavement was not the necessary consequence of sparing a captive's life . . . ' Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, op. cit., p. 346.

²⁰ The Rev. J. Goldsmith, *A Grammar of General Geography. For the use of Schools and Young Persons* (London, 1823). Cited as item 45 in *the Catalogue of the Bonnell Collection in the Brontë Parsonage Museum* (Haworth: Brontë Society, 1932), p. 19.

as a source of her composite kingdom, since the warfare with the southern Galla was for long a cause of difficulty in Ethiopia. The general purpose in creating 'Gondal' was, it appears, to give universal stature to the condition of slavery, since it arose from the conflicting interests of warfare and pride. For Emily at least, the predicament of Ethiopia was a starting point in the creation of a universal allegory about love in desperate circumstances. Here, an African setting led Emily to an Emancipationist argument of heroic proportions.

In contrast, Charlotte occupied a more limited position. Her view of Africa resembles that of Macaulay, whose celebrated *Minute* of 1835, on education in India, forecast a culture of English type for a future India which would think and speak in English.²¹ Charlotte's novel makes no attempt to denounce the view that the Creole or pale Black anti-heroine, Bertha Mason, deserved her fate. Bertha's African ancestry is carefully veiled but visible in the text. It imparted to her nature a demonic predisposition towards evil and licentiousness. The sympathetic handling of a character bearing the same name in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1956), by Jean Rhys, where the heroine's madness is a consequence of social and mental suffocation within a slave society built on male oppression, offers a searching reappraisal of Charlotte Brontë's handling of the theme. In the construction of Heathcliff, a character found repugnant by Charlotte, who describes him as 'savage, swart, sinister,'²² Emily Brontë, like Jean Rhys, explored the dehumanising effect of oppression directed from within a slave society against an orphan child of partly Black ancestry.

This contrast of ideas about the philanthropic efficacy of Christian evangelising in the context of slave society undoubtedly contributed to the tension between the sisters to which Charlotte makes guarded and one-sided reference in her Preface to the New Edition (1850) of *Wuthering Heights*. The two sisters' handling in the *Juvenilia* of slavery, emancipation, and evangelisation, foreshadows their divergent treatment of the psychology of the Creole, or partly Black, personality in their later novels. The 'Angria' or 'Northangerland' series dramatises the standard Emancipationist view of the African continent and its tragic history in modern times. In this view, wars of liberation are waged by white liberators on an African continent torn by warfare initiated by the White slave traders and their allies, the Black slave captors from the Muslim savannah states. Protest against the slave captain's mercenary indifference, his henchman's dispensing of coin into the black slave traders' hands, the cruelties of the branding iron and the whip, and the dismay of the recruits to this carnage, appears eloquently in the painting by Augustin Biard, executed around 1840 and preserved in the Wilberforce Museum at Hull. A similar reading of history and society underlies the portrayal of an innocent African past, despoiled by Islamic 'predators' and Christian 'destroyers,' in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1976). In the 'Angria' series, the extravagant social and official life in the colonial metropolis, 'Glasstown,' or Verdopolis, corresponds to the social profile of Regency Cape Town, but the enemy, the Ashantee, against whom the colonial government is waging a war of liberation, are taken from West Africa. So, too, are the names 'Freetown' and 'Calabar,' which acquire settings resembling

²¹ T. B. Macaulay, *Minute* of 1835, in *Collected Works* (London: Longman, 1866), 8 vols.

²² *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, and *Agnes Grey*, by Anne Brontë, edited by Charlotte Brontë (London: Smith Elder, 1894), p. xix.

those of Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth in the eastern Cape Colony.²³ From an Emancipationist point of view, these were merely the northern and southern borders of a land despoiled by a wave of European criminality.

This fusion of topics and names drawn from the northern and southern extremities of the old slave coast on the western flank of Africa persists in the administrative topography of 'Angria.' Branwell's map of Angria follows the outlines of West Africa, but its eight provinces correspond more closely to the seven magistratures of the Cape Colony, in Campbell's map of the region, than to the divisions of Windward, Grain, and Guinea coasts, used to map the West African Coast in the epoch of slavery.²⁴ The Emancipationist idea of the Cape Colony as a model for the future of Africa is incorporated in Goldsmith's *Geography*, where it is noted as being 'in a state of rapid improvement' (p. 76). Goldsmith's map of Africa (p. 74) shows 'Angra Pequena' in the position of the modern Great Namaqualand in southern Namibia. Gondar, capital of Ethiopia, is shown as well.

A detail probably taken from the history of the Cape Colony, but one for which a textual source within the Brontës' reading has yet to be found, is Mary Henrietta Zenobia, Countess Northangerland and loyal wife of the romantic and imperious Arthur Percy, whose titles include Count Zamorna, Marquis of Duoro and Earl of Northangerland in Charlotte's 'History of Angria.'²⁵ For this character, and for her position as the Spanish wife of an imperious military commander engaged in a frontier war in Africa, Charlotte can be assumed to have drawn upon the romantic history of the rescue by Captain Harry Smith (Sir Harry Smith, Baronet) at the capture by Wellington's army of Badajoz in 1812, during the Peninsular war, of the captivating Juana Maria de los Dolores de Leon, then aged fourteen, whom he married in due course. Two South African towns are named after Lady Smith. Both elements of Charlotte's portrayal of Zamorna, his military intransigence and his romantic attachment to a Spanish wife, evidently arose out of the history of Sir Harry Smith's severity as a conqueror of the Xhosa kingdom in the eastern Cape Colony in 1835 and as the hero of a romantic rescue in Spain (D.N.B.). His recall to Cape Town in 1837 and the view of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, that the Xhosa were the injured nation in the dispute, reflected the changing mood of the later 1830s.

At this point the ideals of liberation and conquest in Africa were irreconcilably opposed. Charlotte's farewell to the subject in 'The Last of Angria' (1839)²⁶ signalled the onset of maturity in that year for her. It marked her departure from an idealised and literary portrait of Africa. The imperious Earl Northangerland, the 'conquistador' with his Spanish

²³ Branwell Brontë, 'Map of the Glass Town Country,' redrawn by Lois North, in *Legends of Angria. Compiled from the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, by Fannie E. Ratchford (London: Oxford University Press, and New Haven, Yale University Press, 1933). p. xvii. See also the Map of South Africa in the Rev. John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa* (London: 1822; London and New York, Johnson Reprint, 1967), p. xiii.

²⁴ 'The British Slave Trade in West Africa. From a Map of 1746,' in *Slavery*, p. 4.

²⁵ 'The History of Angria III,' by Charlotte Brontë, in *The miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings of Charlotte and Patrick Branwell Brontë*, edited by T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, vol. 2 (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press and Basil Blackwell, 1938), pp. 125-139. The Spanish and African characteristics of Zenobia are evidently superimposed on her probable literary source, Gibbon's portrayal of Queen Zenobia in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. See: Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 23-4. In this illuminating study, however, the possibility that the Brontë children made use of the historical and topographical conditions of Africa in the era of slavery and Emancipation, is not considered.

²⁶ *Miscellaneous and Unpublished Writings*, op. cit., pp. 403-404.

wife and English mistress, the romantic protagonist and his antagonists in Charlotte's portrayal of 'Angria,' were replaced in *Jane Eyre* by the all-conquering white orphan child-bride, Jane Eyre, who vanquishes the dark Creole wife and defeats the proud Rochester, and becomes the mother of his legitimate child. Although some features of *Jane Eyre* signal an advance towards maturity in Charlotte Brontë's writing, her position as a champion of freedom is vitiated by the tendency towards self-pitying idealisation, negrophobia, and exaggeration, which never left her work.

In their advance into the novels of the 1840s, the Brontë children made their farewell to the map of Africa, and turned instead to their native Yorkshire. This transition was towards the uncovering of slavery in England, in its plantation form as well as in its metaphorical adaptations. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne's last novel, published in 1848, the Emancipationist metaphor of the wife as slave is given an eloquent exposition. The victim is rescued from her oppressor's clutches by teamwork between her brother and the narrator, who learns to behave as a brother towards the object of his infatuation as well as towards his future brother-in-law, whom he at first mistakes for a rival. The Emancipationist motto, 'Am I not a Man and thy Brother,' spoken by the chained and supplicant slave, in Wedgwood's celebratory medal of 1807,²⁷ appears between the lines of the text. It reappears in more tragic form in *Wuthering Heights*, where Heathcliff is alienated from the Earnshaws through the original offence of Hindley, who relegates his adoptive brother Heathcliff to 'outside' work on the farm. In plantation society the relegation of a house servant to fieldwork was a cruel degradation.²⁸ Wedgwood's figure of the kneeling black slave in chains reappears in Branwell's drawing of the defeated prizefighter Caunt, in supplication to his former pupil, the new champion Bendigo.²⁹ Branwell's last novel, *And The Weary Are At Rest*, written in his last composed year, 1845, and unfinished, portrays a group of traders and financiers after Emancipation, preparing to confess their appalling guilt in the slave trade.³⁰ Several characters from the *Juvenilia* reappear here in a Yorkshire setting, which corresponds in general outlines, as does the setting of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, to the setting of *Wuthering Heights*. Where others did not, the Brontë children discovered slavery among the hills and dales of the Midlands and Yorkshire.

This merely reflects credit on their powers of observation. These developments point to the persistent interest found by the Brontë children in the problem represented by their father's patron, Wilberforce. The participation of Yorkshire and Cumberland Parliamentary magnates in the plantation economy and in slave trading was a subject of persistent protest in the early nineteenth century. At a lower social level, the Brontës contributed to the main stream of Emancipationist objections against literal as well as metaphorical slavery. Though being thrown to the sharks, shackled, branded, hosed down, lashed to death, stripped, sold, and torn from family and friends, were the daily lot rather of Africans caught in the slavery system³¹ than of the British housewife, the overlapping of the latter's servitude with that of Black slaves lent some substance to Mary Wollstonecraft's classic

²⁷ Reproduced in R. Furneaux, *William Wilberforce*.

²⁸ *Slavery*, pp. 78, 117, 148, 151.

²⁹ Branwell Brontë, *The Leyland Manuscripts* (Leeds: Privately Printed, 1923).

³⁰ Branwell Brontë, *And The Weary Are At Rest* (Leeds: Privately Printed, 1923).

³¹ 'And besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely out for at-

objection to the European males' use of trinkets and folly to ensnare their victims, and rectitude to bind them, metaphorically at least, in chains. Her principal target was the specious liberationism of Rousseau:

But the private or public virtue of woman is very problematical, for Rousseau, and a numerous list of male writers, insist that she should all her life be subjected to a severe restraint, that of propriety. Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety—if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subjected to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny woman reason? for a gift is a mockery, if it be unfit for use.³²

The metaphor reappears in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where Helen Graham struggles in vain to prove to Arthur Huntington, as she put it, 'that my heart was not his slave' (Ch. 24), and in *Wuthering Heights*, where both the Catherines and Isabella are subjected, more literally, by keys and bars, to the iron logic of the plantation. This is explained by Heathcliff himself on his return from what can only be construed as a venture in slave trading or plantation management: "The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them" (Ch. 11). In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine rejects the trinkets which Rochester offers as tokens of affection: 'and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched' (Ch. 24). In her treatment of Bertha, however, Charlotte embarked on the slippery slope leading to portraying the slave and crucifying the African. Few White writers, if any, survive this perilous venture. In this attempt she failed, as Rhys has shown. The Creole, or pale Black, is perceived as White by Black, and as Black by White. There can be no doubt that by 'Creole,' the term used by Charlotte to describe Bertha, a person of mixed African and European ancestry was intended, and should be thus understood.³³ The confused presentation of a person with a 'swelled black face' (Ch. 25), with her 'gambols of a demon,' 'whether beast or human being,' with 'that purple face—those bloated features' (Ch. 26), remains without doubt a representative of the type of creature identified by Goldsmith in his *Geography* as coming from Africa, 'the country of monsters' and 'the most barbarous of all the quarters of the world' (pp. 74, 79). In his *History of Jamaica* (1774), Edward Long supplied a handbook of anti-Emancipation ideas in his portrayal of Black people, whom Emancipationists had long since adopted as human in every possible

tempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself. . . . ' from Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels* (London, 1789), cited in *Slavery*, pp. 38–42 (p. 40). Also: ' . . . I had then counted upwards of 300 lashes . . . ,' death of a female on Crawley Estate, in Benjamin M'Mahan, *Jamaica Plantership*, London, 1839), cited in *Slavery*, pp. 127–9 (p. 129). Examples could be multiplied.

³² Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 257.

³³ The term 'Creole' had acquired its modern meaning 'person of Catibbean birth, of African or mixed African and European ancestry' by the late 18th century. For examples, see *Slavery*, pp. 78, 84, 111–3, 124, 140, 143, 162, 249, 251, 252, 260. Except as a curiosity the term 'Creole' is, and was, little used in English in its Spanish sense: 'criollo, person of colonial birth and Spanish ancestry.'

sense. Long saw them as 'savages' who continue thus 'to their latest period,' even after enjoying the benefits of removal to the plantation and beyond. He adds the speculation that the oran-outang is probably allied to the Black variety of the human species, and adds, using the term 'race' for *species* in the fashion disliked by Emancipationists: 'and it is certain, that both 'races' agree perfectly well in lasciviousness of disposition.'³⁴ The degradation of Bertha Mason is given in Charlotte's novel without irony, since it is observed by the eventual victor in the struggle for a male partner, and nowhere exposed to doubt.

In contrast, severe irony enfolds the perception of Heathcliff as a child of the devil, since these are the ideas of figures either of dangerous fun, such as Joseph, or of disruption, such as the Lintons. At the onset of the crisis provoked by his impending death, Nelly succumbs after dark to superstitious reverie, and on thinking him to be a demon, tries in vain to imagine 'some fit parentage for him' (Ch. 34), but knows that her terror is groundless: 'and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror' (ibid). Certainly Heathcliff has succumbed to the vices of the plantation, as his manifesto on slavery at the time of his return explains (his language fits that of Frantz Fanon, the subtlest of modern analysts of the problem), but he, too, is human, and, as the story unfolds, is redeemed by love. He has known the fire and is ready to die. The romantic picture of himself as a half-black who has need of curbing his impatience, and who might be the son of a prince, is given to him by Nelly as she washes him on the eve of the disastrous Christmas party:

"A good heart will help you to a bonny face, my lad," I continued, "if you were a regular black; and a bad one will turn the bonniest into something worse than ugly. And now that we've done washing, and combing, and sulking—tell me whether you don't think yourself rather handsome? I'll tell you, I do, You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!" (Ch. 7)

A wealth of Emancipationist writing and experience lies behind these seemingly haphazard remarks. Relieved of the restrictions imposed on him by his oppressors and false benefactors Heathcliff struggles to become redeemed by love. Nelly imposes on him the false ideals of the stolen prince and the demon, but knows that these are phantoms in the face of economic reality. The problem was invisible to Charlotte, whose Preface is a major stone in the path of criticism. The theme of the black prince in disguise appears in *Othello* and in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, the Royal Slave* (1688). Another instance was *The Royal African: or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe*, a tract of around 1750 giving many details of slave warfare and the iniquities of black traders in their scramble to accommodate their society to the European money economy.³⁵

³⁴ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (1774), cited in *Slavery*, pp. 260–265 (p. 263).

³⁵ *The Royal African: or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe* (London: no date, ca. 1750). The surprise of the young Prince anticipates that of the Lintons when they fall into the grip of Heathcliff, and of Heathcliff when he is rejected by them. For example: "What language can express his Surprise, when

These examples, and their matching positions in the corpus of writings by the Brontës, could be multiplied. The literary conclusion offered here is that the fictional characters, their predicaments and their resolutions in the Brontë repertoire acquire coherence, and emerge stripped of speculative and post-Brontë accretions, when the texts are laid bare against the complex field of Emancipationist writing. There are strong literary reasons for salvaging *Wuthering Heights* from the distortions imposed on it by Charlotte in her Preface. There are similar reasons for tracing the relationship between the *Juvenilia* and the works of the 1840s, and for clarifying the positions of Anne and Branwell, as well as that of their father, in the creation of a great fictional cycle. Beyond the literary rationale for this procedure, the Brontës as a family were involved in a battle of ideas. There is reason to persist, as they did, in a labour which scarcely ended with the accomplishment of Emancipation in the two Acts of 1833 and 1838. The issues raised by the Anti-Slavery Society and its descendant, the Aborigine Protection Society, and the complex of related ecological and social issues emerging in our day, are with us still.

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from the rough Usage that he met with from two Slaves that were in the Boat, he had no Room left him to doubt but that his Condition was the same as theirs?' (*The Royal African*, p. 40). Emily's novel incorporates the standard Emancipationist argument that slavery corrupts both the enslaver and the enslaved.