Fathers in Victorian Fiction

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: UNDERMINING THE VICTORIAN FATHER

NATALIE MCKNIGHT

Fathers fascinate us in fiction as in real life. The mysteries of their identities, their psychological impact, their powerful presence even in absence, their shifting roles over time, and their symbolic link to paternal institutions such as church and state make father figures the locus of quests to better understand our cultures, histories, and ourselves. Victorian fathers offer particularly fascinating material since the role of fathers changed dramatically during the nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution removed fathers' work from the home and the cult of motherhood began to monopolize parenting. Scientific revolutions during this period, particularly Darwin's theory of evolution and geological findings that undermined the Biblical account of history, added to changing perceptions of "father" since they eroded faith in God, the ultimate referent for fathers—father with a capital "F." Naturally the novels of this period reflect the shifts in father roles and the anxieties these shifts produced, while also drawing on father anxieties dating back to Oedipus and the Hebrew Bible, as the essays in this collection demonstrate.

To understand how much the role of father changed in the nineteenth century, it helps to begin at home, where the changes were most immediate and concrete. Before the Industrial Revolution, most fathers worked on or near the home as farmers or village craftsmen, and their children would have worked alongside them from an early age. But toward the end of the eighteenth century, as small farms were consolidated under large estates and home craftsmanship gradually shifted to factories, work began to move away from the home, and fathers had less opportunity to educate, train, and interact with their children (Altick 1973, 36-41). As Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers summarize in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century*, "men's primary identity became associated with the shop, the office or the factory, and with the role of

provider," leaving women with more responsibilities on the domestic front (Broughton and Rogers 2007, 6-7). Broughton and Rogers note that "where hitherto advice on the running of the house had been aimed principally at men, women now became the target audience of household literature and guides to parenting" (6-7; Sanders 2009, 7). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conduct books had been the province of aristocratic men seeking to guide the lives of their sons, such as tracts written by Lord Burghley, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Osborne, and even James VI. The ultimate eighteenth-century example of the genre was Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son* (Wright 1962, ix, x). But in the nineteenth century such books gave way to conduct books written by and for middle-class women, such as Sarah Ellis's *Women of England*, *Wives of England*, and *Mothers of England*, Sarah Lewes's *Women's Mission*, and Isabella Beeton's oft-reprinted *Household Management*, to name a few. Such books helped to establish the "cult of motherhood" which increasingly placed the primary burden of parenting on the mother, relegating the father to the role of breadwinner and titular, if not practical, head of the family. Mothers should devote themselves to the spiritual, physical and educational welfare of the children while making the home a peaceful haven of heart and hearth for fathers to retreat to at the end of a day. While numerous critics over the past twenty years have shown that the "separate spheres" of men and women in Victorian England were never entirely separate, and that women were involved in many public ventures and men more involved in the home than has often been noted,[1] still the stereotype of the separate spheres developed for a good reason. It was not just an ideological construct. Compared to domestic patterns of the eighteenth-century and earlier, middle class men's and women's roles in the nineteenth century were relatively, if not entirely, separate.

These changes in work and domestic patterns tended to undermine the role of the father in the home. While Broughton and Rogers suggest that the forces whittling away at fatherhood also created a backlash of Victorian fathers who "by way of compensation, renewed their efforts to instill virtues of self-control and deference in their children," they also recognize that such efforts often "provoked a corresponding ratcheting-up of filial rebellion" (Broughton and Rogers 2007, 7). So, in many cases, efforts to maintain the power of the father actually eroded it. Ironically the stern Victorian father stereotype—which is such a powerful presence in

[1] See Catherine Waters (1997), *Dickens and the Politics of Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Elizabeth Langland (1995), *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

fiction, memoirs and memories—emerges due to the weakening of the role of father. The figure dominates because of its distance, and the sternness results from the severing of what had been more intimate connections between fathers and children. As Valerie Sanders notes in *The Tragi-Comedy of Victorian Fatherhood*, "Victorian literature and life-writing are full of such stern fathers who are alien and other in their children's limited understanding" (Sanders 2009, 2).

Yet Sanders attempts to dismantle the stern father stereotype in her excellent analysis of the parental practices of such famous Victorian fathers as Prince Albert, Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, W. E. Gladstone, and others. She relies heavily on their own accounts of fatherhood as told in their letters, which show their close practical and emotional involvement in their children's lives. While none of these men matched the stern, distant father stereotype, and all were actively engaged in their children's lives, they still each failed because "fatherhood had failure built into its very purpose and fabric" since fathers were supposed to protect their children, but no father could protect his children against all contingencies (Sanders 2009, 56, 193, 196). Sanders' subjects are not really typical of nineteenth-century fatherhood, however; they defy the separate spheres ideology of middle-class Victorian England because most of these men had the luxury of working within the home at least part of the time. For them, home and work lives were fluid, much as they had been for most men prior to the Industrial Revolution. The stern Victorian father stereotype that Sanders attempts to dismantle emerges more from working-class and middle-class men who had to work for long hours away from home and who returned to it often fatigued and alienated. For them the pressure to be a full-time provider and a hands-on dad led in many cases to the retreat from domesticity that John Tosh writes about in *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (Tosh 1999, 7, 172-93).

Changing concepts of masculinity contributed to the flight from domesticity. While marriage and fatherhood were seen throughout the century to be the ultimate expressions of masculinity, the connection between domesticity and femininity was inescapable (Roper and Tosh 1991, 44-46; Tosh 1999, 1, 108). As Michael Roper and John Tosh write in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, "too great an attachment to home might breed unmanly dependence" (Roper and Tosh 1991, 51). Public schools trained boys to suppress their domestic affections, and popular culture in the latter half of the century produced adventure stories to lure the male imagination even further from home. By the end of the Victorian age, the number of men delaying marriage until

later in life or avoiding it altogether was on the increase (Tosh 1999, 118, 174, 193). "Father" was clearly a diminished and less attractive figure by the end of the century. It is worth noting that Tosh delineates four types of Victorian father, and only one is positive: he sees fathers as being either absent, tyrannical, distant, or intimate (1999, 93-99).

The concept of father was changing on other fronts as well, as I have suggested above. Scientific discoveries and textual studies of the Bible contributed to the waning of belief in the literal truth of scriptures and a consequent erosion of faith in God the father. Samuel Butler captures the loss of faith in literal understandings of the creation story in the following passage from *The Way of All Flesh* in which the narrator reflects on the differences in belief between earlier and later Victorians*:*

> In those days people believed with a simple downrightness which I do not observe among educated men and women now. It had never much as crossed Theobald's mind to doubt the literal accuracy of any syllable in the Bible. He had never seen any book in which this was disputed, nor met with anyone who doubted it. True, there was just a little scare about geology, but there was nothing in it. If it was said that God made the world in six days, why He did make it in six days, neither in more nor less; if it was said that He put Adam to sleep, took out one of his ribs and made a woman of it, why, it was so as a matter of course. (39)

The authority of domestic fathers had been propped up effectively by such absolute faith in God the father, so, as Tosh writes, "the rapid undermining of orthodox belief from the 1860s onwards was deeply unsettling of domestic order" (Tosh 1999, 7). Evangelical Christianity's emphasis on a stern, judgmental God had led to similar expectations of the male head of the household. As more liberal approaches to Christianity emerged, and educated people found it increasingly difficult to believe in the absolute authority of scriptures, emphasis began to shift toward a less authoritative image of God or toward agnosticism and "the moral for earthly fathers was clear. . . . the judging, watchful father of Evangelical tradition seemed absurd and oppressive" (Tosh 1999, 147). Tosh suggests that the rise of the figure of Santa Claus in the latter third of the nineteenth century was in part a reaction to the disappearance of the "judging, watching" domestic fathers and heavenly father. In place of the stern father, the figure of Santa offers a friendly, generous, playful father and in place of punishments, presents. It is interesting to note, however, that even this new friendly father figure is a distant and largely absent one—it's hard, after all, to be intimate with Santa Claus. And he feeds the growing capitalist economy just as the separation of fathers' work from home had.

While Darwin usually receives the most credit for rupturing religious faith with *The Origin of Species*, first published in 1859, the scientific undermining of religious faith really occurred throughout the century. As Milton Millhauser puts it, "evolution . . . was 'in the air'" (27).[2] Millhauser mentions the contributions of biological scientists, of course, but also those of geologists, embryologists and philosophers (Kant, in particular). Darwin himself credits many predecessors, such as Lamarck, Saint-Hilaire, W. C. Wells, W. Herbert, and Professor Owen in his "Historical Sketch of the Progress of Opinion on the Origin of Species," first published in the third edition of *The Origin of Species* (1861) in response to criticism that he had not sufficiently paid tribute to his influences in earlier editions. Given the extent of evolutionary writings in the nineteenth century, it may seem surprising that Darwin's work produced "a profound moral shock" (Millhauser 1979, 31). But many of the works leading up to Darwin were only read by a select, educated few, and most of the ideas reached the public through conservative clerics who tried to explain away the findings as unimportant or as supportive of Scripture, as Theobald Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh* does in a sermon in which he shows that "so far as geology was worth anything at all—and he was too liberal entirely to pooh-pooh it—it confirmed the absolutely historical character of the Mosaic account of the Creation as given in Genesis" (Butler 2004, 31). Yet the clerical resistance to evolutionary ideas in itself extended the questioning of traditional beliefs and prepared Victorian minds to receive Darwin's revelation (Millhauser 1979, 30). So, in spite of earlier influences, it was still primarily Darwin that set in motion the "melancholy long withdrawing roar" of religious faith that Matthew Arnold describes in "Dover Beach." Darwin's *Origin* tipped the balance in favor of science over religion, and science itself became the new authority, replacing other authority figures that were on the wane.

The negative impact on fatherhood of scientific findings was not limited solely to the undermining of faith in God the father brought about by theories of evolution. Analyses of fathering in the animal kingdom tended to show that the role of males in many cases was limited primarily to reproduction and that mothers clearly played the dominant role in nurturing and rearing in most species (Sanders 2009, 163; Tosh 1999, 149). As Sanders notes, these negative examples of animal fathering did

[2] Richard Altick makes the same point: "Far from introducing the idea of evolution *per se* to a totally unprepared public or initiating the religious doubts which were to trouble so many minds in the years to come, *The Origin of Species* was largely a brilliant synthesis of many scientific ideas already current, with one or two crucial additions" (226).

not prevent Victorian scientists such as Darwin and Huxley, who studied such matters, from being some of the most effective fathers she examines. As she states, "Undaunted by the mostly negative example of paternal behaviour in the animal kingdom, the scientists were nevertheless some of the most well-intentioned and kindly fathers of their generation, the conscientious upbringing of their children an integral part of their wider pursuit of truth, integrity and self-improvement" (Sanders 2009, 163). So, while the role of father was getting hit simultaneously from below with negative examples of fathering in the animal kingdom and from above with the "gradual withdrawal of God from the world" (Miller 1963, 1), science stepped into the consequent vacuum as the new authority, the depersonalized authority of testable and reproducible results. As Robert Davis asserts, "the Western *father* becomes, in effect, a *scientist*, the very model of the authoritative knower" (Davis 1993, ix). But this new god has taken its hits in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the products and byproducts of the sciences often bring about as much destruction as they do creation, with nuclear weapons proliferation, dwindling natural resources, global climate change and other threats brought about by technological advances. And the sciences often seem unable to offer solutions to the problems they have helped to create, nor are they very helpful in dealing with matters of the human heart.

Legal changes during the reign of Victoria also contributed to the decline of the authority of the father. As John Tosh writes, "for the first time the legal *carte blanche* of the paterfamilias was subjected to significant inroads, by parliamentary legislation as well as judicial pronouncement" (Tosh 1999, 145). Sanders credits the "gradual erosion of the father's 'sacred' and 'natural' rights to . . . ownership of his offspring" to divorce and custody cases that made accounts of fathers' poor behavior public (Sanders 2009, 9). While for much of the nineteenth century fathers still had primary legal rights to their children, the Infant Custody Act of 1839 allowed a mother to have custody of any of her children under seven years old, and in 1873 mothers' custody rights were extended to children under 16. But a father's bad behavior could undermine his rights even further in the judgment of the courts. The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 contributed to the diminishment of men's control of the home by allowing women to have ownership of any money they earned after they married, and then, in 1882, to maintain their ownership of any property they brought with them into the marriage. "In both the legal spheres and everyday life," Tosh summarizes, "the traditional hierarchy of family life was more openly questioned in the late Victorian period than at any time within living memory" (168).

Just as fathers both domestic and divine were on the decline in the nineteenth century, so too was paternalism in terms of social and governmental practices due to the growing influence of Bentham's utilitarianism and laissez faire policies inspired by Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations.* According to followers of Smith, free trade and minimal government intervention in the lives of the people would bring about the best conditions for society; paternalistic government, in other words, is bad government. And while Utilitarians might conceivably favor government intervention, their practice of dealing with people, pleasures, and pains quantitatively stripped the paternal spirit from social and government practices. Of course, laissez faire and utilitarian proponents were balanced by many in Parliament and elsewhere who supported humanitarian intervention for bettering the lives of the poor, working conditions for child laborers, urban sanitary reform, and other social amelioration projects. But the bureaucracies established to address these conditions at times seemed to cause more hardship than they cured, as Dickens satirizes in *Little Dorrit* with the "Circumlocution Office" and its perfection of "how not to do it," which, Dickens felt, had come to be "the whole Science of Government" (Dickens 2003, 119). In his early writings Dickens favored individualistic paternalism as a means of dealing with social ills, as can be seen in his reliance on the philanthropy of generous older men in *The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby*, and *A Christmas Carol*, in particular. But, as Sally Ledger points out in *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, Dickens breaks with this "paternalistic structure of feeling" in writing *The Chimes*, which attacks both "the vocabulary of political economy" and paternalism through the character of the pompous and stingy MP Sir Joseph Bowley, who tells Toby "'You needn't trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know what is good for you: I am your perpetual parent'" (Ledger 2007, 123, 129). As Ledger points out, Dickens continues his critique of paternalism in *Barnaby Rudge* and throughout the rest of his career through negative male authority figures, but he also continues to critique laissez faire and Utilitarian approaches, most notably in *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, and *Little Dorrit*. The one thing most obviously in common among paternalistic, utilitarian, and laissez faire practices was their general incompetence in dealing with the poor. Arthur Adrian makes the connection between negative domestic fathers and ineffective government leaders and practices when he argues that in Dickens "just as family after family is portrayed with the natural guardian assuming no control, so Victorian England is to be viewed as one vast family with indifferent and incompetent leadership" (Adrian 1984, 131).

By the end of the nineteenth century the diminishment of fathers and the widespread loss of faith in authorities of all kinds contributed to growing anxieties about how much authority one can ever exert even over oneself. Just as Darwin's theory of evolution did not emerge from thin air, neither did Freud's theories of the unconscious. Widespread experiments with hypnotism, for instance, which Dickens himself engaged in, were revealing previously unexplored layers of consciousness. Freud studied hypnotism with Jean Charcot early in his career, and was also influenced by the talk therapy of his colleague Josef Breuer, which suggested the sometimes hidden effect of one's past on the present. Ernst Brücke's advances in physics gave Freud the idea that the mind was just another energy system such as the ones Brücke was studying in physics, not at all a reliable seat of reason governing a coherent personality. With these ideas and others, the educated public was beginning to realize that they knew much less than they thought about themselves nor were they as conscious of their motivations or in charge of their actions as they'd like. Certainly behavioral sciences have offered and continue to offer insights into the mechanisms of the mind, but every new understanding yields new realizations of what we don't know and can't control.

Into this authority vacuum, the arts rush in, offering their subjective but undeniably effective windows into the nature of the self, the workings of the mind, the needs of the human heart, and the strategies for best dealing with one another, whether at home or in society. Perhaps the great burgeoning of authorship in the nineteenth century, the golden age of the novel, is in part due to a reaction against this loss of authority on so many fronts. Traditional sources of *authority* were on the wane, but *authorship* was on the rise. Faced with the dwindling of faith in God the father, government authorities, and biological fathers, Victorians increasingly took to creating their own worlds where they could reign as the undisputed authority.

The authors examined in the following essays confront, directly and indirectly, these multiple factors affecting perceptions of fathers and fathering. The essays offer close readings of father figures in the Brontës, Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, female conversion novels, and film versions of Victorian novels. These fathers reflect the changes and anxieties discussed above; in fact, the tensions caused by these changes and the consequent mourning for the loss of authority, certainty, and tradition help to create the resonance that makes these figures memorable.

Christine Alexander, Scientia Professor of English at the University of New South Wales, and author of *The Art of the Brontës* and co-author of

The Oxford Companion to the Brontës, explores the character and legacy of Patrick Brontë, father of the Brontë sisters. Alexander documents the profound effect Patrick Brontë had on the creative and spiritual development of his daughters, tracing both Romantic and Victorian strains in his influence on his children. In the process she demonstrates that early depictions of Patrick as a tyrannical Victorian father were unfair mischaracterizations that did not do justice to his loving and close involvement in his children's lives.

Michael Hollington, Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge University, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Toulouse, and author of *Dickens and the Grotesque*, as well as *Dickens and Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy* and *Imagining Italy: Victorian Writers and Travellers*, offers "*Hard Times*: The Father as Tragic Clown." Hollington explores the pathos and significance of clown-fathers in Dickens's oeuvre, particularly *Hard Times*'s Signor Jupe. Hollington situates the subject in the European literary and visual context of the sad clown, "a master-image of the terrors and absurdities of modern urban existence." In another essay on Dickens, "Dickens's Philosophy of Fathering," I have examined a range of Dickens's father characters in relation to changing Victorian concepts of fatherhood and masculinity and his own practices as a father. Dickens's "philosophy" suggests that while it is impossible to father perfectly, it is possible to father well. In a chapter on *Bleak House*, Monica Young Zook, a professor of English literature and gender studies at Macon State College, suggests that the novel's pattern of missing and failed fathers ultimately advocates a shift from old paternalistic models to a new fraternalism.

Elizabeth Bridgham and Meoghan Cronin both examine religious father figures in their essays. Bridgham, Associate Professor of English at Providence College and author of *Spaces of the Sacred and Profane: Dickens, Trollope, and the Victorian Cathedral Town*, contributes an essay on Victorian clergy in the novels of Trollope and Gaskell. Bridgham traces the tensions between the demands of domestic and clerical fatherhood in Gaskell's *North and* South and Trollope's *Barchester Towers* and concludes that both authors suggest the difficulties of performing both roles well. Meoghan Cronin, Associate Professor of English at Saint Anselm College, presents "Bless Me Father: Religion and the Victorian Good Girl," which examines the figure of the "good girl" in nineteenth-century conversion/anti-conversion narratives such as Elizabeth Sewell's *Margaret Percival* and Mary Augusta Ward's *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. Cronin demonstrates the complications faced by female characters as they try to define a self that is "good" when they are torn by the contrary

teachings of their biological and their religious fathers. The temptation to convert forces the young women to reassess their relationships with their fathers and in effect their very identities. Conflicting loyalties prohibit the discovery of a coherent self, which traditionally has been an essential component of the female *bildungsroman*.

In "The rights 'o things by my own fireside": Masculinity and Fatherhood in George Eliot's Fiction," Natalie Cole, Professor of English at Oakland University and author of *Dickens and Gender, Recent Studies, 1995-2008*, traces Eliot's depictions of the contradictions that complicate the roles and rights of fathers. While Eliot explores a range of failed fathers, she also offers memorable examples of the rare "manly" father who combines emotional intimacy with authority and guidance.

Melissa Jenkins, an Assistant Professor of English at Wake Forest University and author of numerous essays on Victorian fiction, has written an essay tracing how the palimpsest image in Hardy's novels, and *Jude the Obscure* in particular, reflects his ambivalent attitudes towards fathers and fathering. Hardy's emphasis on texts written over other texts seems to reflect anxieties about children as texts written over the texts of their parents; often in Hardy the connection between text and over-written text or between child and parent emphasizes the distance and disparity between the two, not the continuity and connection. "Hardy's final novel explores every 'hideous' aspect of multiplication and reproduction," Jenkins writes, "as the second generation becomes beholden to the first in monstrous ways." Throughout Jenkins takes on the challenge to fatherhood set down by the character of Phillotson in *Jude*, who says, "I don't see why the women and the children should not be the unit without the man."

The book ends by turning to twentieth- and twenty-first-century representations of Victorian fathers. Regina Hansen, Senior Lecturer in Rhetoric at the College of General Studies, Boston University, and co-author of *Cultural Conversations: The Presence of the Past*, discusses Victorian fathers on film. By analyzing scenes from seven films, including David Lean's *Great Expectations* and the recent modernization of the novel by Alfonso Cuarón, Hansen shows how Victorian fathers in fiction and on film feed our contemporary sensibilities about sensitive, emotive, domestic dads and undercut the myth of the stern, distant Victorian father. The Conclusion summarizes the attitudes toward fathers addressed throughout the previous essays and briefly examines what subsequent writers have done with the figure of the father. It also addresses contemporary trends in fathering and what they take and reject from the Victorians. The stern Victorian father still casts a shadow on the twenty-first century, but domestic and technological changes have drawn fathers

back into the home to a greater degree than has been seen since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Yet the undermining of faith in authority that occurred on so many levels in the nineteenth century has continued and deepened in the twenty-first. The "melancholy, long withdrawing roar" still haunts us, although its sound has become a familiar soundtrack to our lives.

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CHAPTER TWO

FATHER OF THE BRONTËS: ROMANTIC OR VICTORIAN?

CHRISTINE ALEXANDER

Figure 2-1 Portrait of Patrick Brontë as a young man by an unknown artist, by permission of the Brontë Parsonage Museum

On 30 July 1857, four months after the publication of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the Revd Patrick Brontë wrote to the biographer Elizabeth Gaskell revealing his awareness of his own character and the influence he had had on his children: "I do not deny that I am somewhat eccentrick. Had I been numbered amongst the calm, sedate, *concentric* men of the world, I should not have been As I am, and I should, in all probability, never have had such children as mine have been" (Brontë 2005, 258). These were the words of a man of courage and conviction, a man who had suffered the loss of all six of his children and yet could still view his failings with clarity and his remarkable legacy with pride. What exactly was this father's legacy for the three famous Brontë sisters, and to what extent was his fatherhood a product of his time? This essay attempts to document the profound influence of the father on the creative and spiritual development of his daughters, and it suggests that Patrick Brontë bequeathed not only a "Victorian" but also a significant "Romantic" heritage to his children.

Patrick Brontë was born in 1777, twelve years before the French Revolution, the defining "watershed cultural moment" (Klancher 2009, 2) of Romanticism; and he died at the age of eighty-five in 1861, almost midway through the reign of Queen Victoria and in the same year her husband Prince Albert died. He lived with and exerted an influence over his children throughout their lives, and in temporal terms could be classified as both a Romantic and a Victorian father. The terms "Romantic" and "Victorian" have been much debated, and their historical and literary parameters remain unresolved. However artificial or fragile their definition remains, however, they provide a useful shorthand for analyzing cultural sensibilities in the nineteenth century.[1] The term "Victorian" generally equates with the reign of Victoria, and refers to a period in which a set of recognizable characteristics come to the fore, including for example, in the case of Patrick Brontë, the pursuit of self-improvement, a reforming zeal, a cultural confidence and patriotism, an evangelical social conscience, and an interest in technology and natural science. In this essay, "Romantic" will be used to distinguish not so much an historical period as a set of ideas, resulting in a complex state of mind relating to interests and practices that represent the right way to live: in other words, a culture reflecting a moral education linked to literature and art. The Romantics, drawing on the practices of the Scottish Enlightenment and the theories of German philosophers like Herder, developed this sense of a cultivated

[1] A point made by Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy in *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, 1-2. This essay builds on their concern with issues of periodization and the need to re-evaluate these cultural fields.

education, not unlike Goethe's *Bildung*, that was later crafted by Matthew Arnold into a canon of Romantic thought and poetry.[2] Patrick Brontë's liberal nurture of his children can be read as part of the same movement to cultivate the mind and nourish the imagination.

If anything distinguishes Patrick Brontë's parenting it is his commitment to the power of education—the right kind of education, based on the best that has been written and thought[3]—to mould and change lives. In this philosophy of life he was one of many fathers in the first half of the nineteenth century whose own lives had been shaped by the "grace of culture" (Wordsworth's term in the *Prelude* [XII, 466]), propagated not only in poetry of the period but in influential journals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, read regularly by the Brontës and known affectionately in numerous households as simply "Maga". For the twelve-year-old Charlotte Brontë, Maga was "the most able periodical there is" (Brontë 1987, I: 4), a judgment that must surely echo that of her father. The following biographical discussion documents the extraordinary cultural legacy Patrick Brontë bequeathed to his children. His interest in nature, his taste in literature and writing practice, his love of art and music, his military and political interests, and his religious beliefs can be seen to be mirrored in the lives of his children.

For Patrick Brontë reading and learning were the key to success, and his rapid rise through the ranks of society reflects the way he used this key with intelligence and determination. Thought to have been born in a crofter's cottage in County Down, Ireland, the oldest of ten children, Patrick would have attended a local village school and possibly stayed as a

[2] For the diffusion of ideas from the Scottish theorists to Scott and hence to Byron, Shelley and their circle, see James K. Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, 127-35. For Herder's influence see Samuel Baker, *Written on Water: British Romanticism and the Maritime Empire of Culture*, (73-80). Baker shows how the Lake poets "invented the modern idea of culture" in relation to the ocean by building on Herder's notion of "communal human 'cultivation'" (1). Herder "pioneered the term *Kultur*"; and Coleridge and Southey, for example, were familiar with Herder's idea of "cultural pluralism" developed in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte de Menschheit* (73).

[3] The best-known rendering of this view is articulated in the preface to Mathew Arnold's *Literature & Dogma* (1873): "Culture, the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world."

pupil-teacher.[4] By the age of sixteen he had established his own village school, and nine years later, with the help of the Revd Thomas Tighe, an influential Protestant evangelical minister and friend of John Wesley, he gained admission to St John's College, Cambridge, as a sizar[5] on 1 October 1802. He managed to shed his humble Irish background at Cambridge, including his Irish name "Branty." When the registrar of his college, defeated by his accent, entered it incorrectly, he changed it to the more exotic "Bronte,"[6] possibly in imitation of one of his heroes Lord Nelson, who had recently been made Duke of Bronte by the King of Naples. He worked hard, distinguishing himself as a Classical scholar, winning prizes each year, and supplementing the exhibition money he was awarded in 1803 and 1805 by teaching pupils. His industry attracted further sponsorship from eminent evangelicals like William Wilberforce. On 23 April 1806 Patrick graduated BA, and on 21 December 1807 he was ordained priest in the Church of England in the Chapel Royal of St James, Westminster. After several curacies, he obtained the perpetual curacy of Hartshead in West Yorkshire (1810) and then of Thornton, near Bradford (1815), before finally settling at Haworth in 1820, where he remained until his death in 1861. In 1812, he had met and married Maria Branwell who had been charmed by her "dear Saucy Pat" as she referred to him in her letters, but by the time they moved to Haworth she was already weak with childbearing and tragically died of uterine cancer in 1821, leaving six children, the oldest not yet eight and the youngest barely twenty months old. Thus at the age of forty-four, Patrick Brontë found himself responsible not only for the busy Haworth parish church, with pastoral responsibility for five nearby moorland villages, but also for a young family in need of nurture and education.

He rose to the challenge, although he admitted to his friend John Buckworth that "oppressive grief sometimes lay heavy on me and that there were seasons when an affectionate, agonizing *something* sickened my whole frame' (Brontës 1932, I: 59). Maria's unmarried sister Elizabeth Branwell provided help and comfort and, when Patrick Brontë failed in

[4] Unless otherwise referenced, biographical evidence in this essay can be found in Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[5] A poor but talented student who was entitled to reduced fees and free dinners and expected to wait on tables and perform other menial college tasks.

[6] Later he embellished the "e" of his signature with a grave accent, and his children—ever conscious of the signatures they used to sign their early manuscripts—inserted the diasaris over the "ë", never used by Patrick Brontë but the form made famous as part of the Brontë name.

several attempts to find another wife, eventually made her home with the family. She took responsibility for the welfare and education of the girls while he tutored his only son Branwell, but despite her dutiful devotion her stern practical religious nature meant that she was no substitute for a loving mother. This position appears to have been filled in the early years by the eldest daughter Maria. Her father noted that she had "a powerfully intellectual mind" and he immediately began to cultivate. He took real pleasure in reading the newspaper aloud and discussing the topics of the day with this precocious daughter. She, in turn, would take her new knowledge to the nursery, read the newspapers and entertain her younger siblings. This shared activity cemented what Patrick Brontë called "a little society amongst themselves" (Brontë 2005, 237) that fostered creativity and emotional security. Directed by Maria they would act out stories told or read to them by their father or Maria.

Patrick was keen to ensure that his children received the best schooling his limited income (about £200 [Alexander 2004]) could provide. For a short time in 1823 his two older daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, went to school at Crofton Hall near Wakefield; but when Patrick Brontë heard of the establishment of the less expensive Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge a year later, he immediately secured places for his four older daughters. The school came well recommended, with eminent patrons like Hannah More, William Wilberforce and the Revd Charles Simeon. In less than a year, however, Maria became seriously ill with consumption exacerbated by unhealthy conditions at the school, and soon after Elizabeth also succumbed to illness; both children were brought home but died in quick succession. The distraught father had already removed Charlotte and Emily from the benighted school. It was not until 1831 that he would again send a child away to boarding school. Until then he educated his children himself at home, sharing the duty of teaching with Elizabeth Branwell. She taught her nieces their letters, needlework and a little French and was well-read and "tilted argument without fear against Mr. Brontë" (Brontë 1995, 597); but although she was loved especially by Branwell and Anne, her influence over the Brontë children appears slight compared to that of their father.

Patrick Brontë's profession, his situation as a widower, and his constant presence at home in his study (when he was not busy with parish visits, services and meetings) meant that he had more opportunities than other working fathers of the Victorian period to see and interact with his children. Branwell later told his friend the schoolmaster William Dearden that during the early years his father "watched over his little bereaved flock with truly paternal solicitude and affection—that he was their

constant guardian and instructor—and that he took a lively interest in all their innocent amusements" (Barker 1994, 109). Patrick's own testimony confirms this willingness to interact with, if not inspire, his children's play:

> When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not unfrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of him, Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Caesar. When the argument got warm, and rose to its height, as their mother was then dead, I had sometimes to come in as arbitrator, and settle the dispute according to the best of my judgement. Generally, in the management of these concerns, I frequently thought that I discovered signs of rising talent, which I had seldom or never before seen in any of their age. (Gaskell 1973, 35-6)

Given his early experience of teaching children in Ireland and his management of Sunday school children, Patrick Brontë was well equipped to judge his own children's abilities. One particularly novel assessment involved an old mask that he happened to have in the house: "thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that if they were put under a sort of cover I might gain my end" (Gaskell 36). He then questioned them all separately, telling them "to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask." The four-year-old Anne, asked what she most wanted, apparently answered "Age and experience." Emily was asked how best to discipline her brother and suggested first reasoning with him, but "when he won't listen to reason, whip him." Branwell was questioned on how to judge the difference in intellects between men and women, and said, "By considering the difference between them as to their bodies." Charlotte, about ten at the time, was asked to name the best book in the world: she answered "The Bible", and the next best was "The Book of Nature" (Gaskell 36). The unorthodox questions and the sophistication of the answers from such young children give some idea of Patrick's liberal notion of cultivating the mind. Just how novel his methods were might be judged from the reaction of Charlotte's contemporaries when she first arrived at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, aged fourteen. Mary Taylor told Elizabeth Gaskell: "We thought her very ignorant, for she had never learnt grammar at all, and very little geography. . . . [but] She would confound us by knowing things which were out of our range altogether" (Gaskell, 65-6).

Patrick Brontë was vigilant for signs of talent and keen to nourish it. He was, after all, the only begetter of the Young Men's Play that led to the

Brontës' imaginative world of the Glass Town and Angrian saga. On his return from a Clerical Conference in Leeds, 5 June 1825, Patrick brought presents for his children including a set of twelve wooden toy soldiers that inspired not only their physical play but the creation of little books and magazines. Around the characters of these toy soldiers, the children wove a web of stories and poems now famous as the Brontë juvenilia. Patrick had provided earlier sets of toy soldiers, but the varied facial expressions on this set immediately identified them for the children with military, political and literary heroes championed by their father. Charlotte's choice in particular was no coincidence: when she seized her soldier and shouted, "This is the Duke of Wellington! It shall be mine!" she was imitating her father's own enthusiasm for the "Iron Duke," victor of Waterloo and subsequently Tory Prime Minister of Britain. The military manoeuvers, battles and conquests against Napoleon in their earliest play and the subsequent recording of the exploits of their military heroes, the Twelve Young Men, reflect Patrick Brontë's own lifelong preference for military matters. While a student at Cambridge University, he had drilled with the university volunteer corps, and years later, in February 1842, while accompanying Charlotte and Emily to their school in Brussels, he took the opportunity to visit the field of Waterloo, fulfilling a lifetime dream. His conversations about military heroes, battle tactics, colonial conquest, and republican and Tory ideology reverberate through his children's imaginative world and not infrequently informed their home-schooled history lessons.

Lessons were an integral part of life in the Brontë household. Patrick gave instruction to his children at regular times each day, "adapted to their respective ages and capacities" (Dearden 1857, qtd. in Barker 1994, 855), but he expected them to take responsibility for managing the outcomes. They were encouraged to commit their lessons to memory and they did so by discussing, playing and weaving new information into their latest stories and journals. This was a far cry from the dull reciting of numbers and grammar practised in most schools at the time and satirised by Dickens in *Hard Times*. At Crofton Hall, Maria and Elizabeth had used Mangnall's *Historical Questions*, a standard textbook for repeated question and answer lessons that Charlotte again encountered with less rigour at Roe Head. Patrick Brontë's teaching methods were radically different. The early biographer Mrs. Chadwick, possibly on the authority of the servant Nancy Garrs, reported that he regularly "made a practice of telling them stories to illustrate a geographical or history lesson, and they had to write it out the next morning. Consequently they thought it out in bed—a habit Charlotte continued all her life in connection with her stories" (63).

His accent on storytelling and the primacy of the imagination marks Patrick Brontë as an inheritor of the Romantic tradition. For him, storytelling was as important in cultivating the mind as history and globes. He delighted in tales of adventure and regaled his children and their friends with "strange stories . . . of the extraordinary lives and doings of people who resided in far off out of the way places but in contiguity with Haworth—stories which made one shiver and shrink from hearing, but they were full of grim humour & interest for Patrick Brontë and his children" (Brontë 1995, I: 600). It was just such local histories of family scandal and usurpation that later fed into the strange events of Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. No doubt Patrick also entertained them with tales of Ireland. Charlotte's mix of political allegory and fairytale in *Tales of the Islanders* (Brontë 1987, I: 21, 99, 140, 196) displays the same fascination for the gothic and the supernatural. Despite her shyness, she had inherited her father's gift for storytelling and gained a reputation at Roe Head for regaling her schoolmates with stories of sleepwalkers, combining "all the horrors her imagination could create, from surging seas, raging breakers, towering castle walls, high precipices, invisible chasms and dangers" (Brontë 1995, I: 592).

A study of natural history and a love of nature was also part of Patrick Brontë's Romantic ethos. Natural Theology sanctioned the study of nature as a means of revering the earthly grandeurs and design of Creation. Natural history could be justified as morally useful, and the Evangelical movement, which Patrick Brontë supported, gave religious sanction to such pursuits as bird watching and geology. Thus he subscribed to Wordsworth's view that the beauties of nature were a beneficent force, and he allowed his children to roam freely on the moors accompanied by a servant and later by the family dog. Locals reported that he himself took the children with him on his own "rambles among the hills" (Barker 1994, 108), drawing attention to particular birds, plants or geological formations. His books by the naturalists Bewick, Audubon, Goldsmith, and "White of Selbourne" (recommended by Charlotte to one of her school friends) indicate the extent of his interest in this field and his belief that the hand of providence was in every page of the "great book of Nature", the young Charlotte's second "best book" and a phrase often repeated in the Brontë juvenilia (Alexander and Smith 2003, 338). Patrick's own verse typically proclaims the beauty of nature as a manifestation of God:

> With heart enraptured, oft have I surveyed,
> The vast, and bounteous works, that God has made.
> The tinkling rill, the floods astounding roar,
> The river's brink, and ocean's frothy shore,