

## Charlotte Bronte



### Brief Biography

21 April 1816 – 31 March 1855

Charlotte Bronte is one of the world's most famous female writers. She was born in Thornton, Yorkshire. At four years old her family moved to the Parsonage in Haworth, a small village on the Yorkshire Moors. Charlotte had five brothers and sisters; her two sisters Anne and Emily are also poets and novelists. The parsonage is where they wrote their romantic novels. The parsonage is now the Bronte Parsonage Museum, which contains their personal possessions and exhibitions about their lives <http://www.bronte.org.uk/>. After her mother's death Charlotte and her siblings were looked after by an aunt. Charlotte attended the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, which was seen as an influence on the Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Later both Charlotte and Emily spent time abroad studying in Brussels. Whilst in Brussels Charlotte fell in love with Monsieur Heger, but this love was unrequited and so in 1844 she returned to Haworth. Charlotte published her novel *Jane Eyre* on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell, with the publishing house Smith, Elder & Co. It was very successful and quickly had subsequent editions published. Charlotte Bronte's main publishing contact was George Smith. The novel *Jane Eyre* is still popular and read all over the world today. Emily Bronte published her novel *Wuthering Heights* also in 1847. Anne Bronte published her book *Agnes Grey* in 1847 and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* a year later in 1848. Charlotte's brother Branwell died of Tuberculosis in Sept 1848; three months later Emily too died of Tuberculosis. Anne Bronte died in Scarborough in 1849. Charlotte published *Shirley* in 1849; her last novel *Villette* was published in 1853. Charlotte married in June 1854, and died in the early stages of pregnancy in March 1855, three weeks before her 39<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### Who may find this material useful and interesting?

- Students studying GCSE English may study Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* under the 'English Literary Heritage' section of the syllabus as she is one of the pre-Twentieth Century writers.
- Teachers could use this material to enhance the curriculum – with primary sources; worksheets and activities
- Anyone with an interest in literature and history wanting to learn more

## What material is available in the archives?

- 356 Documents (mostly letters)

Some of the letters, for example SG7, SG8 and SG10, mention the reviews that Charlotte received for her novel *Jayne Eyre*. The letters by and to Charlotte Bronte, which you can see on this website, represent Charlotte's life and times. 105 letters are between Charlotte and her publisher, George Smith. The letters deal with the publication of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Vilette*. Charlotte also uses George Smith to help her invest her money wisely. 50 letters are correspondence with Charlotte's lifelong friend, Ellen Nussey.

## Understanding abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the list of letters: AB for Anne Bronte, CB for Charlotte Bronte, EN for Ellen Nussey, MT for Mary Taylor. Where [...] have been used, this shows that there is some doubt or discrepancy with the date or name in the letter. The letters prefixed with SG relate to correspondence between Charlotte and her publisher, George Smith. It is clear that they had a very good working relationship.