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*Christine Alexander (Editor) , Charlotte Brontë , Emily Brontë , Anne Brontë , Patrick Branwell Brontë*

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In their collaborative early writings, the Brontës created and peopled the most extraordinary fantasy worlds, whose geography and history they elaborated in numerous stories, poems, and plays. Together they invented characters based on heroes and writers such as Wellington, Napoleon, Scott, and Byron, whose feuds, alliances, and love affairs weave an intricate web of social and political intrigue in imaginary colonial lands in Africa and the Pacific Ocean. The writings of *Glass Town*, *Angria*, and *Gondal* are youthful experiments in imitation and parody, wild romance and realistic recording - a playful literary world that they would draw upon for their early and later work. In this generous selection, the early writings of the Brontës are presented together for the first time. Christine Alexander's Introduction explores the rich imaginative lives of the Brontës, and the tension between their maturing authorship and creative freedom. The edition includes Charlotte Brontë's *Roe Head Journal*, and Emily and Anne's *Diary Papers*. The edition also has a key to characters and place, detailed notes, and a map of Glass Town and Angria.

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## **Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Early Writings Details**

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## **From Reader Review Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Early Writings for online ebook**

### **Amber Elby says**

This gives clear preference to works by Charlotte at the expense of her siblings, but it is a good introduction to the juvenilia of the family.

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### **Rebecca Jane says**

3.5 stars.

I really enjoyed this selection of the Bronte's works. I'd already read some of Charlotte's Angrian stories, so I skipped those ones, but I liked the other ones for the most part. It got confusing with all the characters, especially not being sure of the timeline. I liked having an insight into Branwell's writing, despite his section being my least favourite. I found it quite boring at times, and even more confusing than Charlotte's section. Emily's was my favourite, closely followed by Anne, despite being disappointed that I didn't get to see more of their fantasy world.

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### **A.R. Collins says**

This is a very difficult book to rate. Whilst I didn't exactly enjoy a lot of the content in the traditional sense, all of it was extremely interesting, and any real Brontëer is sure to get something out of this publication.

I found Charlotte's poetry rather long and dull, but her prose shows her imaginative sense of story and character. Again, I didn't engage with them as I would with good, polished stories, but I found them rather charming as early attempts. They are filled with wonderfully extravagant phrases, many of which I'm sure Charlotte borrowed from her reading. Branwell's stories, on the other hand, I found rather boring - which in itself was interesting, knowing how his writing career turned out. Part of my boredom stemmed from the stories being very male-orientated, which shows a significant difference in the directions he and Charlotte were taking.

Everyone says Emily is the best poet of the three sisters, and for me, the collections in this book support that view. Though she was apparently writing dramatic monologues as characters from Gondal, the works seem to come from real feelings much more than a fictional land, and don't have a sense of story so much as a sense of raw emotion. Anne, on the other hand, writes poetry proficiently as characters who are clearly from fiction, describing fictional events. Anne was the youngest, as everyone knows, and personally I read a deal more innocence and fun into her works than those of her older siblings - and for that reason, her poems are probably the most enjoyable works here for me.

It's a shame that Emily and Anne's prose didn't survive, but at least we still have their 'diary papers', which I found most interesting of all because they are writing as themselves, about what's happening in their home. It really brings the parsonage, which many of us have visited, to life and shows how things were when the Brontës were in residence. It's also interesting to see how little young people's voices change: 'The Kitchin is in a very untidy state Anne and I have not done our music exercise which consists of b major.' Sounds

horrendous!

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### **Ana says**

The diary and poetry sections are great, but it made me sadder that the sisters didn't reach old age together.

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### **Sarah Holz says**

Despite the expected uneven quality, I liked this window into the early Bronte creative process. Also, as I said to myself when I began this one, I too know the fear of dying and letting your rather horrified friends stumble upon your embarrassing Duke of Wellington fan fiction that you wrote as a teenager. Some of us had odd childhoods...

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### **lauren says**

#### **4.5 stars**

I really enjoyed this collection of the Brontës' juvenilia. I had only ever read this kind of writing in biographies on the family, so I was excited to read more of a variety (one that wasn't necessarily bias - you know, the ones that support a biographer's point). For the most part, the collection was brilliant. I liked having this window into the lives and imaginations of the young Brontës.

I much prefer the writing and world of Gondal in comparison to Angria and Glass Town. The latter two focus heavily on political intrigue, war, and mythological elements. However, Gondal feels a lot more natural and personal. Emily and Anne incorporate their own lives, specifically their surroundings, into their verse. I really wish their prose survived - I bet it would have been beautiful to read.

The only reason I rated it down by half a star was for the monotony of some of Charlotte's and Branwell's longer short stories. Although they were interesting, they occasionally got a little tedious. The stories discussed stuff I wasn't particularly interested in. However, they did demonstrate the brilliancy of the Brontës' minds. I had to keep reminding myself that these were written whilst they were young, especially Anne. Their word choice (their writing in general) was just beautiful.

I would definitely recommend!

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### **Jess says**

As Elizabeth Gaskell went about her research for the first official Brontë *propaganda* installment biography, she inevitably stumbled across the reams and reams of surprisingly graphic material they had churned out as children. Charlotte's daringly erotic Duke of Wellington fanfic in particular posed a problem; the purpose of the biography was to establish Charlotte as a suffering saint so as to vindicate her from the public opprobrium sparked by her subversive novels... but unsurprisingly her suggestive fantasies belied this image.

Thus, the juvenilia was calmly dismissed - but in private Gaskell disclosed that:

*"They are the wildest and incoherent things... They give one the idea of creative power carried to the verge of insanity."*

Within Brontë legend, there's the well known story of how the magical kingdoms of Angria (née The Glass Town) and Gondal emerged. Inspired by a set of twelve toy soldiers, the children developed a rich fantasy life, producing plays, poetry, tales and even magazines woven around a cast of imaginary characters, envisioning adventures that were well out of their reach. Not only are these works testimony to the Brontës' brilliant minds, they are also surprisingly entertaining and highly readable - with the exception of some of Charlotte's and Branwell's sporadic earlier works which are, quite simply, bizarre.

The juvenilia is packed full of waspish humour and acute political engagement whilst the later pieces in particular are written beautifully. Charlotte's *Mina Laury* was a favourite, as was Anne's charming poetry and Emily's sublime counterpart. Much of the poetry made a reappearance in *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* which were 'degondalised' for publication, but the originals are highly insightful, especially since the Gondal prose has dropped out of existence under mysterious circumstances - Charlotte, I'm looking at you.

Only Jane Austen's juvenilia rivals that of the Brontës', but quite frankly does not provide as nearly as much insight into the inner mechanics of its author. Even at such an early age, the Brontës establish their own individual styles and voices as well as themes that prefigure their adult fiction. Probably the most amusing is Charlotte's; her idea of the perfect Byronic male (in her own words: "*tall, strong and muscular men going about seeking whom they may devour*") emerges in the form of the Duke of Zamorna especially; in terms of presence, command, brutish masculinity and sexual allure. Emily and Anne's kingdom of Gondal however is ruled by women. Says everything, doesn't it?!!

This collection is very, very thorough; it provides an exhaustive appendix of notes as well as some fascinating autobiographical sources including Charlotte's Roe Head journal and Emily and Anne's diary papers.

Absolutely incredible. It's amazing to think that a group of fairly isolated children living in a parsonage on the bleak Yorkshire moors were able to conjure up such epic tales of murder, romance and intrigue, all set against the distant and exotic backdrop of North Africa and islands in the Pacific.

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### **Rachel says**

i wish i could go back 10 years and surprise child me. truly had no idea this existed, amazing

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### **Ashley says**

A great collection of Bronte juvenilia. If you are looking for a fun glimpse into the childhood of the Bronte siblings, make sure you take up reading this collection.

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## **Thomas says**

This collection of curiosities, a look at childhood and growing up through the fictional exploits and worlds of one of the world's most famous literary families, was never going to be the most "fun" reading around. Taken as it is, Tales of Glass Town... is an incredible document of four young people's growth as writers in the most modest of literary circumstances. It is also a document of the times as we trace their political and fictional interests and influences. The Brönte children, in the throes of creative growth, have imagined and brought to life a parallel universe that mocks, mirrors and recreates their images of Britain at the time, merged with a more speculative version of colonial Africa. As a filler of notebooks with nonsense, ideas, maps and dreams as a child, it is amazing to think of the four children battling each other on an imaginative stage for dominion of this semi-mythological colonial planet, populated with estranged aristocrats, wannabe pirates, type cast characters and doomed heroines.

As stories in their own right, most of Glass Town... is hard reading. In particular the opening "genesis" stories by Charlotte are disjointed. Not everything is here, but the introduction and notes does a good job of filling in the blanks. Confusion, however, is added by the multitude of names for each character, along with their numerous titles. Anne and Emily's poetry, interesting as a literary incarnation of a breakaway republic, a rebellion of sorts with the formation of new colonies to populate with even more romantic couples, also make for dense reading without the gaps filled in by notes. Anne's poems are the more accessible of the two and charm with a innocent lyricism and a feeling of doomed romanticism. There is a fairy tale element to the songs of captivity, seperation, love and loss. Charlotte, however, writes the most striking verse. To think that "Morning by Marquis Douro" is written by a fourteen year old girl speaks volumes for the talent she possesses.

Charlotte and Branwell's prose has an interesting element of competition. The two fence with their alter egos and even rewrite each other's accounts of different "historical" events in Glass Town. The influences of their politics, or influence to politics, and of a journalistic style is very evident, especially in Branwell's caustic style. Charlotte (and Emily in her poetry) reveal their influences as well, and hint at the work they would later produce. Mina Laury and Caroline Vernon (the two most entertaining pieces if taken out of context, both brooding romances with doomed yet powerful heroines) experiment with a Gothic tone, with dark, handsome, irresistible and dangerous heroes and battling young girls struggling for autonomy and control. Both Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre seem to echo and grow through the lines of these inexperience yet promising tales.

The true enjoyment of Glass Town... comes perhaps from imagining the siblings at work creating their early literary pieces. In so isolated a setting, with mainly their father and his political and literary leanings for inspiration, it is fascinating to think of their young minds exploding with such multitudes of ideas, creating new worlds and attempting to understand the world around them, absorbing and regurgitating their influences, the pop culture of the day, growing up together, vying with each other for imaginative dominance, stretching their wings and teaching themselves to become some of the most famous female writers in the English language. 6

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## **Emma says**

Tough, very tough. Lots of chopping and changing and very difficult to keep track of the characters/places/events. However, the imagination and creativity that went into these tales is astonishing.

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## Phil Syphe says

This book features prose and poetry by Anne, Charlotte, Emily, and Branwell Brontë, the bulk of which is written by Charlotte because more of her early work has survived compared to her siblings'.

None of the pre-1840 poems were intended for public viewing, thus what's presented here is first draft material written for the Brontës' personal entertainment. Because of this it does appear quite rough and inconsistent to the general reader.

The stories of Glass Town, Agria, and Gondal have a fantasy element to them. They are not in the same league as 'Jane Eyre' and co., but the reader must remember that these works were born out of the Brontës' childhood. Their passion and practice for writing led the three sisters to the eventual fame. Branwell never achieved the heights he was expected to and his life took a turn for the worst.

Although this collection is titled as 'Early Writings', it does include poems by Anne and Emily that were written in adulthood. The reason for their inclusion was because this poetry contains references to their early works and characters.

I normally avoid poetry like the plague, as it never appeals to me, but with such little prose fiction available by Anne and Emily I decided to read everything here. I actually liked most of Anne's. Rather than writing something short and cryptic she instead composed epic poems that told stories that I could comprehend. Some of Emily's were of a similar vein. I couldn't focus on Branwell's though and gave up.

This collection also includes short diary extracts by the three sisters. Charlotte's were written during her time spent at Roe Head. Anne and Emily had a tradition of writing down their current situation and aspirations, after which they stored them in a tin box. They would open this box three or four years later - on or near Emily's birthday - read them and repeat the process.

It's sad to read the final ones were they wonder how they will be in several years time. Anne prophetically uses the words, 'if we're all alive', in her final entry, but she is 'hoping for the best.'

It's a tragic shame that these talented women died so young. With a classic novel like 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall', I wonder what other magnificent work Anne would have created had she lived into her thirties. Such a loss - times three.

Life is cruel.

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## Lindsay says

This was interesting because it is the writings of children for children. I enjoyed getting to see the early works of the Bronte children although I don't know if I would give it to students because of its more archaic wording.

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