

FORGING AN AFTERLIFE: MRS. HUMPHRY WARD AND THE RELICS OF THE BRONTËS

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Who of us having read Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* can forget the opening scene where Gaskell takes the reader on a journey: through the stolid and enduring northern industrial town of Keighley, along the populated road to Haworth, up the village's steep cobbled main thoroughfare, to the Brontë parsonage and to the church, rising above, with its graveyard "terribly full of upright tombstones" (12). Gaskell's description of the road to Haworth is by no means the first such account. Two years earlier, in the May 1855 issue of *Fraser's Magazine*, Matthew Arnold published an elegy entitled "Haworth Churchyard, April 1855" to commemorate the death of Charlotte Brontë in March of that year:

Where, behind Keighley, the road
Up to the heart of the moors
Between heath-clad showery hills
Runs, and colliers' carts
Poach the deep ways coming down,
And a rough, grim'd race have their homes –
There, on its slope, is built
The moorland town. But the church
Stands on the crest of the hill,
Lonely and bleak; at its side
The parsonage-house and the graves.
(Arnold 528)

Arnold's use of the adversative conjunction "but" in the line "The moorland town. But the church" syntactically juxtaposes town with church and thereby foregrounds both the physical isolation of the church and its surrounds and, implicitly, the originality and transcendence of the Brontë genius.

Later in the poem, Arnold, at the grave's edge and addressing the recently deceased Charlotte, envisions Brontë's rapturous and triumphant reunion with her dead siblings whose graves "Round thee they lie; the grass / Blows from their graves toward thine"(529). Although Arnold had visited Haworth as an inspector of schools on 6 May 1852 (Tillotson 116), there is no evidence to suggest that he actually visited the churchyard or parsonage-house. If he had, Arnold would have known that Charlotte's mother and siblings¹ were buried in a family vault beneath the church rather than in the churchyard and he would have avoided committing "the notorious

¹ With the exception of Anne Brontë who was buried in the churchyard of St Mary parish church at Scarborough on 30 May 1849.

error of burying Charlotte in the churchyard instead of the church, and both her sisters beside her" in his poem (Tillotson 116).² Elizabeth Gaskell made no such mistake when she came to describe the Brontës' burial site in her biography. Having brought her readers right up to the entrance of the church, Gaskell ushers us inside and hurries us toward the communion table where the two original mural tablets detailing the lives of the Brontë family are found. Here we stop to survey the details on them. The mural tablets thus temporarily arrest the forward movement of the text and form a momentary point of closure to Gaskell's introductory chapter.

The litany of epitaphs documented on the first tablet announces both the narrative presence and the historical absence of each member of the Brontë family. Gaskell notes how the letters become small and cramped "as one dead member of the household follows another fast to the grave" so that after the record of Anne's death, "there is room for no other"(14). Charlotte died six years after Anne and her history is thus inscribed upon a second tablet as though Charlotte's life, shaped by and through her family, is nevertheless distinct from theirs. Gaskell uses the separate memorial plaques as a means of formalising her narrative design. Like the tablets, Gaskell will record the distinct life and personality of Charlotte Brontë at the same time as she will examine the influence of the family upon Charlotte's personality and sense of self. While the tablets set the parameters for the life of each member of the Brontë family, Gaskell uses the tablets merely as points of departure from which she will reinscribe and immortalise the lives of Charlotte Brontë and her family. Elizabeth Gaskell thus positions herself as literary biographer and caretaker of the Brontë remains, and her chronological listing of the deaths of the Brontës articulates and affirms her tragic reading of the family.

Bereavement, the harsh, unrelenting Yorkshire environment and their formative influence upon the Brontës' characters and writings are thus to be constant themes in Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Subsequent depictions of the Brontës' graves, such as the "little cage" "All overgrown by cunning moss / All interspersed with weed" of Emily Dickinson's poem (# 148, ll. 1-3), underline the emotional and imaginative impact of Gaskell's approach. Moreover, such readings reveal, as is the case with Gaskell, the way in which reimagining and reconfiguring the graves of the

² In her discussion of the public response to Charlotte Brontë's death, Tillotson notes "two shining exceptions" to the "meagre" quality of the obituaries published in the London dailies and weeklies: Harriet Martineau's anonymous tribute to Charlotte Brontë in the *Daily News* for 6 April 1855 and Arnold's elegy. Tillotson traces "several suggestive likenesses" between the two obituaries and comments on how both obituarists "fell into the same mistake about the churchyard" (120). In Martineau's portrayal of the emotionally oppressive and "secluded and monotonous" life which she believed Charlotte had endured at Haworth and which she saw reflected in the "painful portions" of *Villette*, Martineau underlines the dismal and barren prospect of the parsonage-house and hallowed grounds: "in that forlorn house, planted on the very clay of the churchyard, where the graves of her sisters were before her window" (Martineau 302; 304). Elizabeth Gaskell clearly discerned the influence of Martineau's obituary upon Arnold's poem when she wrote in a letter to John Greenwood on 5 May 1855: "There are some lines by Matthew Arnold in this month's Fraser's Magazine called Haworth Churchyard, - falling into the same mistake Miss Martineau did. I have not seen them, but I hear they are very striking" ("To John Greenwood", 342-43).

Brontës became an important means through which writers positioned themselves publicly as fellow writers *of* and *on* the Brontës. This article will briefly examine some of the ways in which Mary Augusta Ward at the end of the nineteenth century sought to become one of the more celebrated of these literary caretakers of the Brontës' lives and writings.

In 1912, Mary Augusta Ward (or Mrs. Humphry Ward as she preferred to be known professionally) was elected president of the Brontë Society, a position which she held until 1918. The choice of Mrs. Humphry Ward as president is not difficult to understand. In 1912, she was a celebrated writer with more than fifteen novels to her name including the popular *Robert Elsmere*. As founder of the thriving Passmore Edwards Settlement, a centre established in the 1890s to provide education and welfare for the working class population of the north west of London, Ward was also a public figure with proven organisational and fundraising skills. Moreover, Mary Ward's interest in the Brontës was in the public domain: she had reviewed (albeit anonymously) Clement Shorter's biography *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle* for the *Times* in 1896; two years later she was approached by George Smith of Smith, Elder and Co. publishing fame to write introductions to what would become the seven volume Haworth edition of the *Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters* (1899-1902); and, no doubt as a result of her work on these prefaces, Mary Ward under the initials "M.A.W." published a somewhat florid poem entitled "Charlotte and Emily Brontë" in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1900.

1916 was the centenary year of Charlotte Brontë's birth. To commemorate this event, the Brontë Society published the following year a collection of essays written by contemporary Brontë scholars and enthusiasts such as Edmund Gosse, G. K. Chesterton, Arthur Benson, Herbert Wroot and Sir Sidney Lee. It was as the outgoing president of the Brontë Society that Mrs. Humphry Ward published an address she had delivered to the Society at Bradford on Friday 30 March 1917 in this collection. The address, entitled "Some Thoughts on Charlotte Brontë," is conspicuous not so much for Ward's general but pertinent comments on the peculiar nature of Charlotte's and Emily's genius, but for the way in which the address becomes a tribute to George Smith, Charlotte Brontë's and Mary Augusta Ward's publisher and friend, as well as a public statement of what Ward perceived to be her unique and inevitable connection to the Brontës. It is arguable that just as Ward used old letters, anecdotes and poems of the Arnold family in her 1918 autobiography (pointedly entitled *A Writer's Recollections*) to form "a texture of allusion to an eminent indeed dominant literary tradition to which, unobtrusively, [Ward] claims the right to belong" (Bellringer 44), so in her tribute to Charlotte Brontë and George Smith, Ward sought to assert her intellectual and cultural legitimacy.

According to Ward's 1917 memorial address, her love affair with the Brontës began at the age of 17 when she was given a copy of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* by "a dear kinswoman – Matthew Arnold's youngest sister – now one of the few survivors who can remember the living Charlotte" (30). Ward is referring here to

her aunt, Frances Arnold, who met Charlotte at the family home of Fox How in August and December 1850, during the celebrated author's visits to the Kay-Shuttleworths and Harriet Martineau. Ward's reference to her aunt is interesting for the way in which Ward indirectly promotes herself both as the niece of Matthew Arnold and as a member of a cultural and literary milieu that included the likes of Charlotte Brontë. Moreover, in her centenary address, Ward recalls "some other personal links with Charlotte Brontë which I like to think of" (34), introducing another aunt to her audience: Jane Forster, sister of Matthew Arnold and wife of William Forster, MP. Ward claims: "[t]he interesting letter printed by Mrs. Gaskell as written by a 'neighbour' in 1850, describing a visit to Haworth in that year, was written by my aunt and godmother, Mrs. W. E. Forster [. . .]" (34). Ward attributes Gaskell's source to her aunt again in her autobiography, and as Alan Bellringer wryly remarks: "[t]his small but significant annotation of an indispensable literary biography tacitly places 'A Writer's Recollections' in the line of direct descent from it" (44-45).

At one point in her centenary address, Ward marvels at the Brontës' prodigious output of juvenile writings, a list of which "occupies a page and a half of Mrs. Gaskell's biography" (18). In the context of Ward's portrayal of the Brontës' isolated but tremendously creative childhoods, Ward's later description of herself as one who had been "from her childhood scribbling on her own account" (31) implicitly affirms her intellectual and creative correspondence with the Brontës. It was, therefore, as a fellow writer that Ward goes on to describe her response to *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Such was the impact of Gaskell's biography, that on her first trip to London at the age of 18, Ward dragged a friend out at night:

to find Paternoster Row and the site at least of the Chapter Coffee house. I had never been in the City before, and I remember the thrill of the deserted streets, the strong lights and shades, the great dome hovering darkly overhead,³ the darkness and silence of Paternoster Row and Amen Corner; then Fleet Street, with its illuminated newspapers offices; and, brooding over it all, the sense of history, and of the "mighty heart" of London, "lying still." ("Some Thoughts" 31-32)

Ward's fond memories of her first big trip to London capture and simulate the feelings of awe and excitement which Currer and Acton Bell experienced when they first visited London to assert their separate authorial identities. Indeed, Ward refers to this celebrated event immediately after describing her own London experiences. Once again, Ward seeks to position herself as an historical and literary successor to Charlotte Brontë.⁴ In her centenary address, Ward's desire for such intellectual and

³ This passage eerily echoes Lucy Snowe's first impressions of London: "Above my head, above the house-tops, co-elevate almost with the clouds, I saw a solemn, orb'd, mass, dark-blue and dim – THE DOME" (Brontë 58).

⁴ In her illuminating article on Mary Augusta Ward's readings of the Brontës, Beth Sutton-Ramspeck likewise discerns in the 1917 address an acknowledgment by Ward of the "degree to which she

cultural legitimacy – a “canonisation” of sorts – crystallises in her laudatory account of her “constant and generous friend” (32), George Smith.

When Ward first met Smith in 1886, he was no longer the “tall young man” with whom Brontë had corresponded and engaged, but a man “over sixty, with a full and varied life behind him; the publisher of Thackeray and Matthew Arnold, of Trollope, Huxley, the Brownings, Leslie Stephen, and a score of others” and “he was still in every other respect the same man whose quick intelligence discovered the Brontë genius” (“Some Thoughts” 32). One could infer from such comments that since most of Mary Ward’s novels were published by Smith and Elder, she too could claim to belong to that elite band of writers who George Smith, with his rare ability to discover and nurture genius, promoted and supported in manifold ways. Moreover, just as forty years earlier George Smith’s publishing firm had encouraged Charlotte Brontë to continue to write despite their rejection of the manuscript of *The Professor*, so George Smith “had indulged [Ward] through the long travail that finally produced *Robert Elsmere*”⁵ and could always be relied upon to reassure Mary that she was a genius (Sutherland 260-61). In Mary’s mind at least, such support from George Smith would reassure her not only that she was a genius but also in the same league, therefore, as Charlotte Brontë.

One of the prevailing critical opinions about Mrs. Humphry Ward’s literary achievement is that her abilities as a writer deteriorated after the publication of *Helbeck of Bannisdale* in 1898. John Sutherland proffers a number of explanations for the decline, most notably that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Ward had no one left to write for. “Ever since she first put pen to paper and dedicated ‘A Tale of the Moors’ to her grandmother,” Sutherland argues, Ward

had seen herself catering for a charmed circle of readers – older men (mainly) and women who really mattered to her. One by one this Sanhedrin were dying off. Mandell Creighton and George Smith both died in the first year of the new century, Gladstone in the penultimate year of the old. Jowett was long gone (he died in 1893). Most important was her father, who died in November 1900. (158-59)

It is arguable that Mary Ward, catering for such “a charmed circle of readers,” had George Smith partly in mind during the writing of her 1892 novel *The History of David Grieve*, and that parts of the novel discover Ward’s attempts to direct, legitimise and memorialise her own public image and reputation.

perceived Charlotte Brontë as a literary foremother [. . .]. Clearly Ward responds to the Brontës as one woman author to another, as women not only of shared professions but of shared professional experiences” (66-67).

⁵ Her previous novel, *Miss Bretherton*, had been published by Macmillan in November 1884. *Robert Elsmere* was published by Smith, Elder and Co. in February 1888.

"I am childishly delighted with my three-volume baby; how nice and thin it is!" Mrs. Humphry Ward jubilantly informed George Smith in October 1891 (Sutherland 136). It had been a long and arduous childbirth, having taken the famous female writer and "ailing materfamilias" (Sutherland 214) nearly four years to bring forth *The History of David Grieve*. To understand the pressure under which Ward laboured during this period, one need only refer to such grandiose claims in the press as the following:

In some respects Mrs. Humphrey [sic] Ward may be regarded as the heir of George Eliot. "Robert Elsmere" is a name as well known in our day as "Adam Bede" was thirty years ago, and we could hardly cite another name from fictitious literature of which as much might be said. (Wedgwood 219)

The reviewers of 1892 inevitably sought to compare the fledgling *David Grieve* with his plump and prolix brother, *Robert Elsmere*. Writing for the *Academy*, James Noble noted that "it is safe to say that in every [review] will be found an estimate of *The History of David Grieve* largely based upon the degree of its likeness or unlikeness to the famous *Robert Elsmere*" (149). The *Quarterly Review* critic attributed the "too often laboured, pompous, diffuse" style of *David Grieve* (Morris 331) to a writer only too aware of her fame and of the expectations which such renown incurred:

The shadow of its rival broods over it, as we have said, from the first, and the author, weighted, as it were, with a solemn sense of responsibility, moves less freely among the Derbyshire hills than she moved among the dales of Westmoreland. (333)

Of the many contemporary critiques of *David Grieve* that compared Ward's two most recent novels, those published in the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* were conspicuous for their added attempts to identify and to contextualise the phenomenal success of *Robert Elsmere* and its author. Writing for *Blackwood's*, Margaret Oliphant singled out *Jane Eyre*, *Amos Barton* and *Robert Elsmere* as the three literary successes of the last fifty years, while the *Edinburgh Review* critic, Rowland Edmund Prothero, explicitly compared Mary Augusta Ward to Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. Prothero saw in the passionate and forceful characters of *David Grieve* a parallel with the "vivid portrayal of romantic characters" in *Jane Eyre*, although "Mrs. Ward's passion is studied; that of Charlotte Brontë is genuine" (530). Prothero detected more resemblance between Mary Ward and George Eliot than the Brontës, although it was "George Eliot in that decadence which dates from 'Felix Holt' whom Mrs. Ward most resembles" (531). That such comparisons between Ward, Eliot and Brontë were being made at all suggests the level of fame and notoriety to which Ward had been subjected following both the publications of *Robert Elsmere* and Gladstone's celebrated response to it in the *Nineteenth Century* (as the *Quarterly Review* somewhat cattily remarked: *Robert Elsmere* was one of those books

“which succeed by virtue more of what is written about them than of what is written in them” (Morris 328).

In both the *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Edinburgh Review* articles, the writers make it quite clear that they personally are unable to fathom the immense popularity of *Robert Elsmere*. In the end, Margaret Oliphant can only acknowledge the book's fame:

[. . .] we have never been able to see wherein the attraction of this book lies. But then, on the other hand, thousands upon thousands have seen it. And what in the face of that cloud of witnesses can any poor critic say? (456)

Prothero, on the other hand, attributes the secret of *Robert Elsmere's* success to Ward's having

gathered up much of the floating scepticism of the day, and interpreted it in the play of her fictitious characters. Her book was the embodiment of many of the thoughts which are rankling in human hearts. She gave utterance – however hesitating and uncertain the voice – to some indeterminate, inarticulate, but widespread, feeling that needed expression. (Prothero 518)

It was thus as one conscious of her celebrity status and role as spokeswoman for the age that Ward approached the writing of *David Grieve* and specifically, the seventh chapter of the first book.

In chapter seven of the novel, David Grieve, a troubled and restless teenager, accompanies his guardian-uncle on an expedition to buy sheep. During their journey, they stop overnight in Haworth. In the village David meets a “decent elderly woman who had come out for a mouthful of air” (76) who claims to have known the Brontës personally and who tells him the tragic story of their brief lives and early deaths, their writings and their enduring fame. She offers to accompany him to the local church, the destination of many a literary pilgrim. “[T]hey coom along o' t' monument, an' Miss Brontë – Mrs. Nicholls, as should be, poor thing – rayder,” she informs David. “Yo should see t' visitors' book in th' church,” she exclaims:

“Aw t' grand foak as iver wor. They cooms fro Lunnon a purpose, soom ov 'em, an they just takes a look rou t' place, an writes their names, an goos away.” (77)

Significantly, the woman alludes to the historical controversy of 1879 surrounding the demolition of old Haworth church and the building of a new one.⁶

⁶ It is noteworthy that the name of this elderly townswoman who first introduces David to the Brontës is “Martha.” At the time of David's visit to Haworth, one of the main local sources of memorabilia and recollection of the Brontës still living at Haworth and “something of a celebrity – sought after in

One concern at the time was that the Brontë family vault in the chancel of the old church would be disturbed (Hirst 183), although this issue is not explicitly addressed in Ward's account. The dispute had been ignited by a letter to the *Times* from Thomas Wemyss Reid in December 1878 who had heard on a visit to Haworth that "plans for a new church were ready for examination of the rector and the churchwardens" (Baumber 102). Opposition to the demolition of the Brontë church was organised not by residents of Haworth but by the Bradford Historical and Antiquarian Society. In fact, Michael Baumber argues that the people in Haworth were either too apathetic or still harboured strong feelings of resentment toward the Brontës to be bothered to raise money to restore the church. Their resentment, Baumber contends, arose in part from what was considered the violent, indecorous and shocking nature of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and from Charlotte's easily recognisable and often unflattering portraits of local families and members of the clergy in her novels (103-05). The elderly townswoman in *David Grieve* exposes this ambivalent response of the village to the Brontës, with comments such as: "Not but what yo get a bad noshun o' Yorkshire folk fro Miss Emily's bukes – soa I'm towd'" and "everybody about 'thowt Miss Brontë had bin puttin ov' em into prent,' and didn't know whether to be pleased or piqued" (78). Mary Ward's depiction of the townswoman's ready sympathy towards the Brontës thus seems to be more an expression of Ward's own feelings and attitudes toward the threatened destruction:

"Noa, it's not a beauty, isn't our church. They do say our parson ud like to have it pulled clean down an a new one built. Onyways, they're goin to clear th' Brontës' pew away, an sich a rumpas as soom o' t' Bradford papers have bin makin, and a gradely few o' t' people here too! I doan't know t'reets on 't missel, but I'st be sorry when yo conno see ony moor where Miss Charlotte an Miss Emily used to sit o' Sundays – An theer's th' owd house. Yo used to be 'lowed to see Miss Charlotte's room, where she did her writin, but they tell me yo can't be let in now." (77-78)

Arriving at the church, David and the townswoman find themselves in the midst of a small protest meeting led by a "young weaver in a black coat, with a sallow oblong face, black hair, high collars, and a general look of Lord Byron" (79). His passionate and, for David, persuasive speech to his followers is characterised by

Haworth by Brontë admirers" (Dinsdale 99) was Martha Brown (1828-1880), a former servant in the Brontë household. In Gaskell's biography, Martha Brown is a valuable source of information, providing Gaskell with both important anecdotes about the family as well as several letters from Charlotte Brontë which are quoted in the text. In his introduction to Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Easson identifies Martha Brown as one of the "cloud of witnesses" in the biography who "authenticate the work and make Charlotte live" (xiv). In placing this scene within the tradition of the Gaskell biography, Ward may have had Martha Brown in mind in her portrait of the elderly village woman whose rôle is indeed to "authenticate the work and make Charlotte live" for David Grieve. I am indebted to the anonymous reader of this paper for pointing out the various connections between the historical and fictional Marthas.

sentences ringing with the great words “genius” and “fame” and others devoted to an indignant contemplation of the hassocks in the old pews [. . .] which a meddling parson was about to ‘hurl away,’ out of mere hatred for intellect and contempt of the popular voice. (79)

However, the Byronic young man proves no match for the quietly determined church sexton who, in a somewhat comical scene, dispels the “Bradford” crowd and evicts them from the church:

But the voice of authority within its own gates is strong, and the champion of outraged genius collapsed. The whole flock broke up and meekly followed the sexton who strode on before them to the vestry. (79)

The satirical tone Ward here adopts and the general inefficacy of the protest are arguably neither a criticism nor a repudiation of the issues at hand, rather evidence of Ward’s uneasiness and distaste for public and militant protest which she “instinctively associated with the Irish outrages that had terrified her in the 1880s” (Sutherland 201).

Outside the church, the sexton, who turns out to be the brother of the garrulous townswoman, befriends David and lends him a copy of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* and Charles Dickens’s *Nicholas Nickleby*. The effect on David of reading *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Shirley* (Charlotte’s social-problem novel and the most self-consciously realist of her oeuvre) is immediate. There is a sudden euphoric broadening of perspective followed by a “more intense self-consciousness than any [David] had yet known” (82):

“Shirley” and “Nicholas Nickleby” were the first novels of modern life he had ever laid hands on, and before he had finished them he felt them in his veins like new wine. The real world had been to him for months something sickeningly narrow and empty [. . .]. Now the walls of this real world were suddenly pushed back as it were on all sides, and there was an inrush of crowd, excitement, and delight. Human beings like those he heard of or talked with every day – factory hands and mill-owners, parsons, squires, lads and lasses – the Yorkes, and Robert Moore, Squeers, Smike, Kate Nickleby and Newman Noggs, came by, looked him in the eyes, made him take sides, compare himself with them, join in their fights and hatreds, pity and exult with them. Here was something more disturbing, personal, and stimulating than that mere imaginative relief he had been getting out of “Paradise Lost” or the scenes of the “Jewish Wars!” (81-82)

David's enthusiastic, captivated and animated response to *Shirley* embodies that romantic impulse which is, Ward argues elsewhere, distinctly European and Celtic in origin and which is central to the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. As Ward writes in her centenary address:

Charlotte and Emily are Romantics through and through, and the Celts in history and literature are the eternal Romantics. For they are not thinking – striving towards – an artistic whole, in which feeling, poetry, passion, shall be all brought into bondage or a shaping and fastidious instinct, which is, in truth, the ultimate thing. They are grasping at poetry and passion for their own sakes, careless what happens, so long as they can exercise the piercing and arresting power they are conscious of possessing. (23)

With this description in mind, it is significant to note that it is Franklin's *Autobiography* alone that "filled [David] with an urging and concentrating ambition, and set his thoughts, endowed with a new heat and nimbleness, to the practical unravelling of a practical case" (82). Franklin's "rags to riches" story with its underpinning of the American Dream, its optimism and insistence upon individual and collective effort as the essence of mankind's progress articulate Ward's conviction that, "trusting in man's intelligence and good will," "the individual will survive and live to reshape contemporary society" (Collister 217). As Collister notes, this "purposeful optimism" recalls the conservative social problem novels of the 1850s, particularly those of Kingsley and Gaskell, where the individual's commitment to doing one's own and thus society's duty is an expression and affirmation of man's religious and spiritual destiny (217-19). Indeed, reading Franklin, Brontë and Dickens prompts David to leave his childhood home and to travel to Manchester, where he gradually and steadily progresses in the bookselling trade. Ambition, talent and hard work are rewarded. At the close of the novel, a rather subdued and austere David is head of a successful Manchester bookselling firm and printing co operative, where the workers themselves have become profit-sharers in David's printing business.

Significantly, David's ardent response both to *Shirley* and to the protest in the church also embody what Ward believes to be the poetic and spiritual legacy of the Brontë novels and story. Before leaving the church, David finds a moment alone to approach the Brontë memorial: that "plain tablet on the wall, whereat the crowd which had just gone out had been worshipping."

Through the wide-open door the fading yellow light streamed in, and with it a cool wind which chased little eddies of dust about the pavement. In the dusk the three names – black on the white – stood out with a stern and yet piteous distinctness. The boy stood there feeling the silence – the tomb near by – the wonder and pathos of

fame, and all that thrill of undefined emotion to which youth yields itself so hungrily. (80)

The “fading yellow light,” the “little eddies of dust,” the twilight hour and the silence all direct the reader’s attention to the notions of the transience of life and of the ephemeral but enduring, enchanting but repellent life of the emotions which, Ward seems to argue, any Brontë devotee must confront. It is the “black on the white” – what the Brontës have written as well as what has been written about them – that prevails and shapes the unshaped life. In monitoring David’s reactions to Shirley and in placing David before the shrine of the Brontës, Ward endeavours to give voice to the Brontës’ romantic legacy.

The manuscript version and first proof of *David Grieve* now at the Honnold Library in California reveal that Ward had originally used the term “verger” to describe the church official who assists David. In the second proofs, also at Honnold Library, we see Ward laboriously substituting the word “sexton” for “verger” throughout the chapter. According to the OED, the verger’s role was to carry a rod before the dignitaries of a cathedral, church or university, to take care of the interior of the church and to act as attendant. The duties of the sexton, however, were more onerous and mortuary in nature. According to Dale’s *Law of the Parish Church* (71), a sexton’s duties included the digging of graves, the care of the ornaments of the church and the care of the church and churchyard:

The sexton was usually an experienced stonemason, who could supplement his small stipend with fees received from his responsibility for the graves. The supply of tombstones and the inscriptions thereon, along with the digging and filling in of graves, were part of his responsibilities to the church and its parishioners. (Emsley 297)

In *David Grieve*, the church official’s duties do not extend beyond caring for the interior of the church and acting as attendant so that the use of the term “verger” was appropriate. Why did Ward go to the bother of altering the numerous references to him? It is arguable that Ward uses the term “sexton” deliberately to forge a connection between the church and the Brontë vault within.⁷ By throwing out the Bradford crowd, Ward wants us to see that the sexton is not only protecting the interior of the church but also the tomb of the Brontës. So that the protest against the demolition of the church becomes as well a revolt against the desecration of the Brontë grave and name. In turning an historical event to fictional account and, through her main character, declaring her sympathy and support for the opponents of the new church proposal, Mary Ward appropriates the rôle of the sexton. Chapter seven is Ward’s own version of “black upon white” and becomes a declaration of her intention to protect, reinscribe and thus memorialise the Brontë name. She is the invisible sexton

⁷ The historical Martha Brown was also the daughter of John Brown, the sexton to Patrick Brontë and this may also have influenced Ward’s decision to alter the rôle of David’s guide from that of verger to sexton.

who ushers David forward to the memorial while the other sexton is “engaged in turning back a group of Americans, on the plea that visiting hours were over for the day”(82) and who silently reworks the inscription on the Brontë memorial for David and her readers.

Mary Ward thus deliberately positions herself as a caretaker of the Brontës’ intellectual and physical remains. In the pressure to produce a novel as good as, if not better than, *Robert Elsmere*, Ward devised another way of preserving her literary reputation, particularly in the eyes of George Smith. If, through her novels alone, she failed to remain one of the select few whom George Smith patronised, then Ward would seek to couple her name with those of established and abiding genius. In hindsight, we can say that her strategy worked. For, it was Mary Ward who was approached by George Smith to pen the prefaces to the Haworth Edition of the Brontë novels. These monuments to the Brontës’ brilliance have been acclaimed as “the best sustained critical prose that [Ward] ever wrote” (Sutherland 231) and as “the first completely mature and what might be called the first modern appraisal”(Petit 54)⁸ of the Brontës’ work. Ward’s innovative and perceptive response to the Brontës in these prefaces has ensured Ward will not be forgotten. In consecrating the Brontë name in *David Grieve*, in her centenary address and in her prefaces, Ward managed in part to memorialise her own.

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⁸ Petit is referring here to Ward’s Preface to *Wuthering Heights*.

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