



## SIX WRITERS AND THEIR READERS

# CHARLOTTE BRONTË



## ***Jane Eyre* (1847): on not running away with Rochester**

While he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him. They spoke almost as loud as Feeling: and that clamoured wildly. ‘Oh, comply!’ it said. ‘Think of his misery; think of his danger – look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair – soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do?’

Still indomitable was the reply – ‘I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself.’

Charlotte Brontë’s first novel immediately captivated readers. Narrated in the first person by a highly intelligent young woman ‘disconnected, poor, and plain’, many were struck by the emotional power of the book, all the more so for the fact that its author’s identity – and sex – were initially unknown. For others, however, it was a dangerous and even distasteful tale that sought to undermine existing notions of social hierarchy, sexual propriety and religious authority.

‘I wish you had not sent me “Jane Eyre”. It interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it. ... Some of the love passages made me cry, to the astonishment of John who came in with the coals.’

William Makepeace Thackeray, 1847

‘There is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact, has at the present day to contend with.’

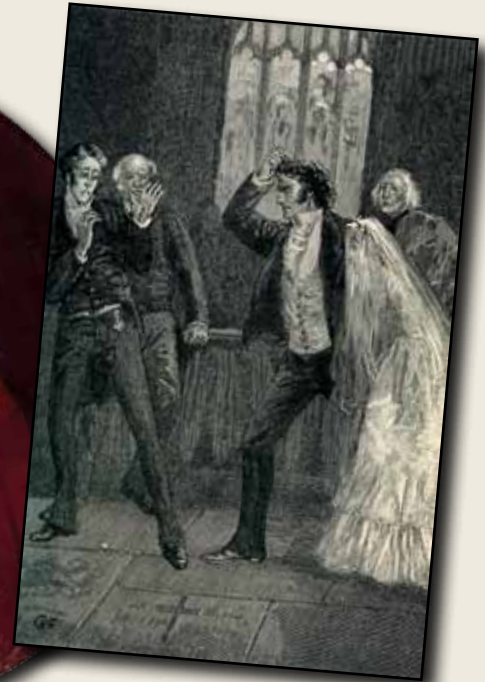
Elizabeth Rigby, 1848

‘We hear so much of Jane’s innermost anguish, questioning, self-doubt, convictions, that we become totally absorbed in her: it is odd to look up at the end to find ourselves not in a large, ruined mansion in Yorkshire.’

Penguin Reader’s Group review, 2010



With its psychological realism and gothic intensity, Jane Eyre has lost none of its appeal in the intervening century and a half. Creative responses to the book have matched its critical reception from the start, and authors, artists, playwrights, musicians and film-makers continue to draw inspiration from this story of love, loss, madness and redemption.



# BRAM STOKER

## ***Dracula* (1897): interview with a vampire**

Beside the bed, as if he had stepped out of the mist, or rather as if the mist had turned into his figure, for it had entirely disappeared, stood a tall, thin man, all in black. I knew him at once from the description of the others. The waxen face, the high aquiline nose, on which the light fell in a thin white line, the parted red lips, with the sharp white teeth showing between, and the red eyes that I had seemed to see in the sunset on the windows of St. Mary's Church at Whitby. ... I would have screamed out, only that I was paralysed. In the pause he spoke in a sort of keen, cutting whisper, pointing as he spoke to Jonathan.

‘Silence! If you make a sound I shall take him and dash his brains out before your very eyes.’

Abraham ‘Bram’ Stoker was an Irish novelist and journalist who worked for Henry Irving, one of the leading theatrical figures of the period. Stoker’s

early fiction won modest praise, but in 1897 his profile altered radically with the publication of the sensational *Dracula*. Even sceptical reviewers admitted that this tale of supernatural horror pushed the boundaries of the genre. One of



Stoker's most effective device was to tell the story from a variety of perspectives, using letters, diary entries, telegrams, newspaper cuttings and even transcripts of phonograph recordings. This relayed the plot's terrifying twists and jolts without the cushioning presence of a narrator.

'A summary of the book would shock and disgust; but we must own that we read nearly the whole with rapt attention.'  
*Bookman* review, 1897

'For a man of suave manner and blameless life, a kind husband, a good father, and an obliging friend, he has written the most blood-curdling novel of the paralysed century.'  
Henry Lucy, 1897

'It's a great story: very imaginative, creepy and atmospheric. To my surprise, I enjoyed the book more than any of the films – and I enjoyed the films a lot.'  
Amazon review, 2004

Although readers of the 1890s felt that this was a tale for their times, subsequent generations have been equally susceptible to its uncanny appeal. *Dracula* has never been out of print, and, like the Count himself, has proved itself capable of an array of fantastic mutations. It would be hard to imagine the twenty-first century without it.



# JAMES JOYCE



## **‘Grace’, from *Dubliners* (1914): reconnecting with religion**

- All we have to do, said Mr. Cunningham, is to stand up with lighted candles in our hands and renew our baptismal vows.
- O, don’t forget the candle, Tom, said Mr. M’Coy, whatever you do.
- What? said Mr. Kernan. Must I have a candle?
- O yes, said Mr. Cunningham.
- No, damn it all, said Mr. Kernan sensibly, I draw the line there. I’ll do the job right enough. I’ll do the retreat business and confession, and ... all that business. But ... no candles! No, damn it all, I bar the candles!

He shook his head with farcical gravity.

- Listen to that! said his wife.
- I bar the candles, said Mr. Kernan, conscious of having produced an effect on his audience and continuing to shake his head to and fro. I bar the magic-lantern business.

Everyone laughed heartily.

- There’s a nice Catholic for you! said his wife.

Joyce described this early collection of short stories as an attempt to ‘write a chapter of the moral history of my country’. For many his effort to capture the reality of Dublin

life cut far too close to the bone: ‘the Anglo-Saxons are modest and Joyce calls a cat a cat, which is very indecent’, one French reviewer noted. Joyce paired controversial content with innovative technique, placing the language of everyday men and women at the heart of his stripped-down, unsentimental exploration of Irish humour, hopes, and illusions.

‘*Dubliners*, James Joyce. ...

They are immensely real and intimate sketches.

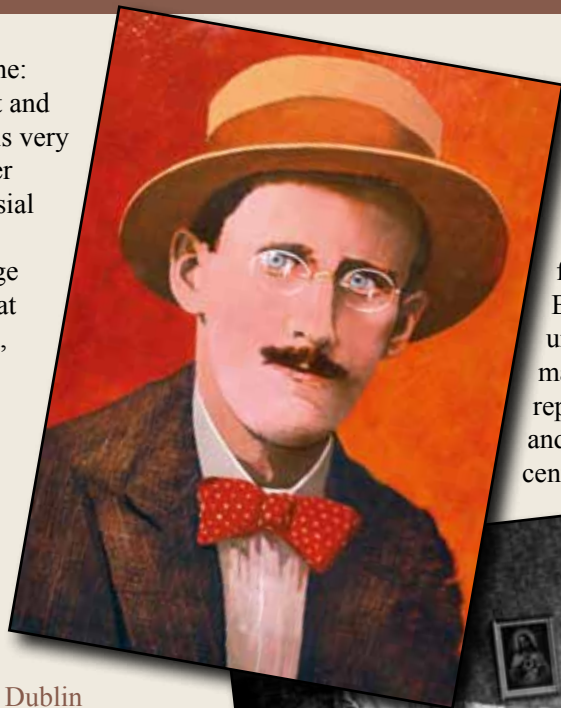
Whenever I feel fed up I read one of these sketches and find myself in another world – Dublin, 20 years ago. Dublin

saloon bars, street children, catholic priests and inconspicuous clerks – all ordinary people but real.’

Anonymous reader, 1942

‘Certainly the maturity, the individual poise and force of these stories is astonishing.’

Gerald Gould, 1914



Joyce explored this territory further in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922). The latter generated a storm of conflicting opinion: ‘it has been hailed as “the greatest novel in English”. It has been condemned as “a filthy book, unfit for print”’ wrote Edwin Baird in 1934. While modern readers are unlikely to be shocked by Joyce’s subject matter, his formal daring has ensured his reputation as one of the most provocative and exciting authors of the twentieth century.



# KATHERINE MANSFIELD

## ***Prelude* (1918): mother and daughter:**

‘I have been looking at the aloe,’ said Mrs. Fairfield. ‘I believe it is going to flower this year. Look at the top there. Are those buds, or is it only an effect of light?’

As they stood on the steps, the high grassy bank on which the aloe rested rose up like a wave, and the aloe seemed to ride upon it like a ship with the oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung upon the lifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew.

‘Do you feel it, too,’ said Linda, and she spoke to her mother with the special voice that women use at night to

each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave – ‘Don’t you feel that it is coming towards us?’



Katherine Mansfield was born and brought up in New Zealand, moving to London in 1908 to pursue a literary career. Her short fiction, essays, letters and diaries vividly evoke life in the first decades of the twentieth century. They also chart her search for a voice for female experience, and for a language in



which to frame the world that she had left behind: 'I want for one moment to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the old world. It must be mysterious, as though floating – it must take the breath', she wrote in her notebook in 1916.

'Always surprising, often shocking, the stories extend an apparently sedate invitation to view the lives of people engaged in struggles, external and internal, often complicated by misunderstandings, deceptions or outright fraud... These stories are more likely to bite than soothe, several are guaranteed to make you uncomfortable and some will stay with you for years.'

Sarah Hilary, [theshortreview.com](http://theshortreview.com), 2008

'Page after page gives off the feeling of being still warm from the touch. Fresh from the pen. Where is she – our missing contemporary?'

Elizabeth Bowen, 1957

Mansfield's determination to remain, as she put it, 'rooted in life', to be scrupulous but fearless personally and stylistically, has guaranteed her position as a widely read and popular author, a central figure in literary modernism, and as one New Zealand's most important writers. Nearly 90 years after her death at the age of 34, her work continues to provoke lively critical debate and to inspire a wide range of creative responses.



# SAMUEL SELVON

## *The Lonely Londoners*, (1956): from the Caribbean to London

What it is that a city have, that any place in the world have, that you get so much to like it you wouldn't leave it for anywhere else? What it is that would keep men although by and large, in truth and in fact, they catching their royal to make a living, staying in a cramp-up room where you have to do everything – sleep, eat, dress, wash, cook, live. Why it is, that although they grumble about it all the time, curse the people, curse the government, say all kind of thing about this and that, why it is, that in the end, everyone cagey about saying outright that if the chance come they will go back to them green islands in the sun?

In his most celebrated novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Trinidadian writer Sam Selvon captures the dreams, disappointments and strategies of survival of an early generation of Caribbean immigrants, the first of whom arrived in England on the iconic *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948. Despite the poverty and racism they experience, Selvon's protagonist Moses and his 'boys' lay claim to London, remapping it with resilient energy and reinventing themselves in the process. With an irreverent wit and innovative linguistic style which draws on Caribbean



dialects, Selvon takes us beneath the surface of the city into the lives of a group of memorable characters whose stories can be followed in *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983).

‘*The Lonely Londoners* is one of the capital’s greatest literary creations; a novel of heart, humanity and understanding. It is resolutely not just about the Windrush generation’s experiences. It is about belonging and not belonging: about where one fits in the world and in society.’

Stuart Evers’ blog, <http://stuartevers.blogspot.com>, April 2010



‘The master-storyteller turns his pen to rural village life in Trinidad: gossip and rivalry between the village washerwomen; toiling cane-cutters reaping their meagre harvest; superstitious old Ma Procop protecting the fruit of her mango tree with magic. With equal wit and sensitivity, he reflects the depression of “hard times” in London, where people live in cold, damp basements, hustling for survival.’  
Amazon review of Selvon’s 1952 novel *A Brighter Sun*, 2006



Selvon’s fiction, set in England and Trinidad and written between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s, remains popular among a wide range of readers today. These two recent responses to his work suggest the continued impact of this pioneering writer of novels, short stories and radio plays who paved the way for a future generation of black British writers.

# ABDULRAZAK GURNAH

## ***By the Sea*, (2001): from Zanzibar to a British seaside town**

I live in a small town by the sea, as I have all my life, though for most of it it was by a warm green ocean a long way from here. Now I live the half-life of a stranger, glimpsing interiors through the television screen and guessing at the tireless alarms which afflict people I see in my strolls. I have no inkling of their plight, though I keep my eyes open and observe what I can, but I fear that I recognise little of what I see. It is not that they are mysterious, but that their strangeness disarms me. I have so little understanding of the striving that seems to accompany their most ordinary acts. They seem consumed and distracted, their eyes smarting as



they tug against turmoils incomprehensible to me. Perhaps I exaggerate, or cannot resist dwelling on my difference from them, cannot resist the drama of our contrastedness.

This extract from Tanzanian British writer Abdulrazak Gurnah highlights the novel's themes of dislocation, migration and reconfigurations of identity. Central to Gurnah's fiction is a profound questioning of the processes of history. Born in Zanzibar in 1948, Gurnah moved to



Britain in 1968. He is the author of seven novels, including the acclaimed *Paradise* (1994 Booker and Whitbread prize shortlists), *By the Sea* (2001 Booker prize longlist), and *Desertion* (2005).

‘I was gripped immediately by the emerging story of the asylum seeker and his past life. [...] The writer vividly conjures Zanzibar as a place of beauty, intrigue and complexity and juxtaposes it with the grim realities of life for an asylum seeker in England.’

Amazon reader’s review, 2002

‘So strange and beautiful, I haven’t read a book like this for a long time. The impossibility of objectivity and how opposing narratives collide, just breathtaking.’

A reader on Facebook

‘A beautiful and moving account of a genuine refugee from Zanzibar settling into this country, coping with a different culture and a different faith. The world today is full of the dispossessed and displaced.’

2001 Booker Prize chair Kenneth Baker in the *Daily Mail*

Writing about the condition of displacement as one of the major stories of our times, *Gurnah* evokes Zanzibar as an interior landscape that contrasts with the harsh realities of life in Britain. Readers’ comments in online forums and newspapers show that his stories about characters who find themselves adrift resonate with a broad audience across the world.



# LEARNING WITH THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

You'll be part of Europe's largest academic community. With more than 210,000 students learning with us each year and with 570-plus courses available in a range of fascinating and challenging subjects, you're sure to be inspired. We call our flexible study method 'Supported Open Learning' – study that fits around you and your life.

You can start with a single course in an area of interest or in a topic that's relevant to your job, or your future career. And if you want, you can follow a programme towards a qualification such as a certificate, a diploma or a degree.

Choose from courses in: Arts and Humanities, Business and Management, Childhood and Youth, Computing and ICT, Education, Engineering and Technology, Design, Environment, Development and International Studies, Health and Social Care, Languages, Law, Mathematics and Statistics, Psychology, Science, or Social Sciences.

## Beginning to study

If you have no experience of higher education, deciding to become an undergraduate student can be a big step. Our Openings programme of introductory courses, such as, Making sense of the arts (Y160), have been specially designed to help you develop your learning skills and build your confidence – perfect for new learners. Our short courses are for people who may already have study experience, but who don't want to commit to a full undergraduate course straight away. For example, there is a range of short 'Start Writing' courses, including Start writing fiction (A174), a 12-week online course which provides a practical introduction to writing fiction – firing your creativity and imagination as well as equipping you with basic narrative strategies. Other short courses include A177, a 12-week introduction to Shakespearean drama and the study of literature at university level. For more Arts short courses see: <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/short-courses/courses.shtml>

If you have an interest in literature, other degree-level Open University courses on offer include:

## Voices and text (A150)

This course focuses on language in a wide range of contexts and from the perspective of different academic subjects. These include classical studies, history, literature, music, religious studies, creative writing and English language studies.

## Approaching literature (A210) (A230 from 2012)

How do we work out what a text means? How does a play move from page to performance? This course offers a wide-ranging introduction to the study of literary texts – including fiction, poetry and drama.

## Creative writing (A215)

This course takes a student-centred approach to creative writing, offering a range of strategies to help you develop as a writer. The emphasis is highly practical, with exercises and activities designed to ignite and sustain the writing impulse.

### Twentieth century literature: texts and debates (A300)

This course takes you right to the heart of twentieth-century literature – the excitement it has caused, the provocative critical debates it has generated, and the political and historical influences it has developed from.

### The nineteenth-century novel (AA316)

Novels in the nineteenth century were particularly engaged with the events, circumstances, beliefs and attitudes of their time. This course encourages you to enjoy and understand them through the study of twelve texts from England (mainly), France and the USA.

### Advanced creative writing (A363)

This course develops your writing ability by widening your generic range and developing your knowledge of style. The course works on the forms introduced in the Creative writing (A215) course – fiction, poetry and life writing – and supplements these with dramatic writing, showing you how to write for stage, radio and film.

### Shakespeare: text and performance (AA306)

This intensive study of nine Shakespeare plays takes close account of the social and political circumstances in which they were written and performed. The course will develop your knowledge of the range and variety of Shakespeare's dramatic work; examine how its reception and status has been shaped by cultural and institutional factors; and explore themes such as questions of genre, politics, sexuality and gender.

### MA in English (F58)

If you wish to develop your research and analytical skills and upgrade your qualifications, this degree is for you. You need appropriate entry qualifications, and should have a passion for literature and enjoy an intellectual challenge. You must hold an honours degree to be accepted for the MA in English programme. Your bachelor's degree need not be in English but you must have the basic skills expected of a graduate in that area.

### Supporting you all the way

Whatever you decide to do we're right behind you and you're never alone. With many courses you'll benefit from

unrivalled one-to-one support from your tutor who can be contacted by telephone, email or face-to-face. Your tutor will provide advice and guidance throughout your studies and will give individual feedback on your progress. Your Regional Centre is also on hand to answer any queries you may have.

### Find out more

To learn more about our courses and qualifications, and to find out what it's like to be an OU student, visit our website at [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk), contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Services on **0845 300 60 90** or by email [general-enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:general-enquiries@open.ac.uk), or write to **The Open University, PO Box 197, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BJ**.

For information about Open University broadcasts and associated learning, visit our website [www.open2.net](http://www.open2.net).

The Open University has a wide range of learning materials for sale, including self study workbooks, videos and software. For more information visit the website [www.ouw.co.uk](http://www.ouw.co.uk).

Published in 2010 by The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA,  
to accompany *In Their Own Words: British Novelists*, first broadcast on BBC2, Summer 2010

BBC Executive Producer: Jonty Claypole  
Academic Consultant: Delia da Sousa Correa  
Broadcast & Learning Executive: Caroline Ogilvie  
Broadcast Project Manager: Diane Morris  
Authors of booklet: Faith Binckes, Rehana Ahmed, Florian Stadler  
Graphic Designer: Peter Heatherington

Acknowledgements: Cover: Letters D, E, H, I, N, O, R, S, T, W © abzee/iStock. p.2 and 3: Charlotte Bronte © FPG/Getty Images, Jane Eyre Film Still: Orson Welles, Joan Fontaine, 1944 © Everett Collection/Rex Features, Portrait of Charlotte Bronte (1816-55) (oil on canvas) by Thompson, J.H. (19th century) © Bronte Parsonage Museum/The Bridgeman Art Library, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte © Lebrecht Music and Arts photo Library/Alamy. p.4 and 5: Dracula 1992 © Photos 12/Alamy, Dracula Claims Lucy, 2009 (oil on canvas) by Barry, Jonathan (Contemporary Artist) Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library, Bram Stoker 1884 © Lordprice collection/Alamy. p.6 and 7: James Joyce © Mary Evans Picture Library/Alamy, James Joyce young man © Mary Evans Picture Library/Alamy, Tenement Room © Erich Hartmann/Magnum Photos. p.8 and 9: Oriental Bay 1890s © Alexander Turnbull Library, Katherine Mansfield 1916 © Alexander Turnbull library, Katherine Mansfield head and shoulders © Alexander Turnbull Library. p.10 and 11: Samuel Selvon © Ida Kar/Mary Evans Picture Library, Backs of Jamaican immigrants © Getty Images, Boat the “Windrush” with immigrants © Getty Images. p.12 and 13: London Soho © Getty Images, Zanzibar Island © HG/Magnum Photos, Abdulrazak Gurnah © Mark Pringle

Copyright © The Open University 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright holders.

Enquiries regarding extracts or the re-use of any information in this publication should be sent to The Open University’s Acquisitions and Licensing Department: email [Rights-General@openmail.open.ac.uk](mailto:Rights-General@openmail.open.ac.uk) or call 01908 653511

Edited by The Open University  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Belmont Press, Northampton

SUP017653

