

Without The Veil Between Pre-Publication Review by Mary Clark, literaryeyes.com

Early in Diane Denton's book the young curate, William Weightman, says to Anne Brontë: "You must find such satisfaction in being able to capture those moments the rest of us let slip away and sometimes aren't aware of to begin with." This is an essential part of Denton's own gift. With this ability she is able to enter the world of a shy artist who lived in the shadows of her father, brother, and sisters, and in the light of a determined and insightful intellect. Anne Brontë set herself a more difficult task than her famous sisters, Charlotte and Emily. She was on a course of an artist whose subject was her life. Making this even more difficult, she sought to achieve emotional and mental stability.

Denton shows us the tensions in the austere home of the Reverend Brontë, the hopes for and disappointment in his drunken son, Branwell, and the longings of the three sisters for a more fulfilling life. The sisters' books are populated with people who live large lives, with secret loves, deception, greed, passion, and loyalty. In this setting, quiet Anne makes her own way, exploring human relationships with a keen sense of morality and ethics. As a governess she has to be with people all day, at their beck and call, and can barely aspire to more. But as a true Brontë, she does aspire. Brief moments with the young curate open her heart to the possibility of love. And she dreams of opening a school with her sisters, and being in charge of her own life. William's sudden death from cholera plunges her into depression, but she concentrates on duty and endurance, and calls on her faith.

On return to her father's home, Anne witnesses Branwell's descent into drugs, sexual escapades, and fantasy. Denton writes, "To reside within the dissolution of principles and proper behavior without being party to it meant that constant vigilance was required, which left little time or inclination for make-believe." Anne realizes she will never be comfortable at home, able to escape into her writing as Emily has. She believes she will never be useful in society or at home unless she pursues a "well-cultivated mind and well-disposed heart," and "have the strength to help others be strong." Denton indicates these are the real-world issues she explores in her writing.

Denton builds the story of Anne's young life gradually, taking us through her thoughts and experiences as she matures. The tempo steps up with the three sisters together again at Haworth, after having been separated for a few years. Charlotte has an idea for a book of poetry featuring all of them. Emily balks, and Anne mediates between the two, securing Emily's participation. I found this one of the most fascinating parts of the book. The dynamics among these three gifted women sizzles on the page. Descriptions of Charlotte and Emily are haunting in their excellence.

Each woman changed literature and the way in which women were viewed in society. Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has been called one of the first feminist novels.

The book roars through the tragedies of Branwell's and Emily's deaths from consumption. Through all of this Anne faces reality with determination. She has come to believe she was meant to be "an observer, and given ... a quiet skill to extract lessons from what she saw. There was truth to be told, warnings to be issued, patience and prudence to instill in young women." She depicted people and society with realism, not romanticism. This book made me wonder what Anne Brontë's influence would have been had she lived to reach full maturity. Sadly, she died soon after her sister, Emily.

In *Without The Veil Between*, Denton's writing has reached its maturity as well. I kept copying excerpts and pasting them in a file for me to read, enjoy, and think about later. Whole passages are beautifully written: meticulous, poetic, luminous, and powerful. The ending, echoing the title, is especially brilliant. I can't think of anyone better suited to bring us into the world and the life of the sensitive, creative, and quietly courageous Anne Brontë.