



# *Saucy Pat*

## The life of Patrick Brontë

- father of the famous novelists

*"He ought never to have married. He did not like children."* **Elizabeth Gaskell**

Written by **Cenarth Fox**

Creator of

*The Real Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Crispie*

*Shakespeare the Musical, Aunt Georgy - The Private Life of Charles Dickens*

### Reviews of Saucy Pat

A wonderful evening of entertainment. **Peter Kemp**

Impressive research and an excellent performance. **Chris Gaffney**  
Congratulations. Extremely well told and a wonderful evening. **Glen McIntyre**

In a blend of exhaustive historical research and the art of storytelling, actor/playwright Cenarth Fox delivers a splendid and entertaining portrait of Patrick Brontë, progenitor of the famous literary sisters. Since "Saucy Pat" was an Anglican vicar, Fox assumes the identity of an Anglican priest who is writing a book about colourful men of the cloth, and his discoveries about Patrick Brontë reveal a life full of hardship, sadness and often unconventional behaviour. **Jim Murphy**

Superb presentation and a very enjoyable night. **Lynn Kimber**

I was engrossed in this production and returned to my seat after interval wanting to know more about Patrick Brontë. Cenarth Fox has written many plays during his career and I think this is probably his best work. *Saucy Pat* is of a very high standard and has international appeal. **Kevin Trask**

Very impressive. We thoroughly enjoyed it. **Barb Stewart**

*Saucy Pat* was great theatre and left us wanting more. The skill of the actor held us spellbound throughout. Cenarth Fox has produced a 'must see' performance in an inspiring play. It is brilliantly written and superbly brought to life - a great evening's entertainment. **Ken and Liz Launder**

Meticulous research and engaging, entertaining delivery. Immensely enjoyable.

**Cheryl Threadgold**

I loved the intimacy the script and setting created. It felt as though you were talking to me, only me, in your presbytery sitting room. I loved every part of the play.

**Veronica Hanneberry**

An excellent production where the audience are drawn into the moving account of Patrick Brontë on a memorable journey to a bygone era. **Friends of Labassa**

# Saucy Pat

*The life of Patrick Brontë*

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## Synopsis

*"She was trusted and valued by her father, loved and courted by all dogs, cats, children, and poor people, and slighted and neglected by everybody else."*

**Anne Brontë**

The Reverend Patrick Brontë was a remarkable chap. His parents were poor farming folk who lived some 30 miles south of Belfast in what is now Northern Ireland. They had ten kids and only their first-born, Patrick, left his homeland to live in England. Patrick did many remarkable things like largely teaching himself to read and winning a scholarship to Cambridge. But his eventful life was overtaken by some of his even more remarkable children. Patrick's life was dominated by tragedy and the artistic greatness of his three famous literary daughters.

Their novels are hugely popular. Millions of people have been to the Brontë village and what was their home in Haworth, Yorkshire. The tragic events which befell the Brontë family are arguably as well known as their publishing triumphs.

Their writing evolved despite enormous hardship and grief. And amidst all this stands their priestly papa. He was eccentric, determined, hard-working, brave, at times rash but always human. His faults make him all the more interesting. His legacy makes him someone to admire and love. You would do well to know the family Brontë and most certainly its patriarch, Patrick.

## First Performance

The world premiere of *Saucy Pat* was staged at the National Trust mansion Labassa in Melbourne, Australia in November 2011.

## Sources of Information

Several people have assisted in the writing of this play with comments on the material or the supply of photographs. I am indebted to Richard Bell, Roy Hammans, Bryan Yorke, Barbara Tanke, Phylly, and the University of Pennsylvania Library.

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### Costumes, Movement and Staging

The script is delivered by an actor, male or female, a mature-aged Anglican priest who has recently written an as yet unpublished biography of Patrick Brontë. The writer has shown the book to family members and been given some encouragement. So the biographer has decided to ‘do a Dickens’; to take the work on the road, read some excerpts and see what response the material elicits. Cue the audience.

The priest is enthusiastic about the book because of his or her enthusiasm about the subject; the performer’s love for the subject is overflowing. Hopefully it will be infectious so that the audience finds not only the actual story interesting but the writer’s passion for the subject of interest as well.

*Saucy Pat* can include a series of illustrations via an audio-visual display. The biography of Patrick contains readings of works by Patrick Brontë and Charles Dickens which could be pre-recorded even using another voice.

The presenter is a modern day Anglican priest dressed in appropriate clerical garb. He or she is not in fancy or ceremonial attire but usual day wear with clerical collar. He or she is writing a book *Forgotten or Famous Fathers*. This performance takes place in the present time. The presentation should be professional and flow effortlessly but the material is the key. The story of Patrick Brontë should dominate and shine throughout.

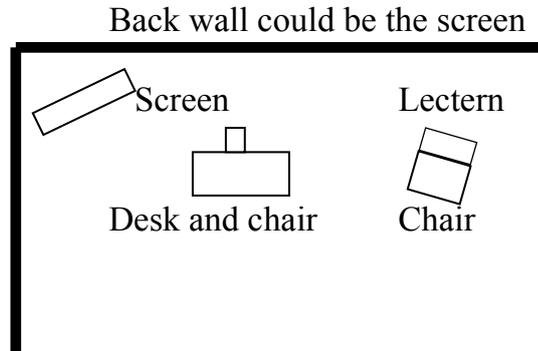
There is limited staging or movement required during the performance. The detailed content of the script, the voice of the narrator and the variety of screened photos should give the performance depth, variety and colour.

### Set Design

There is no set as such. You may wish to decorate the performing area with potted plants or with simple furniture from the Brontë time at Haworth – a writing desk for example. Otherwise the staging uses black cloths with a screen or wall for the photos, a lectern, a chair and a desk and a reading chair for the excerpts. If used, lighting would be dim to give the screen its best chance of showing photos although *Saucy Pat* can be performed in daytime without artificial theatrical lighting. In a theatre, you could use lighting on the lectern or chair as required. The lectern is behind the single chair but the lectern is not required until almost the very end of the play and need not appear until after interval.

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### Character

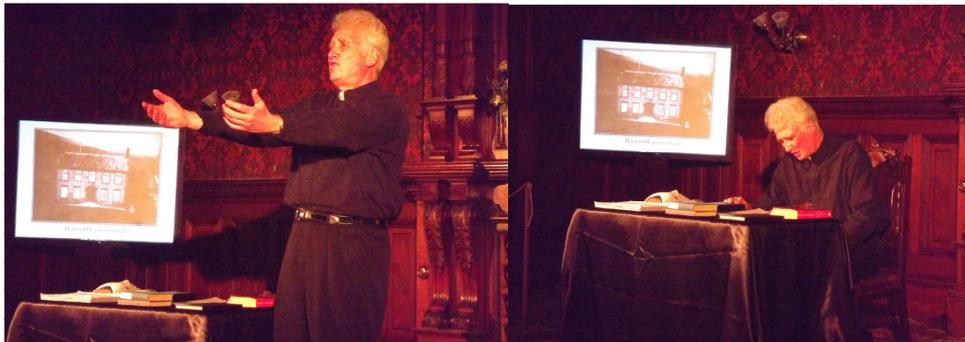
The character of the performer, the author/authoress of the biography, is open to interpretation. The character needs to be interesting but not so dramatic or overpowering as to take the spotlight away from the subject, the Reverend Patrick Brontë. It's one Anglican priest telling the life story of another Anglican priest.

The character is playing the part of an inexperienced biographer – this is his or her first book – but is a person with an interest in and a passion for all things Brontë. This enthusiasm for the subject should come through in the performance. The audience should catch the fire in the writer of his or her pet subject. The character is keen on the loves, the works, the life and times of the Brontë family but especially keen on its patriarch, Patrick.

The character therefore needs to be emotional at various times in the script. There are light-hearted times with amusing anecdotes and there are sad and moving times when personal tragedy is laid bare. The presenter is both a biographer and a storyteller.

There are sub-headings throughout the script in boxed bold type. They are not intended to be spoken but act as a guide for the performer and director when rehearsing.

The word **Photo** means at that point a new photo or picture is displayed.



Scenes from world premiere of *Saucy Pat*

### **Photo – The title of the play is shown – Saucy Pat**

*[Pre-show music of a religious type such as being performed by the choir at St John's College, Cambridge. This music could be performed from about 30 minutes before the play begins and continues as the audience enters and is seated. Once ready, a selected and short piece of appropriate music begins [again something from the choir at St John's College, Cambridge], the house lights dim and all goes black. Light comes up as the performer enters, music fades and the narration begins]*

### **PERFORMER**

*[Performer enters holding draft of the biography of Patrick Brontë and addresses audience]*

### **Introduction**

#### **Photo – Blank screen**

I've just discovered what's wrong with the world; we've stopped writing by hand. We're so busy typing our texts, tweets and emails ... emails! They alone mean today's post office is now a mini mart, philatelists an endangered species and tomorrow's biographers and historians will soon be devoid of any decent source material.

*[Refers to manuscript, confesses]* Oh yes, my Brontë manuscript was typed but to create it I first hand wrote masses of notes. I wrote in exercise books, on single sheets, the back of envelopes, post-it notes – I even scribbled in bedside-table notebooks at two in the morning. I was writing by hand.

I'm not advocating a return to the quill but if we spent more time handwriting than texting, we *might* resurrect our spelling and syntax skills and be forced to actually think about what we want to say.

*[Smiles]* Rant over. Good evening [afternoon]. As a retired Anglican vicar, I've decided to write about some of my fellow clergy each of whom has taken heavenly retirement. I've chosen clergy who are either famous or forgotten and my first cleric is a priest from the Emerald Isle, Patrick Brontë.

So is he famous or forgotten? Well if you read certain novels, you may have heard of him but otherwise, he's forgotten. And that's where my unpublished biography comes in. I plan to bring the old cleric roaring back to life.

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*[Referring to manuscript]* Ah, this is just a first draft and not having any publishing experience, I thought I might copy Charles Dickens, travel around and read my tome to willing audiences. *[Aghast]* Not the whole book. Good lord no, some of you have to be home by Tuesday.

But I'd love it if you could discover Patrick. To me he's ...

*[Placing manuscript on table, he spies two props – a potato and a bible]*

Ah! To me he's these. The potato his beginning, the Bible his life. Spuds and sermons. *[Puts down props]* But let's begin with his parents.

### **Parents**

Patrick's father was Hugh Brunty who was a bit like his fictional great-granddaughter Jane Eyre. As a young boy, Protestant Hugh grew up in the south of Ireland but was farmed out to cruel relatives who beat him. He suffered for years until, as a teenager, he ran away up north.

There he found work in a lime kiln and was such a good worker won promotion. But he was all alone until one Christmas a client invited Hugh home for a meal. It wasn't the grandest of mansions.

### **Photo - Alice's family home**

Hugh knocked on the door.

**FX**            *Live knocking on door or table*

There stood a beautiful young woman with the prettiest smile in County Down.

Her name was Alice and she and Hugh clicked but, as often happens, the course of true love never did run smooth. Alice was engaged to a fellow Catholic. Did that stop Hugh? Not on your Nellie. He lost his job at the lime kiln but still he courted Alice. Her family objected to Hugh and told him so in word and deed. *[Punches fist into hand]* They even warned the local priest not to marry them. Alice's wedding drew nigh.

**FX**            *Track 1 Audio Church bells*

But on the very day she was to wed her Catholic fiancé, she vanished. Her family sent out search parties. Where's Alice? Ah, Alice was in wonderland as she and Hugh became a runaway couple, married in a Protestant church.

### **Photo - Magherally Presbyterian church**

#### **Birth, Childhood**

So Patrick's parents were married and that meant the usual thing - babies. Hugh and Alice had ten, five of each with their first born the star of my biography. But what to call the boy? His birthday sealed the deal. In Ireland, a boy born on March the 17th is surely a Patrick.

### **Photo – St Patrick or March 17**

Catholic or Protestant, it makes no difference.

And the most famous Patrick is Ireland's Patron Saint who supposedly died on March the 17th, 493 and whose life we still celebrate today with parties, parades and giant jugs of green beer.

So my first clerical candidate was born on St Patrick's Day 1777. At the time Captain Cook was discovering Down Under, George Washington was battling the Brits near Boston, Mozart was churning out choons, and in England, Londoners were queuing, in the rain, to see Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*.

Ah but across the Irish Sea in County Down and the parish of Drumballyroney, Patrick Brunty was born. His father was a farm labourer and the first family home was not so much a two up and two down as simply a two.

### **Photo – Patrick's parents' cottage**

Patrick's parents were poor. They grew potatoes on a few acres and did their best with a growing family. Patrick got hooked on reading and read and re-read the meagre family library of the Bible, poetry by Burns and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He went to the local school.

### **Photo – Drumballyroney School**

The family kept growing and moved to a larger home.

**Early life**

Patrick left school and started work. He was a weaver and a blacksmith but he always longed for more education and never went out unless he took a book.

*[Picks up book]* On a trip to Belfast, he bought a copy of Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Patrick loved poetry. Alone in the woods he read aloud to the trees of Ireland. *[Reading]*

**FX**           Track 2 *Sounds of nature*

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat.

But he wasn't alone. *[Puts down book]* By chance a Presbyterian clergyman, overheard the teenager and offered the 16 year old Patrick Brunty a teaching job in a local school. The kids loved this enthusiastic young man with the bright red hair. He took them on excursions to local places. He made education come alive.

He, he ... he was also human and perhaps didn't understand the expression *in loco parentis* when he took a shine to one of his female students who was almost as old as her teacher. Behind a haystack the teenage couple were canoodling when Patrick made an elementary mistake in the art of seduction. He got caught.

And what's worse, he was sprung by the girl's father, an elder in the church. Pat's passion got him the sack and closed the school.

Ah, but the luck of the Irish saw Pat fall on his feet. Another clergyman, the Reverend Thomas Tighe, gave Pat both employment and education.

And this new mentor was a university graduate who saw Pat's potential. He taught the young man Greek, Latin, history and theology. He encouraged Pat to think about the priesthood. The years went by and the untrained teacher applied for university.

**FX**           Track 3 Choir King's College Cambridge *Hallelujah*

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Hallelujah, great news, wonderful news that the son of poor, uneducated parents from a rural backwater had won a place at university. And not at some minor establishment, some unheard of third-rate college. Patrick Brunty was accepted by one of the world's oldest and most prestigious seats of learning - Cambridge University.

### **Photo – Cambridge University**

He won a scholarship as a sizar. They got free board and reduced fees.

He was 25, single and almost broke. He'd barely travelled more than 30 miles from home in his whole life. But in 1802 Patrick Brunty set sail for England.

### **University**

Imagine the Cambridge setting. Imagine the common room on his first day.

**FX**            Track 4 Hubbub of voices

There's Patrick. He's wearing plain, homemade clothes, has bright red hair, is almost 10 years older than the other students and speaks with a strong Irish accent. Does he stand out? Does he ever?

His fellow students included 34 gentlemen and 7 nobles. The noblemen had their own dining-room and were entitled to take their degree without the inconvenience of sitting for exams. Such an exemption did not apply to poor Irish blacksmiths.

Most of his fellow students were wealthy. Some had a title. And alongside these nobles and gentlemen from the likes of Eton, Harrow, Winchester and Charterhouse stood the Irish potato farmer's son from Drumballyrone.

Did he survive? Survive? He started with his studies, soldiering and signature.

Now the Cambridge records show a Mr. P. Branty enrolled at St John's College. Branty? Was the bursar drunk or deaf? [*Imitating bursar*] "What's that? Branty you say, Branty?"

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Was Patrick's Irish accent *too* broad? We'll never know *exactly* why but at Cambridge Patrick changed his name from Brunty to Brontë.

Then his soldiering. The university had a student militia with drills, marching and use of firearms. Patrick was one of the best within the corps and made friends with a fellow student Henry Temple who, as Lord Palmerston, went on to become the British prime minister [*Slight bow*] - twice.

And finally his studies. Patrick was brilliant. At the end of his first year he was in the top group. The same for each of his four years and very few students achieved that distinction. And he won academic prizes and scholarships.

### **Photo – William Wilberforce**

He was funded by the famous anti-slavery advocate William Wilberforce who heard of Patrick's successful studies and interest in the church.

So Patrick graduated, was ordained in the Anglican Church and was appointed as curate to the church of St Mary Magdalene in Wethersfield, Essex.

### **Photo – St Mary Magdalene, Wethersfield, Essex**

### **Priest and Poet**

Meet the Reverend Patrick Brontë, [*Irish accent*] the Irishman done good. [*Normal accent*] But does he really want to be a priest? Well, yes and no, you see he also wants to write. Patrick loves poetry and in-between weddings, funerals and anything, he puts pen to paper. [*Picks up book*]

Was he any good? [*Shrugs*] Four of his children became published poets and maybe they got some of their ideas and inspiration from reading the many, many published poems of their dear old dad.

### **Photo – Cover of Cottage Poems**

*[Reads one of Patrick's poems possibly in Irish accent]*

**THE HAPPY COTTAGERS**

By Patrick Brontë

*One sunny morn of May,  
When dressed in flowery green  
The dewy landscape, charmed  
With Nature's fairest scene,  
In thoughtful mood  
I slowly strayed  
O'er hill and dale,  
Through bush and glade.*

There are only another 31 verses ... *[Looks at audience, pauses and then re-starts by turning to another page]* perhaps not.

**THE RAINBOW**

By Patrick Brontë

*The shower is past, and the sky  
O'erhead is both mild and serene,  
Save where a few drops from on high,  
Like gems, twinkle over the green:  
And glowing fair, in the black north,  
The rainbow o'erarches the cloud;  
The sun in his glory comes forth,  
And larks sweetly warble aloud.*

Patrick was torn between his love of the romantic and the strict requirements of his religious calling. Did one cancel the other?

**THE COTTAGE MAID**

By Patrick Brontë

*Aloft on the brow of a mountain,  
And hard by a clear running fountain,  
In neat little cot,  
Content with her lot,  
Retired, there lives a sweet maiden.*

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*[Puts down book. NARRATOR recites a limerick s/he has composed. In an Irish accent?]*

I've written some doggerel about my subject. *[Clearing throat]*

*There once was strange Irish blighter  
Who fancied himself as a writer  
He churned out the stuff  
Till the fan cried, 'Enough!  
Just stick to y'sermons and mitre ... you blighter.*

### Photo – The Reverend Brontë [Saucy Pat]

#### **Love and Marriage**

In Patrick's day, one important step in the life of any Anglican clergyman was the acquisition of a wife. The *earthly* trinity Patrick faced was priesthood, parish and pal. He had the first two but not the third.

That was until the teenage Mary Burder hove into view. She was lovely, lived out of town and came to visit her spinster aunt, Patrick's landlady. Pat and Mary walked out. They hit it off. But oh, Paddy, Paddy, Paddy, get the family's blessing first.

He didn't and copped a serious blast from Mary's guardian and uncle.

*[The irate uncle]*

"Who is your family? Where is your family? You've got no land, no money and no prospects. You're C of E and our Mary's a Congregationalist; but worst of all, you're Irish!"

Pat was in trouble. He told Mary he loved her and that was as good as a promise. What should he do? He thought long and hard then chose discretion over valour and left town for good. That decision would return to haunt him.

He spent a year in Shropshire before moving to Yorkshire. Ah Yorkshire, *[Yorkshire accent]* county of trouble at mill, harsh winters and harsh words. *[Normal accent]* And in Patrick's time, the county of rebellion.

### **Photo – Luddites**

When Patrick was born, an angry young Englishman, Ned Ludd, took a hammer to some knitting machines and when the Industrial Revolution put thousands of weavers out of work, some of them took to destroying the new equipment. They became known as Luddites and Patrick Brontë was living in a war zone.

**FX**           Track 5 Fight scene

*[Lighting dims as scene is played at night]*

One night Patrick was woken by strange sounds. Creeping past his bedroom window were local folk, sacked workers carrying crude weapons. They headed for the mill. Patrick crept out and watched in disbelief.

Suddenly all hell broke loose. The workers attacked the mill not knowing the mill owner had soldiers inside. Screams filled the night air as gunfire rained down on the protesters. Some were killed, many injured.

But worse was to follow as the survivors were arrested and tried with seventeen executed and the others transported to Australia. Then a local wool merchant was murdered in cold blood and from that day on, Patrick Brontë always slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow.

*[Lighting returns to normal]*

### **Photo – Woodhouse Grove School**

But not all was doom and gloom when Patrick was asked to examine some boys at a nearby Methodist school. It was a 12 mile walk to Woodhouse Grove but the journey to Patrick seemed but a hop, skip and a jump when he met the headmaster's wife's niece.

Hooley Dooley, this was the real thing. Similar age, shared love of writing and religion with family and friends all supporting the couple. *[Fires imaginary arrow]* Patrick finally hit the romantic jackpot.

*No sooner met but they looked;  
No sooner looked but they loved.*

But who was she? Ah, *she* was Maria Branwell.

### **Photo – Maria Branwell**

And this was a marriage made in heaven as her love letters attest. They began ‘My Dear Friend’, then ‘My Dearest Friend’ then ‘My Dear Saucy Pat’. Apparently he deserved such a greeting having again acted outrageously when he ‘stole a kiss’.

### **Photo – Saucy Pat 2**

So Patrick and Maria were married in St Oswald’s church, Guiseley, [*Guys-lee*] West Yorkshire and like most newlyweds of the day soon started a family. Maria was one of 12 and Patrick one of 10 so big families were in fashion. Before long, daughters Maria then Elizabeth were born.

**FX**            Track 6 *Sound of children*

### **Photo – The house where the children were born**

Patrick was appointed to Thornton near Bradford and here the Brontë family grew with the birth of daughter Charlotte, their only son Branwell and then daughters Emily and Anne.

But one more move remained. One more parish. One more church in one more village; the unknown village but which today is universally regarded as the home of the Brontës - Haworth.

### **Photo –Haworth parsonage**

#### **Haworth**

Now I’m sure you won’t be surprised if I told you that politics was alive and well in the Anglican Church in Yorkshire in 1820.

Haworth had a vacancy and the vicar of Bradford reckoned he had the right to appoint the new curate. The locals, the trustees or parish council at Haworth were all born and bred Yorkshire men and the one thing they couldn’t abide was somebody telling them what to do.

So when the vicar of Bradford ignored the locals and appointed his choice of curate to Haworth, one Patrick Brontë, there was trouble. Patrick sensed this and declined the Haworth appointment. *[Taps nose with finger]* Wise move. So in came another Bradford selection and the locals reacted in true Yorkshire style.

**FX**           Track 7 *Crowd sounds*

Meet the new curate, the Reverend Samuel Redhead. He arrived for Sunday's service and the church was packed. This looked promising. Then just as he started to speak the entire congregation arose and stomped out of the church.

### **Photo – Early Haworth church**

Next week Sam was back. Again the church was packed. This time no walkout but suddenly the doors flew open and in came a local, riding on a donkey.

The worshippers erupted and the curate fled. Ah, but third time lucky. The next Sunday Mr Redhead came with heavies.

### **Photo – Haworth church interior**

The church was packed. Up in the pulpit the nervous cleric began to speak. He had cause to be nervous when from the front row, a chimney sweep, covered in soot and ash, arose, climbed into the pulpit and *kissed* the terrified priest.

Pandemonium! This time the Reverend Redhead fled, never to return with the locals' catcalls ringing in his ears.

The vicar of Bradford backed down and the locals invited Patrick Brontë to become the new curate at Haworth and this time he accepted.

The parsonage was bigger, spacious gardens, two privies with the majestic moors beyond. Here Patrick and Maria could raise their six children. At last Patrick was home.

### **Photo – Haworth church or moors**

## **Death**

*[Lighting dims]*

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Each of us knows someone who has been affected by cancer. Even today with progress in medical science the disease is still a powerful foe. Imagine what it was like for people with cancer hundreds of years ago.

A few months after settling in Haworth, Patrick's wife was in pain. Maria had cancer of the uterus and her suffering was horrendous. Her sister Elizabeth came from Cornwall to help with the children. Patrick hired a local woman to act as carer for Maria by day. By night he sat with his wife.

These were dreadful times. Upstairs Maria was afraid to cry out in case she frightened her six young children. Downstairs her six young children were told to be quiet as dear Mama was poorly. Dear Mama longed to hold her young ones but dreaded them seeing her wasted, wretched body.

What could Patrick do? He could pray. *[Kneels and prays]* "Heavenly Father, my wife is dying. If it pleases thee, spare her, O Lord, and grant her peace."

As Maria's illness grew worse, Patrick dismissed the local woman; he wanted only family to witness the final days. That dismissal would return to haunt him.

*[Kneeling]* As he knelt by his wife's bed, she begged his help. "Patrick, promise you will care for all our children." Of course he gave such a promise. But why did she have to suffer? Why did she have to die? Why did God allow this to happen?

*[Standing as lighting returns to normal]*

### **Another wife**

#### **Photo – Elizabeth Branwell**

Maria died and was buried in the crypt beneath the church. Patrick was devastated and now how could he alone raise six young children? He couldn't marry his wife's sister because, at the time, both church and state law decreed such a union incestuous.

He needed a new wife. But who? And who would want an impoverished parson with six kids in freezing Yorkshire? He proposed to three women without success. The last was Mary Burder, the then teenager he walked out on in Essex all those years ago. She told him precisely what he could with his proposal.

So sister-in-law Elizabeth, known as Bess to Patrick and as Aunt Branwell to the children, remained at Haworth and became a fine mother substitute for her nephew and five nieces.

### **Photo – Cowan Bridge school 1**

And things took a turn for the good when Patrick saw an ad in the newspaper. ‘School for Clergymen’s Daughters’. Reduced fees, full board, patron William Wilberforce, he who supported Patrick at Cambridge, and headmaster, the Reverend William Carus Wilson, well-known evangelical clergyman. This was perfect for Patrick’s five girls.

### **Photo – Cowan Bridge school 2**

He took daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, to the new school at Cowan Bridge, some 40 miles away; he dined with the pupils and stayed the night. Everything was tickety-boo.

### **Photo – Cowan Bridge school plaque**

A few months later he took Charlotte and Emily to join their older sisters meaning there were now four Brontë girls at school together. But what was it really like?

### **Nicholas Nickleby**

When the Brontë sisters began their education at Cowan Bridge, 12 year old Charles Dickens was working as a child labourer in London for a man called Bob Fagin. [*Picking up book*]

### **Photo – Charles Dickens**

Years later and using a false name, the novelist travelled to Yorkshire to investigate school conditions and from such research came part of his novel, *Nicholas Nickleby* with Dotheboys Hall, its evil proprietor Wackford Squeers and his equally odious wife.

### **Photo – Nicholas Nickleby 1**

**FX**            **Tk 8** wind/rain during reading from *Nicholas Nickleby*

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*[Lights could dim and concentrate on the pictures on screen. Sound effects are used to support the reading making this segment a mini play within the play. Narrator reads]*

'Yes' rejoined Squeers. 'We purify the boys' bloods now and then, Nickleby.'

'Fiddlesticks,' said Mrs Squeers. 'We don't want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone and treacle because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner.'

Now, the fact was, both Mr and Mrs Squeers considered their business was to get as much from every boy as could be screwed out of him.

Nicholas assisted his master and Squeers, arming himself with his cane, led the way to a door in the rear of the house. 'This is our shop, Nickleby!'

### **Photo – Nicholas Nickleby 2**

It was such a crowded scene, a bare and dirty room with a couple of windows. The walls were so stained and discoloured, it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash.

But the pupils--the young noblemen! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies.

### **Photo – Nicholas Nickleby 3**

There were little faces which should have been handsome; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping and lonesome even in their loneliness.

What an incipient Hell was breeding here!

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*[Nicholas Nickleby extract ends and narrator resumes]*

*Nicholas Nickleby* is fiction, a novel by Charles Dickens. But the school at Cowan Bridge was real.

And while the fictional school was a hell hole run by a rogue, the real school was a hell hole run by a rector, a man of the cloth. Naturally Patrick expected his daughters would receive the best in care and education. How wrong he was. Cowan Bridge was Dotheboys Hall in real life.

### **Photo – Cowan Bridge School 3 [black and white]**

At Cowan Bridge there was insufficient food, it was rancid and badly cooked. The rooms were freezing. The girls rose at dawn to break the ice on their water bowl before an hour or more of prayer. Discipline was harsh and cruel. The girls were beaten and on Sundays made to walk two miles to church in all weathers.

### **Photo – Church**

In damp even wet clothes they stayed in the freezing building all day before walking home after two services often featuring the school's headmaster.

### **Photo – Church interior**

The Reverend Carus Wilson did not believe in sparing the rod and made such an impression on Charlotte Brontë, he came to life as the brutal headmaster in her novel *Jane Eyre*.

### **Photo – Carus Wilson**

The girls at Cowman Bridge were constantly reminded of sin. Crying children could be struck dead by God. Evil children went straight to the fires of hell. *[Picks up book]* And for bedtime reading, the headmaster, a clergyman, would favour the students by reading one of the children's stories he himself had written.

*[Dim lights. Actor could use torch as he reads]*

*'Do look at that bad child. Oh how cross she looks. And oh what a sad tale I have to tell you of her. She was in such a rage that all at once God struck her dead. She fell down on the floor and died. No time to pray. No time to call on God to save her poor soul. She left the world in the midst of her sin. And oh where do you think she is now? I do not like to think of it. But we know that when they die, bad girls go to hell.'*

*[Snaps book closed] Sleep tight, girls. [Lights return to normal, book put down]*

Patrick had no idea of the appalling conditions at Cowan Bridge until the day a letter arrived. *[Mimes reading letter]*

*Dear Mr. Brontë*

*I am sorry to say your daughter Maria is unwell.*

What? Patrick grabbed his coat and hat and raced from the parsonage. "Take the carrier," cried Bess but he was gone. He ran to Keighley and boarded the coach.

**FX**            *Tk 9 Horses*

*[Sitting on single chair and bouncing en route]* It was many miles of bumpy roads. His mind was racing. What is wrong with Maria? Has she seen a doctor? I promised her mother I would care for our children. Oh come on, driver, faster, faster!

### **Photo – Cowan Bridge school 3**

He jumped from the coach and raced into the school. "Where is my daughter?" he cried then burst into her room. She smiled with delight at the sight of her dear Papa but Patrick's heart was crushed.

He knelt and cradled his darling girl, her nightdress splashed with blood. She was but skin and bone. Oh God, thought Patrick, not again!

Then Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily burst into the room. They smothered their father with kisses and tears ran like rain.

But Patrick had no choice. *[Mimes picking up Maria]* He wrapped Maria in a coat and blanket and carried her to the coach for the journey home. Imagine that trip. His heart was breaking. He left the other girls behind and returned to Haworth. *[Kneeling]* There the routine he performed for Maria his dying wife he repeated for Maria his dying daughter.

### **Photo – Haworth parsonage**

Young Maria had consumption, TB, the dreaded lung disease which then was fatal. For weeks Patrick and Bess doted on the pathetic child. She wasted away and died aged 11, joining her mother in the family crypt beneath the church.

Patrick was shattered. He struggled on performing his religious duties. His grief was raw, his life a mess. Things could not be worse.

Then, only days after Maria's funeral, came a knock. *[Actor taps on table]* Patrick opened the door to a staff member from Cowan Bridge with daughter Elizabeth. Home delivery. *[Imitating staff worker]* "Here, this time we saved you the trip."

Not again! Yes, again! Consumption again. Daughter number two was wretched, coughing blood, dying. Patrick's pain was unbearable. Elizabeth was home but a fortnight when she died in her father's arms. How much can one man take? Time to open the family crypt for Brontë number three. Time to mourn. No, time to act.

Patrick set off to collect Charlotte and Emily. He brought them home with a steely determination to protect and educate his remaining four children. The parsonage became Fortress Haworth, College Haworth and it would be many years before any Brontë child ever left home again.

### **The Brontës in Haworth**

Home tuition from Patrick and Bess with the children isolated from the village. And with good cause.

In Haworth almost half the children died before they were 6. Average life expectancy was about 25 and the town water supply was so polluted even the cattle refused to drink it. Consumption, cholera and typhus were rife with the parsonage a sanctuary for Patrick's children.

But *he* still went out. *He* still went into homes where the sick and dying coughed and vomited. Patrick buried and baptised at a rapid rate. He would baptise up to 30 in a single service not knowing who might die tomorrow.

### **Photo – Miniature book**

But back in the parsonage the children began to write and draw. It was the start of an amazing period in the life of this amazing family. The children's work was spectacular in scope and detail. They created characters and stories in imaginary cities in imaginary lands. They self-published their tales using old wallpaper and sugar bags to make miniature books. They wrote using miniscule writing and created hundreds of stories.

But why? What triggered this outpouring of literature and art? Two things - soldiers and a mask. Patrick gave his son a box of toy soldiers which he shared with his sisters.

### **Photo – Some old toy soldiers**

These soldiers came alive. They became young men with names, lives and adventures. On the moors they fought battles to feed the vivid imaginations of their young human owners. The children became fantastic at fantasy. But why?

In the early days at Haworth, Patrick would gather his children and ask questions. They dealt with history, philosophy and human nature. Patrick's clever idea was to use a mask. [*Collects mask*]

### **Photo – A mask**

Each child would be asked a question then given the mask before they replied.

[*As Patrick*] Anne: What does a child need most? [*Mask up and speaking as a child*] Age and experience.

[*As Patrick*] Charlotte: What is the best book in the world? [*Mask up as child*] The Bible and the Book of Nature.

[*As Patrick*] Emily: Sometimes your brother is a naughty boy. What should I do with him? [*Mask up as child*] Reason with him and if he won't listen, whip him.

## Saucy Pat - 23

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*[Mask down]* So now we see the seeds of their vivid imagination. Patrick educated them *and* encouraged them to think. He plied them with books, magazines and newspapers. He held family discussions. And from this background came their world of writing, their hundreds of characters and tales. What a magnificent foundation for their writing of tomorrow.

But after six years of home tuition, the children were growing up and would soon leave home. And with that, *[Turning mask upside down]* Patrick's life would be turned upside down.\*

**Photo – Blank screen**

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**FX**            *Tk 10 Music [it fades]*

Well I don't know about you, but I could sure do with a cuppa+. *[Starts to exit]*  
Come on. Let's see if the kettle's boiling. *[Exits]*

**Photo – The title of the play, the word 'Saucy Pat' [Slide 1]**

+ *The word 'cuppa' is short for a cup of tea.*

**End of Act 1**

*[If an interval is not required you simply continue after \* above and pick up at \* below. If you do have an interval you perform the entire script]*

Act 2

**Photo – The title of the play, the words ‘Saucy Pat’**

**FX**            *Tk 11 Music [it fades]*

**Leaving Home**

*[Actor enters]*

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\*Teenagers. They weren't invented until the 1950s but don't try telling that to Patrick Brontë. He home schooled his kids for six years but sooner or later they'd fly the nest. And when they did, his world would never be the same again. He farewelled his children.

**Photo – Four children**

*[As Patrick farewelling Charlotte]* “Goodbye Charlotte. Your new school is much closer to home and nothing like that dreadful Cowan Bridge.” *[As narrator]* Charlotte went to boarding school and was so talented she became a teacher there enabling her sisters to enrol as students.

*[As Patrick shaking hands with Branwell]* “Branwell, my boy, my hope for the future. Time to show the world the skill of your art.” *[As narrator]* Patrick arranged his son's entrée to the Royal Academy in London. Branwell headed south but squibbed it even failing to enrol. He came home and took odd jobs.

He painted some portraits, published some poems, got the sack as a railway clerk and, as a tutor to a young child took a fancy to the boy's mother and was sent home in disgrace. Patrick had one seriously sad son.

*[As Patrick farewelling daughters]* “Now my girls, study hard and don't forget to write to your Papa.” *[As narrator]* Patrick escorted Charlotte and Emily to Belgium where they would study French. Patrick returned to Haworth leaving Charlotte to fall in love with her teacher, a married man. She caught the disease of unrequited love and, later, back in Haworth, waited in vain for a reply to her letters. Patrick had one seriously sad daughter.

*[As Patrick comforting Emily]* “My darling girl, of course you don’t have to return to Belgium. Haworth is your home.” *[As narrator]* Emily was a loner who loved nature, the moors and dogs. As a teacher she once told her pupils she preferred the school pooch to them. Whenever away from home, she longed for Haworth. Patrick had one seriously homesick daughter.

*[As Patrick comforting Anne]* “My dear child, I am so sorry. He was such a fine young man.” *[As actor]* Anne, the youngest, the sensible one, the governess, fell in love with Patrick’s assistant curate, Willie Weightman. But the young priest caught cholera and died. Patrick’s youngest child wept in private and he had another seriously sad daughter.

So sending his children out into the world did not bring happiness to Patrick. And his misery increased when his helpmate, his good friend, his dear sister-in-law became seriously ill.

**Bess**

### **Photo – Aunt Branwell**

Aunt Branwell had served Patrick’s family for more than twenty years. She was loyal, devoted, grumpy and kind but the sisters Branwell suffered the same fate. Maria died of cancer of the uterus and Elizabeth, cancer of the bowel. Like her sister, Elizabeth suffered horrendous pain and for days, Patrick could but hold her hand, thank her profusely and pray for God’s mercy.

Nephew Branwell was desolate when his aunt died. He wrote, “*I have lost the guide and director of all the happy days of my childhood.*”

But what of Patrick? His sister-in-law dead, his young adult children unhappy and now *his* health began to fail. Over several years his eyesight became worse. He needed others to read to him. Blindness beckoned.

### **Photo – Branwell**

And to make matters worse, son Branwell went completely off the rails. Maybe his lack of artistic success pushed him to drink and drugs. More pressure for Patrick who was so worried he made Branwell share his room. And at night Patrick would collect his drunken son who staggered home from the pub. The combination of cataracts and cider saw the blind leading the blind drunk.

But Patrick was a fighter and not interested in self-pity. With daughter Charlotte, he set off to Manchester for a cataract operation; no anaesthetic. It was a success. And all the while he was recuperating, his son was drinking while his daughters wrote novels.

### **Novels and death**

And what did Patrick think when his daughters found writing success? What did he think when their novels were published? Or when they became popular? Or when Charlotte became the toast of the literary world?

Well if he celebrated his daughters, he despaired over his son. Branwell became desperately ill. *[Kneels]* “Heavenly Father, my son is dying. If it pleases thee, spare him, O Lord, and grant him peace.”

It wasn't to be. *[Rises]*

Just as the talents of his three daughters began to bloom, Patrick's life was again in turmoil with the death of his boy.

Branwell was 31 and the first of Patrick's children to die since those terrible days at Cowan Bridge. Memories came flooding back. Did Patrick grow to hate his own church? His wife, sister-in-law and three of his children were now lying beneath the church. How cruel, how soul-destroying was the sight and smell when that crypt was opened again and again.

But if he thought things were bad then, he had no idea how worse they would become. Behold the outrageous paradox. The success of his daughters was matched by the success of their consumption. As their books prospered, their health collapsed.

### **Photo – Emily**

Emily was independent and refused a doctor. With her dog Keeper by her side, she suffered in silence but in the end her pain was too great. Medical care was useless. *[Kneeling]* Again Patrick was forced to watch, weep and pray for a loved but dying member of his family. Emily was 30.

**Photo – Keeper**

Her dog Keeper went everywhere with Emily. He went to church for her funeral then, after she was buried, sat outside her bedroom door and howled for two weeks.

**Photo – Anne**

Then Anne, the youngest, only 29, her consumption was just as insidious. Charlotte took her to the seaside, to Scarborough and before she died, the sisters agreed Anne would be buried away from Haworth because ‘poor Papa could not bear to bury another of his children’.

**Photo – Anne’s grave**

Charlotte returned to Haworth to live with her father. Imagine the parsonage. The dogs quiet, the house quiet, the world quiet. Patrick lost three of his adult children in eight months. Did this affect his mind? Did this grieving change his behaviour?

I think so. I think his grief affected his behaviour.

**Photo – Charlotte**

And I mention his mental state because of Patrick’s reaction when he finally received some good news. Charlotte agreed to marry Patrick’s assistant curate, the Reverend Arthur Nicholls. At last, Patrick had something to celebrate.

Instead of a funeral, a wedding. Instead of death, life. Instead of misery, joy. But this is where things didn’t quite go as expected. Patrick’s behaviour was strange. He opposed Charlotte’s wish to marry.

“But I love him, Papa,” said Charlotte.

*[As Patrick]* “Love him? He’s but a lowly curate with nothing to offer. You are a famous and feted novelist with your own income and a glorious future. You can’t marry him, he’s Irish!”

**FX**            *Tk 12 Church bells*

But Charlotte *did* marry Arthur and in the Haworth church.

So, Patrick finally relented and gave Charlotte his blessing. No. So, Patrick gave away his daughter on her wedding day. No. So, Patrick officiated at his daughter’s wedding in his own church. No. Well at least he sat in the front pew? Any pew? *[Shakes head]*

Patrick Brontë didn’t attend his daughter’s wedding. He remained in the parsonage while next door Charlotte walked down the aisle and was wed. Could Patrick hear the bells? Or the cheering when the happy couple came out of the church?

Maybe he didn’t attend because he couldn’t bear such happiness taking place above the family crypt. And maybe this ‘unusual’ behaviour drove many to say he was eccentric and worse, cruel, vindictive, mad.

**Mrs. Gaskell**

*[Fetches book]*

Let me read you something. It’s from a well-known Victorian novelist.

**Photo – Elizabeth Gaskell 1**

*[Reading]* Their dress is very independent of fashion; as they observe, “What does it signify how we dress here, where everybody knows us?” And if they go from home, their reason is equally cogent, “What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us?” The materials of their clothes are, in general, good and plain, but I will answer for it, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford.  
*[Stops reading]*

That was a passage from *Cranford* by the Victorian novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. She was prolific, writing such novels as *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Cranford*; short stories some of which were published in a magazine edited by Charles Dickens and the biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

But more of Mrs Gaskell later as we return to Haworth and Patrick who is now sharing the parsonage with Charlotte and her husband.

### **Photo – Charlotte and Arthur**

Patrick is growing old. He's in his late 70s in a village where average life expectancy was about 25. He performed his parish duties assisted by his son-in-law.

Charlotte's literary success continued and for once, Patrick's life seemed free from care but that was not to last. Charlotte became pregnant and suffered badly from morning sickness with fainting spells and malnourishment. Then she caught cold.

Patrick could but despair as the last of his six children grew ever weaker.

*[Kneels]* "Heavenly Father, my daughter is dying. If it pleases thee, spare her, O Lord, and grant her peace."

Only a few months after her wedding, Charlotte Brontë and her unborn child were buried in the Haworth church crypt. The official cause of death was again the dreaded consumption. Did Patrick run out of grief?

### **Photo – Patrick Brontë**

*[Rises]* He'd lost his entire family and now shared the parsonage with his son-in-law, housekeeper and the dogs, Cato and Plato. What a sad and lonely place. Two clergymen in a near empty parsonage, preaching in a church above their dead and buried loved ones.

Every worship service, every marriage, baptism and funeral conducted above all those Brontë bodies.

But Patrick had one last request. He wanted the memory of his talented daughter Charlotte recorded for posterity and so invited the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell to write the biography.

### Photo – Elizabeth Gaskell 2

Mrs. Gaskell agreed and wrote a book which told the world of the brilliant Charlotte Brontë. But it also told the world that Patrick Brontë was not the world's best father.

In fact the book painted Patrick as ..... [*Fetches book*] Let me read what Elizabeth Gaskell wrote.

### Photo – Patrick Bronte 2

[*Reading*] “He is a tall fine old looking man with silver bristles all over his head; nearly blind. He was very polite and agreeable to me but I was sadly afraid of him in my inmost soul; for I caught a glance of his stern eyes over his spectacles which made me know my man. He ought never to have married. He did not like children and the consequent family disorder made him shut himself up and want no companionship.”

“He ought never to have married and didn't like children.”

Strange, I thought he loved children and clearly adored his own. But Mrs. Gaskell said more. [*Finds notes inside book*] I've made a list of her Patrick comments published in Charlotte's biography.

[*Reading*]

- The Reverend Brontë had a dreadful temper
- He was prone to wild behaviour
- He once cut the sleeves from his wife's silk dress
- He chopped the legs off chairs
- He set fire to his children's coloured boots
- He set fire to a hearth rug and
- He refused to allow his children to eat meat

Well, she certainly gave Patrick a serve. But why? And more importantly, was she right? I suggest these are the background facts.

One. Patrick encouraged Charlotte to mix with people.

Two. This enabled Charlotte to meet Mrs. Gaskell.

Three. Patrick invited Mrs. Gaskell to write the biography.

Four. Patrick gave Mrs. Gaskell every assistance with her research.

Five. Mrs. Gaskell accused Patrick of some dreadful things and ....

Six. That makes me mad.

### **Speech**

I think everyone dreams. I dream; day dreams mostly and one dream I have is that a letter will arrive, *[Goes to desk to get envelope]* a real letter mind, with a real handwritten signature. *[Opens envelope and takes out letter]*

*[Prepares to read letter]* In my dream I'll start to read this letter and then ....

**FX**            *Tk 13 King's College Choir [it fades]*

*[Excited]* Cambridge University! Me? *[Finds and puts on academic gown]* I can't believe it. This is fantastic. *[Starts searching]* Where's my passport? Where's my costume? *[Panics]* Where's my speech?

*[Lighting change to concentrate on lectern. Could possibly have light on lectern shining onto face of reader. Narrator slips on academic gown]*

### **Photo – Cambridge University 2**

*[Moves to lectern to make a speech. Addressing audience at St John's College]*

Master, Fellows, students and friends, as part of your 500th anniversary celebrations, I am delighted to deliver the inaugural Patrick Brontë Oration.

What a privilege to stand in St John's College, Cambridge where once the young Irishman stood and speak of his great but unknown achievements.

I have entitled my speech, 'Mrs. Gaskell goofed'.

Elizabeth Gaskell is highly regarded as a writer and she it was who gave us the term that something unique to Charles Dickens was 'Dickensy'.

But today I will not discuss her novels or Dickensy donation but rather her Brontë biography and while I applaud Mrs. Gaskell for her insights into the Brontës, I challenge her comments about the family patriarch.

I believe the writer

- used both falsehoods and selective research and
- ignored the clergyman's finer points

The falsehoods are easily exposed. To claim the children were not allowed meat is nonsense. The parsonage was overrun with dogs, the children clearly described their carnivorous diet and staff spoke often of regular meat dishes.

The fact that Patrick at times ate alone is well known but why? Mrs. Gaskell should have known of Patrick's lifelong digestive problems beginning with his childhood diet of buttermilk and potatoes. His absence from meals may simply have shown his wish not to offend fellow diners.

Then to her selective research.

When Mrs. Brontë was dying, Patrick employed a local woman to care for his wife. With death close, he dismissed the carer not wanting a stranger involved in so private a matter.

The sacked carer clearly bore a grudge.

But what of the women who worked for Patrick for years? Nancy Garrs lived with the Brontës at Thornton *and* Haworth and described Patrick as 'the kindest man who ever drew breath'. Mrs. Gaskell rejected positive comments from staff who knew Patrick well yet repeated unproven and ancient tittle-tattle by a part-time, disgruntled employee. Selective research.

Did Mrs. Gaskell verify her claims? Her prejudice was alive and well when she described Patrick as a ‘cassocked savage who should be taken into the garden and shot’. Did her Unitarian beliefs include incitement to murder?

Finally Mrs. Gaskell says nothing positive about the Cambridge graduate.

Nothing about hero Brontë who rescued a disabled boy drowning in the River Calder.

Nothing about Detective Brontë who uncovered evidence to set free a young man wrongly imprisoned for desertion.

Nothing about reformer Brontë who improved the deadly Haworth water supply, started a new school and helped reduce poverty, unemployment and disease.

We search her book for truth and balance. We search in vain. He was a good man, Mrs. Gaskell, a good man done wrong. The truth, if you please, madam, the whole truth.

*[Lighting change to that of before]*

Patrick Brontë remained at Haworth and died in his 85th year. On the day of his funeral, all the Haworth shops were shut and the church filled to overflowing.

I’ve enjoyed writing about Patrick. I’m proud to talk about a humble clergyman who served so many, so well for so long.

I’m proud of his unshakeable faith despite constant, heart-breaking grief.

I’m inspired by his passion for education, his campaigns to eradicate poverty and disease.

I’m inspired by his boundless love for his family.

**FX**        *Tk 13 Music finale [it begins softly and increases]*

And what a family. From Patrick and Maria came children who gave, ... who give us joy, knowledge and inspiration.

## Saucy Pat - 34

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Patrick was unusual, eccentric and strong-willed. He was a doer, a quiet achiever with a legacy to enrich us all.

I salute you, Paddy Brunty. I thank you Patrick Brontë. And while Mrs. Gaskell believed you should never have had children, I say, “Thank God you did!”

*[Music swells for curtain call]*

**The End**

**Photo – Title slide**

## Saucy Pat - 35

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### **Rehearsal Material and Performing Rights**

In order to stage *Saucy Pat* you must first obtain written permission from your local agent below.

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