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A quest for truth reveals Lies and the Brontës

April 21st 2021 marks the 205th birthday of Charlotte Brontë, author of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849) and her masterpiece, *Villette* (1853). On this day, Monica Kendall, a descendant of the Jenkins family, publishes *Lies and the Brontës: The Quest for the Jenkins Family*.

On reading biographies of the Brontës, Monica Kendall discovered that no one had researched the Jenkins family; instead the biographers relied on fabrication and copying, reducing the family to whining nonentities – with the noble exception of Mrs Gaskell in 1857 and her celebrated and controversial *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. After seven years of research Monica Kendall has taken her revenge.

The book is a quest, a biography and an occasional travel book. It reveals radical insights into the background for Charlotte Brontë's writing, not least the identification of one of her main characters.

The Jenkins family knew the Brontës in Brussels and West Yorkshire. Evan Jenkins, who looked after the Brontë sisters in Brussels, was born on a derelict farm in mid-Wales, but a unique Welsh school led to Cambridge University and eventually chaplain to King Leopold I, Victoria and Albert's uncle. His wife Eliza was born in Rotterdam, the granddaughter of a Provost of Aberdeen, and during a wealthy childhood in Edinburgh probably knew Walter Scott. After her father's bankruptcy the family fled to England where she undoubtedly encountered the teenaged John Keats. Evan's brother David Jenkins, who worked with Patrick Brontë in Yorkshire, was a formidable preacher, whose daughter attended Cowan Bridge School with the Brontë sisters (Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*).

Using numerous unpublished letters, from Aberystwyth to Cumbria, and Lambeth Palace to New South Wales, Monica pieced together the truth of how the families were connected and discovered that the Jenkins family provided inspiration for Charlotte Brontë's novels during those pivotal two years she spent in Brussels (1842–3).

The research for the book also uncovered a thrumming wire that links Byron, Henry James and Anthony Trollope – at one time an unhappy classics teacher in Brussels; identifies the Jenkinse's friend whom Jane Austen once 'doated' on; finds another who became the 'father' of Australian geology after a torrid courtship; and reveals a connection with the Liberator of South America. It is a fascinating read for the Victorian literary fan and student of the period.

The book is available from local bookshops, Waterstones, the Book Depository and Amazon, or for booksellers from Central Books.

About the Author:

Monica Kendall was born in north London and was a book editor for many years, including spells as a Hansard reporter at the House of Lords and as an actress. She has a Master's degree from St Hugh's College, Oxford University (in Arabic), and another from University College London (in Medieval Studies). Having moved from London to North Wales, she is currently doing a PhD in the Department of History and Welsh History at Aberystwyth University. This is her third work of non-fiction. She has previously edited two books: John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (Pearson/Longman, 2004) and the secret diary of a teenage great-aunt trapped in occupied Brussels during World War I, *Miss Cavell Was Shot: The Diaries of Amy Hodson, 1914–1920* (SilverWood, 2015).

Note to editors:

Monica Kendall is available for interview or to write an article. If you wish to review the book, a PDF ARC is available now, or please request the book to be sent to you when it is available in April. Please contact her by email at monica.kendall@btinternet.com or mok26@aber.ac.uk. Or contact SilverWood Books on 0117 318 0566 /admin@silverwoodbooks.co.uk. High resolution images available to accompany any editorial piece.

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