

her references, both verbal and visual, being understood. Nor is the reference in *Jane Eyre* the only one the Brontës made. In *Villette*, it is probably Bewick which young Graham Bretton delighted to show to the six-year-old Paulina, entrancing her by telling her 'all about the pictures' (chapter xxv). And in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë also refers to such a book, 'a natural history with all kinds of birds and beasts in it, and the reading as nice as the pictures'. Helen Huntingdon's little boy Arthur is looking at it in chapter liii.

These Brontë references have in common, it will be noted, the book's appeal to a child.⁵ In this connection another contemporary tribute may be cited. Bewick's old friend Bowman has recorded, 'that I was . . . in very early life . . . allured by his fascinating wood engravings; my own children were passionately fond of them and never weary of examining them, but that this was an indulgence only granted as a reward for good behaviour'.⁶

British Birds was the work of Bewick's maturity, and his finest. Thomas Bewick was born in 1753 at Ovingham, on the Tyne, in Northumberland, the son of a small farmer and collier. After a boyhood dominated by his love for the outdoors and for drawing, he was apprenticed in 1767 to a Newcastle engraver, Ralph Beilby. The firm's miscellaneous trade offered the boy wide experience, but only with *Select Fables* of 1784 did his talent find real scope. This book revealed him not only as an engraver of great technical dexterity, but as a creative artist, equally Hogarthian and poetic in his vision. Both aspects found fuller expression in *The General History of Quadrupeds*, 1790. The difficulty he found in this of suggesting life when drawing only from specimens led Bewick to determine in his next venture to 'stick to nature as closely as he could'. For *Birds* he worked almost wholly from life, for both the bird and its setting, so that we have a priceless record, not only of the birds themselves, but of house and farmyard, moor, copse and stream, sea coast and estuary, even of the 'coaly Tyne' itself, as these were at the close of the eighteenth century. As Charlotte expressed it in her "Lines", Bewick's woodcuts are 'true to the common Nature that we see/ In England's sunny fields, her hills and vales'. (See Appendix).

A History of British Birds, volume 1, *Land Birds*, was published in 1797, and its companion volume, *Water Birds*, in 1804. In both, Bewick arranges the birds in the classification of his day, giving each a page or two of technical description. Almost every entry is given a heading illustration, or 'figure' as Bewick called it, consisting of a woodcut about one-third to one-half the size of the page. (Jane Stedman's reference to this figure as a 'large ornithological plate' is misleading, for the figure is a woodcut, printed integrally with the text, not a dissociated plate.) Each figure shows a bird in some appropriate natural