



The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

Issue No 37

June 2016

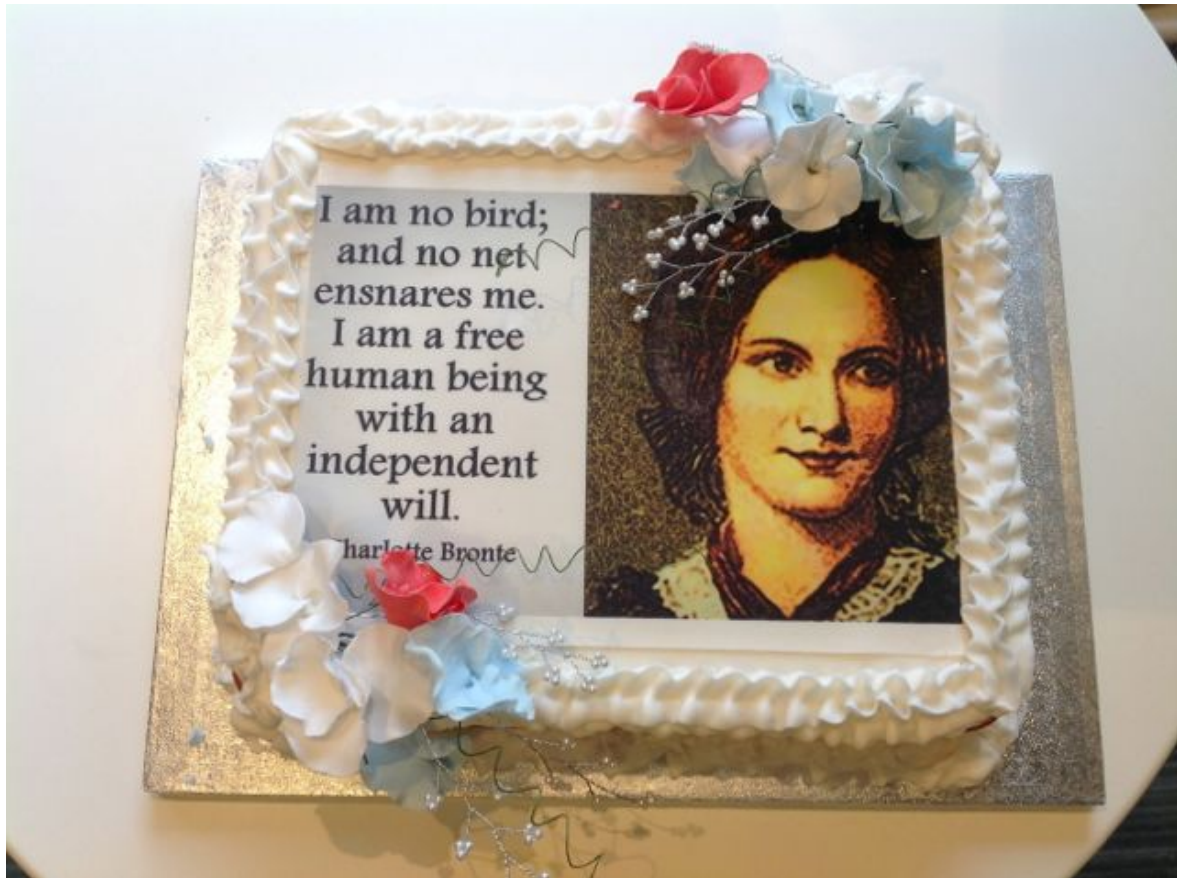
Website: www.ausbronte.net

Email: info@ausbronte.net

HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHARLOTTE

Charlotte Brontë was born on 21st April 1816, and all round the world there have been celebrations of her 200th birthday, this year. Here in Sydney we held a special celebratory dinner in the Grand Ballroom of the Castlereagh Hotel. About fifty members and guests shared in this experience and, between courses, enjoyed the performance of the play *Scenes From Charlotte's Childhood*, performed by various members and friends.

Meanwhile, in Haworth, there was a special celebration. The cake below was part of the celebrations there.



NEW BRONTË FILMS

The latest film version of *Wuthering Heights* is now being filmed in Yorkshire. It is due for release in the UK on 31st December 2016. The makers describe the story as “the most terrifying love story of all times” and their aim is to bring back the shock factor. Last month they were filming the external farmyard scenes at Acton Scott’s Working Farm Museum.

The director is Elisaveta Abrahall. Heathcliff is Paul Eryk Atlas and Catherine Earnshaw is Sha’ori Morriss and Sophie Mort plays the young Cathy.

The company is actively fundraising and invite you to make donations. Small donations can give you a video of the cast. For larger amounts you can buy some of the props and costumes. Visit their web-site at www.wuthering-heights.com



Also filming, on Penistone Hill, is Sally Wainwright’s *I Walk Invisible*, the new BBC film of the lives of the Brontës. The parsonage, graveyard and Schoolhouse have been recreated on the moors. Notice the parsonage here is as it would have been in Emily’s day, that is without the wing on the right hand side that now houses the library. Charlotte is played by Finn Atkins, Emily by Chloe Pirrie and Anne by Charlie Murphy.



CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND SCIENCE

Charlotte Brontë at the Soane was an exhibition, earlier this year, at the Sir John Soane's Museum, in London, to mark the bicentenary of Charlotte's birth. The Museum is housed in the nineteenth-century architect John Soane's home in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This exhibition focussed on Charlotte's five trips to London between 1848 and 1853, when she visited her publisher George Smith.

During these visits she met several important experts in both physics and medicine. Following the publication of *Jane Eyre* Charlotte became a reluctant celebrity. At first she was able to hide under her pseudonym Currer Bell, but word soon got round. She met William Makepeace Thackeray, and visited social theorist Harriet Martineau. At this time London was abuzz with innovations in science, medicine and manufacturing. In 1851, when Charlotte paid her fourth visit to the city that she dubbed 'Babylon', London was full of excitement because of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace.

In all six million people visited the exhibition and this generated enough money to found the Science Museum, Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Charlotte visited the Exhibition several times and met the great physicist David Brewster.

Brewster was famous for his discoveries in experimental optics. He explored polarised light and invented the kaleidoscope. In a letter Charlotte wrote:

Sir David Brewster came to take us to the Crystal Palace — I had rather dreaded this, for Sir David is a man of the

profoundest science and I feared it would be impossible to understand his explanations of the mechanisms &c. indeed I hardly knew how to ask him questions — I was spared all trouble — without being questioned — he gave information in the kindest and simplest manner...

In another letter she wrote:

... after all, its wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye, and rarely touch the heart or head. I make an exception to the last assertion, in favour of those who possess a large range of scientific knowledge. Once I went with Sir David Brewster, and perceived that he looked on objects with other eyes than mine.

Among the items on display were instruments of photography. Brewster, who had a great interest in photography, probably took Charlotte to see these items. But it is interesting that there is no hard evidence that Charlotte ever allowed herself to be photographed. Though there are a few



photographs that some have claimed to be of Charlotte, the evidence is very weak.

It could be because she was self-conscious of her appearance.

Mrs Gaskell described her as having a "reddish face; large mouth & many teeth gone; altogether plain".

Charlotte was very interested in medicine, and perhaps conversed with the medical men to whom George Smith introduced her. There are numerous references to illness in *Villette* and one of the main characters is the physician is Dr John.

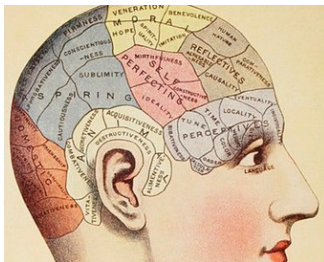
Charlotte acquired an informal, but extensive, knowledge of things medical. She had seen Branwell, Emily and Anne die from tuberculosis. Though Emily shunned the medical profession, Charlotte consulted many doctors on behalf of Anne. Add to this that her father was a hypochondriac who, had he lived in our day, would have been constantly Googling about his many real, or perceived, ailments. His ‘bible’ was Thomas John Graham’s 1827 *Modern Domestic Medicine*, in which he made many notes based on his own observations. Surely some of this would have rubbed off on Charlotte.

She appeared to have been fascinated by mental disorder, as she wrote so forcefully about Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. On her fifth visit to London in 1853 she visited Newgate and Pentonville prisons and may

have seen Bethlehem Hospital. George Smith related Charlotte’s compassion towards a woman who was imprisoned in Newgate for having killed her own child.

She dabbled in the pseudo-science of phrenology when she went with George Smith to have her ‘bumps’ read. According to George Smith, the reading of Charlotte’s skull revealed:

Temperament for the most part nervous... [The forehead] bears the stamp of deep thoughtfulness and comprehensive understanding. It is highly philosophical. It exhibits the presence of an intellect at once perspicacious and perspicuous...



JAMES BOND’S BOSS TO SAVE THE BRONTËS

The Brontë Society in Haworth has been going through some difficult times with the resignation of the President, Boonie Greer last June, along with the Chairman, Executive Director and half the Council, over a disagreement about the way the Society was being run.

To the rescue, comes “M”, or at least the actor who played James Bond’s boss, Judi Dench. She was appointed Honorary president in April this year, just in time for the Bicentenary celebrations.

Oliver Moody of *The Times* advises her to take her copy of *Wuthering Heights* when she next visits Haworth. “Only the savage psychodrama of a Brontë novel could

be an adequate preparation for taking over at the most bitterly divided fan club in Britain.”

Judi Dench was born near York and has been a fan of the Brontës for years. She played Mrs Fairfax in the 2011 film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. In a press statement she says:

“I am delighted to have been offered the role of Brontë President and look forward to helping the

organisation celebrate this significant and iconic family. The Brontës are respected and adored the world over and it will be an honour to work with the Society to promote their legacy during this important bicentennial period.” Her position won’t become official until she is voted in at the Brontë Society AGM in June.



REVIEW: THE MADWOMAN UPSTAIRS

by Catherine Lowell

Published by Simon and Schuster, March 2016

ISBN 9781501124211

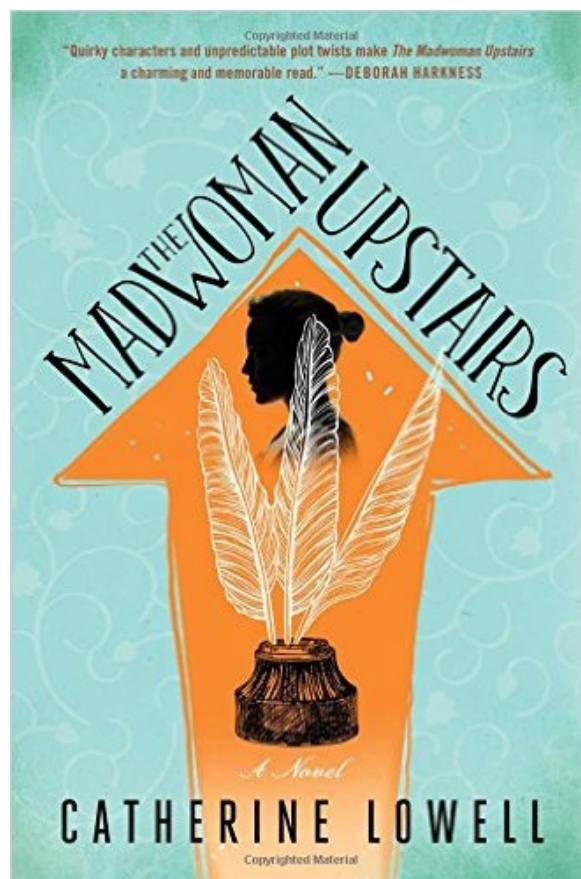
[This review (by M) appeared on the Brontë Blog on Wed 27th April 2016.]

Fiction somehow related to the Brontës will be a common trend these coming months. Fictions about the Brontës are not so abundant since the historical novel fever of some years ago but sequels or retellings of their novels are even more popular than they used to be (even if there is never a shortage of them). But there is a third type of Brontë-related fiction: the contemporary novel which features the Brontës as a commentary to the action and their presence in the life of the characters as motifs, landscapes, influences through the reading of their novels or even the world of Brontë studies.

Recent examples that come to mind without any intention of being exhaustive are *Four Dreamers and Emily* by Stevie Davis, *The Brontë Project* by Jennifer Vandervelt or *The Brontë Plot* by Katherine Reay.

Catherine Lowell's debut novel, *The Madwoman Upstairs* belongs partially to this group of books. It's a book about the reception of the Brontës but it's also a book about the Brontës in a way, because the main character, Samantha Whipple, is the last member of the Brontë family. The book creates a parallel Brontë literary history where the Brontë descendants are alive and some of them, like the father of Samantha, are authors themselves. A parallel world where it is believed that the Brontë descendants have inherited a considerable Brontë 'estate' that they are hiding from public view.

Here is a novel with many simultaneous layers. It's a description from an American point of view of the sometimes bizarre world of literary academia in places like Oxford. It's a subdued but nonetheless moving love story. It's a story about how to



survive sudden loss and how to deal with (or how to hide from) pain. It's a discussion about the value of literature and literary criticism confronting views about authorial intent (new criticism vs intentionalists mainly) and it is, of course, a mystery and a treasure hunt that has to be solved.

Not all the layers work with the same intensity. Probably the less interesting it is arguably the one under which the novel has been sold: the mystery and treasure hunt. No spoilers intended, but for the hardcore Brontë aficionado it is not really very difficult to guess at once one of the 'treasures' and imagine the other(s) will be. It is also hard to believe that some of the obvious clues are not spotted by people so

versed in the Brontës as the main character or her (sort of) nemesis, the Brontë Parsonage director John Booker. There is also the somehow arbitrary character of the 'treasures' themselves. One wonders if they have to be read just as macguffins, but the novel itself does not treat them as such, giving them a meaning that is lacking in the end.

But the Brontës are not only on the surface of the novel. They also permeate the novel in all levels, creating a well-measured subtext which quotes explicitly or not from *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* (madwomen and fires included) and particularly and extensively from Anne Brontë's both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This vindication of the youngest of the Brontë sisters is very welcome indeed. The Samantha-Orville relationship deserves special mention as it obviously echoes the Rochester-Jane one in a quite nice and well-resolved parallel.

Where the novel excels is in the description of the world of academia, and old Oxford colleges. Catherine Lowell's writing is funny and inventive. She manages to describe a sometimes bizarre world (even more from an American point of view) with a witty prose, never disrespectful. The author also creates a great character in Samantha. She is not the most likeable of characters but, in a way, she is irresistible. Contradictory (she can be extremely shy or absurdly bold, irritant, stupid, vulnerable... at the same time) and in a permanent search for meaning for her life (through her self-imposed legacy quest, through literature, through her ancestors...), she is the novel. So much so, that you will like the book as much as you are able to connect with her.

NOTES:

(1) Which opens an interesting debate that the novel doesn't explore: Is it licit to publicly expose things that the original owners didn't want exposed?

(2) Even the reader-response school gets a mention. Although the level of the discussion does not cross the Reader's Digest line, few novels are comfortable, like this one, discussing literary criticism (assuming literary criticism is something more than putting likes on an author's Facebook).

(3) Not to be compared with Robert Barnard's *The Case of the Missing Brontë*. Barnard plays in another league.

(4) The true Brontëite will also notice that it is hardly necessary to take a taxi from the KWVR Haworth station, where Samantha arrives in Haworth, to the Parsonage.

(5) Some of Samantha's crazy theories about Charlotte, Anne or both being the madwoman in the attic à la Gilbert and Gubar are quite funny.

BOOKS THAT CHANGED ME

Vivian Gornick

The Entertainment section of the *Sun Herald* 10 April 2016 included an article by Vivian Gornick, American feminist and author. Gornick will be speaking at the Sydney Writers' Festival about her new book *The Odd Woman and the City*.

But what drew my attention to the article was that she included Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* amongst those books which changed her. "I read this book first as a teenage girl, next as a college sophomore, and then as a graduate student."

"First, I saw Jane as Cinderella; then I saw the heaven-and-hell nature of the fairytale; then I saw the second-class position of women, as Jane prevails as an equal only when Rochester is blind - and has therefore been cut down to size. Again, the thrill of rereading: what you need to see when you need it."

Michelle Cavanagh

SCENES FROM CHARLOTTE'S CHILDHOOD

Written by Christopher Cooper and performed by various members and friends at the 200th Birthday Dinner on 22nd April 2016.

CAST: **Narrator:** Christopher Cooper
Rev Patrick Brontë: Harvey Broadbent
Maria Brontë: Malvina Yock
Elizabeth Brontë: Elisabeth Cooper
Charlotte Brontë: Cindy Broadbent
Branwell Brontë: Graham Harman
Emily Brontë: Annette Harman
Anne Brontë: Marissa Pongan
Tabby Ackroyd: Michelle Cavanagh

NARRATOR:

This week is remarkable for anniversaries. Tomorrow is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Today Yeheudi Menuin would have been 100 if he was still alive, and the Queen is still alive, and going strong, having celebrated her 90th birthday yesterday.

But the reason we are here tonight is to celebrate a 200th birthday – that of Charlotte Brontë. She was born, at home, in Thornton, a few miles from Haworth. She was an early second birthday present for her older sister Maria and she was also greeted by her other sister, Elizabeth, who was then only 14 months old.

So what was the world like in 1816? King George III was on the throne and his wife, the queen, was Charlotte of Mecklenburg. Perhaps this is where Charlotte got her name.

The year 1816 was a remarkable year, known in history as "The Year without a Summer". During the few previous years there had been some volcanic eruptions around the world, which lowered global temperatures, but in 1815 this was capped off by the eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies, now known as Indonesia. It was a far more powerful eruption than Krakatoa and, in fact, it was the strongest

eruption that the world had experienced for well over 1000 years.

The eruption threw billions of tons of rubble into the atmosphere and lowered the average temperature all over the world. There were crop failures, food shortages and food riots in many parts of the world, including Yorkshire.

The sky took on an orange colour. In 1816 the painter William Turner went on a walking expedition in Yorkshire, and it is thought that his distinctive orange colouring of skies began with what he saw there.

The unusual weather included abnormally heavy rain. In June 1816 Mary and Percy Shelley, and their friend Lord Byron, were holidaying at the Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva. They experienced "incessant rainfall" during that "wet, ungenial summer" and had to resort to staying indoors.

They relieved their boredom by making up stories and telling them to each other. Mary's story was about a creature that was put together from body parts and given life through electricity. This was the story that became *Frankenstein*.

Later in the year, in October 1816, the Leeds-Liverpool Canal was completed. This is Britain's longest canal and, at Keighley, is only about four miles from Haworth. This year is a big year for canal enthusiasts as they celebrate its 200th anniversary. It's a wonder to me that, although the Brontë sisters frequently walked to Keighley they never mentioned the canal.

Tonight we are going to witness three scenes from Charlotte's childhood. By now they have moved to Haworth. These scenes are all based on well-documented fact. Scene 1 was related by Patrick Brontë to

Mrs Gaskell, who wrote it up in Charlotte's biography.

Scene 2 was described by Charlotte herself at the beginning of her juvenile work *Tales of the Islanders*. It was written in tiny manuscript volumes and was deciphered, edited and published by our patron, Christine Alexander, who is with us tonight.

The opening scene takes place in 1824. Patrick Brontë is 47. His wife died a few years ago and he was unsuccessful in finding a new wife. His eldest child, Maria, is 10. Then comes Elizabeth, 9. Both these children will die the following year, which is why many of you may not have heard of them.

Charlotte is 8, Branwell is 7, Emily is 6 and Anne is just 4. Keep these ages in mind when you hear their answers to their father's questions. Their maid, Tabitha, will join the family later in this year, so she doesn't come on until Scene 2.

SCENE 1:

Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne are in the Parsonage study. Branwell, Emily and Anne are sitting in front of Papa's desk.

NARRATOR: The six Brontë children have been summoned into Papa's study in the Haworth Parsonage. Their father has is seeing one of his parishioner's to the front door and the children are wondering what he wants with them.

ANNE: I wonder why Papa has asked us into the study?

BRANWELL: Oh, it's probably just to chastise us all for talking too loudly last night when he was trying to sleep.

EMILY: No, Branwell, I think he wants to tick *you* off for sleeping in church this morning.

CHARLOTTE: Perhaps he just wants to announce that he's at last found a mother for

us all. Heaven knows he's proposed to so many ladies. Maybe one of them has finally said "yes".

ANNE: And what's wrong with Aunt Branwell? Hasn't *she* become our mother?

BRANWELL: But he not only wants a mother for us but also a wife for himself. You know that every man needs a wife – for many reasons. (*He winks.*)

MARIA: Quiet Branwell, here he comes.

(*Patrick enters the room, carrying a mask and sits at the desk.*)

PATRICK: Children, I've brought you all together this evening to try a little experiment. One of my colleagues, in a nearby parish, tried this out on his family and was well pleased with the results. So I thought I might try it with my own children to get some insight into your inner thoughts. Now I'm going to ask each of you, in turn, a question.

ELIZABETH: Oh no, are you going to test our arithmetic?

MARIA: No, I think he means to test us on our catechism.

PATRICK: It's nothing like that, children. With these questions there are no right or wrong answers. I'm going to ask each of you your opinion on some matters. But I want you to answer these questions frankly. Don't just give me the answer you think I want to hear. Be bold and don't be afraid of what I might think.

EMILY: That might be a bit difficult.

PATRICK: Well to make it easier I'm going to do something my colleague did with his children. See this mask. When it's your turn to answer a question I want you to put the mask on. That will make you feel

anonymous. Just forget that you're my children. Then you'll feel freer to answer boldly.

BRANWELL: Where did you get that mask, father?

PATRICK: My colleague brought it back from Venice. There they hold masked balls and everyone wears a mask.



ANNE: Why do they do that, Papa?

BRANWELL: So that they can dance with other men's wives without anyone knowing who they are.

PATRICK: Never mind that. Now we'll do this in reverse order according to your ages. Anne, you're the youngest, so you go first. Here, put on this mask. *(She puts it on.)* Now my dear, please tell me what it is that you most want in life.

ANNE: Well, father, I think what I most want most is Age and Experience.

PATRICK: Well answered, Anne. I suppose you said that that's because you're the youngest and have a lot of experience ahead of you. Emily, you're next. Please

take the mask from Anne and put it on. *(Emily takes the mask from Anne and puts it on.)* Now, Emily Jane, you know how Branwell is sometimes a naughty boy. What do you think is the best thing I can do with him?

EMILY: I'd say ... reason with him – and if he won't listen to reason, whip him!

(Branwell pokes his tongue out at Emily.)

PATRICK: Well, Branwell, I don't know what you think of that answer. But my question for you – take the mask from Emily *(he takes it and puts it on)* – my boy, what is the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of a man and a woman?

BRANWELL: I think the best way is to consider the difference between them as to their – *(he traces out a woman's body with his two hands)* – bodies.

CHARLOTTE: Branny, you're not supposed to say such things.

BRANWELL: You're not supposed to know it's me. That's why father made us put on these masks, so that we could speak out boldly.

PATRICK: Never mind that, let's see what Charlotte has to say for herself. *(Charlotte takes the mask from Branwell and puts it on.)* Tell me Charlotte, what is the best book in the world?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, that's easy, Papa. Without a doubt it's the Bible.

BRANWELL: You only say that because that's what you think father wants to hear.

PATRICK: Well I assumed that the Bible is everyone's best book. I meant, apart from the Bible. So Charlotte, what's the next best?

CHARLOTTE: I'd say the next best book would be ... the Book of Nature.

(Elizabeth takes the mask.)

PATRICK: And Elizabeth, what's the best mode of education for a woman?

BRANWELL: Women don't need to be educated – it would only be wasted on them.

PATRICK: I was asking Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: The best education for a woman is to teach her to rule her house well.

PATRICK: Nice answer. Now we come to Maria. *(Maria takes the mask.)* You're the eldest and have had the longest time to acquire wisdom. My question for you is, what is the best way of spending your time?

MARIA: I think it would be in laying out in preparation for a happy eternity.

BRANWELL: Oh, not another Miss Goody Two-Shoes! Mind you, I do agree with you. Except I think you mean by doing lots of praying and reading your Bible. My recipe for preparing for a happy eternity is to enjoy happiness in this world.

PATRICK: Branwell stop interjecting. The whole idea is for nobody to make comments on other's answers. Perhaps I should follow Emily's advice and whip you. *(Branwell winces, in a comic fashion.)* That's all children. I'm sure that your dinner is ready in the other room. Maria, ask your aunt to bring in my meal now.

(All the children leave the room.)

SCENE 2:

The Parsonage kitchen. Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne are sitting around the blazing fire warming their toes. It is dark, with the only light coming from the fire. Tabby is standing nearby.

NARRATOR: Here we are in the parsonage kitchen. It is dark, with the only light coming from the kitchen fire. Maria and Elizabeth have both died. Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne are sitting around the fire, warming their toes. Tabby, the servant, is standing nearby.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, how dreary it is outside, with the cold and sleet and fog.

EMILY: Yes, but it's always like this in November.

ANNE: Listen to the high, piercing night-winds.

CHARLOTTE: Tabby, could you get us a candle?

TABBY: What do ye need a candle for? Isn't there enough light from the fire?

CHARLOTTE: But it's too gloomy in here.

TABBY: Don't you remember what your father said? We're using too many candles?

EMILY: But we're all four here together, so we'll only be using a quarter of a candle each.

TABBY: I don't care how many of you there are – you're not getting a candle!

BRANWELL: But we can't read by firelight.

TABBY: Open yer lugs will ye? I said – NO CANDLE!

(There is a long pause, with nobody saying anything.)

BRANWELL: *(In a lazy manner)* Oh dear, I don't know what to do.

EMILY: Yes, I'm bored. What can we do in the dark?

ANNE: Well we can't read, that's for sure.

TABBY: Wha ya may go t'bed.

BRANWELL: I'd rather do anything than that.

CHARLOTTE: You're so glum tonight, Tabby. Well suppose we each had an island. Branny, if you could have an island which would you choose?

BRANWELL: I'd choose the Isle of Man.

CHARLOTTE: And I'd choose the Isle of Wight.

EMILY: The Isle of Arran for me.

ANNE: And mine should be Guernsey.

BRANWELL: Why don't we invent our own country, and we can each have an island? Shall we rule over them ourselves or should we appoint a chief?

CHARLOTTE: I say we should have a chief for each of our islands. The Duke of Wellington should be my chief man.

BRANWELL: Herries should be mine.

CHARLOTTE: What, that Rogue? Didn't he sell his mistress at the Keswick fair?

BRANWELL: I'll admit that he wasn't a nice fellow in his private life but I believe he'd make a good ruler. After all, haven't there been so many rogues who've made great statesmen?

ANNE: I seem to remember that he's mentioned in Scott's *Redgauntlet*?

EMILY: Yes, you're right Anne. But *my* chief, to rule over the Isle of Arran would be Walter Scott himself.

ANNE: I should have Bentinck.

CHARLOTTE: Not Captain James Benwick from that modern author Jane Austen?

ANNE: No it's Bentinck. I read his obituary last year.

(The clock strikes eight dismally.)

TABBY: Come on then chillen – it's off t'bed with ye.

ANNE: Oh, Tabby!

CHARLOTTE: Just a little longer.

BRANWELL: Damn you Tabby!

TABBY: Ye've got t'morrow hasn't ye. What ye cant do tonight will keep.

(They all go out, followed by Tabby.)

SCENE 3

(The bedroom of Charlotte and Emily. They are sitting..)

NARRATOR: For the third and final scene we are in Charlotte and Emily's bedroom.

(Branwell enters, holding a wooden soldier.)

BRANWELL: Just look at what father has just brought back for me from Leeds. Twelve of these wooden soldiers.

(Charlotte and Emily jump up and Anne enters.)

CHARLOTTE: *(snatching one of the soldiers)* This is the Duke of Wellington! It shall be mine!

EMILY: *(snatches it)* No it shall be mine! He's a grave looking fellow. I shall call him Gravey.

ANNE: *(snatches it)* No he's mine!

BRANWELL: Girls, you don't have to fight. I've got twelve of these soldiers. You can each have one of your own.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, Branwell, you are so good.

ANNE: Well, mine will be the prettiest of the whole lot and perfect in every way.

EMILY: If it's this one, he's a queer looking fellow.

BRANWELL: Yes, just like you, Anne.

ANNE: Don't be rude Branwell. I think I'll call him Waiting Boy.

BRANWELL: Well, I'll choose one and he shall be Napoleon Bonaparte. I'll keep the other eight as spares.

CHARLOTTE: It's just as well, The last lot you had have all been either burned, maimed or destroyed.



BRANWELL: Well, it's a risky thing to be a soldier. The casualty rate in battle is quite high.

EMILY: Let's make up a story about them. Come on Gravey. You're leading the advance party and you creep up on the enemy. You make a quick calculation and discover that they outnumber your troops two to one.

2016 COMMITTEE

<i>Patron:</i>	Christine Alexander
<i>President:</i>	Sarah Burns (02) 9953 1244 sarahburns605@gmail.com
<i>Vice President:</i>	Michelle Cavanagh (02) 9872 1947 michcav@gmail.com
<i>Secretary:</i>	Gary Corkill (02) 9547 2580 garywcorkill@gmail.com
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Michael Links (02) 9524 7835 meccano@telstra.com
<i>Membership Secretary:</i>	Annette Harman (02) 9498 2852 harmans@bigpond.com
<i>Publications Editor:</i>	Christopher Cooper (02) 9804 7473 christopher.cooper@mq.edu.au
<i>Committee Member:</i>	Carmel Nestor (02) 9665 6083 nanuk@ozemail.com.au

BOOK REVIEW

***The Madwoman Upstairs* by Catherine Lowell (Quercus Editions Limited, 2016).**

There is much to enjoy in this fictional account about the Brontës. Whilst it falls into the 'fan fiction' genre, it does give a good account about the Brontës and their work (particularly *Jane Eyre* – as the title would suggest).

It concerns the fictional great-great-great granddaughter of Patrick Brontë's brother, who is attending Oxford University and has a love-hate relationship with her tutor. As a review stated in the Sydney Morning Herald (26/03/16) it uses "the genre to explore ideas about the Brontës and their work, as well as the contemporary fetishism about their belongings and home". A book titled "*The Brontë Cabinet - Three Live in Nine Objects*" by Deborah Lutz, being a case in point.

Gary Corkill

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In 2016 we are *Celebrating Charlotte* with a program of talks and events dedicated to Charlotte Brontë. Thank you to all the members who have volunteered to read from our Book of the Year, *Jane Eyre*, at ABA meetings.

In February we met some of Charlotte's friends and contemporaries - Margaret Wooler (Brian Beergah), Ellen Nussey (Carmel Nestor), Constantin Heger (Michael Links), Harriet Martineau (Annette Harman) and Elizabeth Gaskell (Michelle Cavanagh). Unfortunately, Gary Corkill could not join us on the day but we will include his work on George Lewes in the "Friends of Charlotte Brontë" to be published in *The Thunderer* in December.

At our April meeting, Dr Andrew Shields explored the social, political and cultural history of Victorian Britain in his fascinating talk on *Shirley* and the Luddite Movement. Afterwards, we sang Happy Birthday to Charlotte and shared a cake.

The Bicentenary Dinner held on 22 April was a great party in honour of Charlotte. Thanks to Christopher Cooper and his band of merry men and women for entertaining us, and to Cindy and Harvey Broadbent for adding to the fun of evening.

Our Bicentennial Conference on 14 May at the NSW State Library was a huge success. Special thanks to our Patron, Christine Alexander, for bring together such an illustrious panel of speakers. Thank you to all who helped to put together this event.

Taylor's of Harrogate and Abbey's Bookshop once again sponsored our events this year for which we are truly grateful.

There have been many talks throughout Sydney and beyond celebrating Charlotte's bicentenary and many more to come. Thank you to ABA ambassadors Christine Alexander, Michelle Cavanagh, Vasudha Chandra, Susannah Fullerton, Sabine Klust and many others for promoting the Association throughout the year.

Welcome to new members:

- Jenny Boardman
- Donna Couto
- Rose Gunsberger
- Pamela & Dennis Nutt
- Stacey Stellatos
- Amanda Wharton
- Vasudha Chandra
- Julia Gennissen
- Walter Mason
- Kevin & Carol Rozzoli
- Joy Thompson

We look forward to continuing our celebration of Charlotte Brontë with you at our bi-monthly meetings. With best wishes

Sarah Burns

FORTHCOMING TALKS

In addition to our scheduled talks at the Castlereagh Hotel, the following talks will be given at other venues by several of our members.

Wed 15th JUNE at 6:30pm – 7:30pm at the Ryde Library 1 Pope St Ryde

Christopher COOPER

Celebrating Charlotte Brontë

In this introduction to the life of Charlotte and her sisters Christopher will examine some of the commonly held misconceptions about their lives.

Thurs 18th AUGUST at 11am at the Ashfield Library

Level 6, Council Chambers, 260 Liverpool Rd Ashfield

Vasudha CHANDRA

Medical Mishaps and Maladies in the Brontës' Lives and Works

This talk is based on an excellent talk she gave to the ABA in 2014.

Fri 11th NOVEMBER and Sat 12th NOVEMBER at the Art Gallery of NSW

Susannah FULLERTON

Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre

This is an introduction to Charlotte's most famous novel by Sydney's most accomplished literary lecturer. Times weren't announced at the time we went to press. Bookings will open in late May.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S VERSION OF A FAMILIAR NURSERY RHYME

These are the opening lines of a poem about Percy and Zamorna in Charlotte's *Tales of Angria*.

Lady-Bird! lady-bird! fly away home,
Night is approaching and sunset is come,
The herons are flown to their trees by the Hall,
Felt but unseen the damp dew-drops fall.
This is the close of a still summer day.
Lady-bird! lady-bird, haste, fly away.

The grand old Hall is wrapped in shade,
The woodland park around it spread
In gathering gloom in every glade.
This is the moment, this is the hour
To feel Romance in all her power.

.....

**Text from *The Poems of Charlotte Brontë*
edited by Tom Winnifrith
published by The Shakespeare Head Press.**



CHARLOTTE BRONTË CONFERENCE

State Library 14 May 2016

Nearly sixty people attended our very successful day conference, celebrating the 200th anniversary of Charlotte Brontë's birth. After a warm welcome by our President, Sarah Burns, our Patron Professor Christine Alexander set the scene by her talk entitled *Celebrating Charlotte: The Life & Writing*. With her long experience of Brontë research, especially in the area of the Juvenilia, she was able to inject a very personal flavour to the story. She recalled tramping across the US, in her younger days, searching out unknown Brontë Juvenilia in libraries and private collections and the difficulty she had in editing them for publication.



David Malouf's talk, *Jane Eyre: The Opera* described how he came to write the libretto of the opera and how the constraints, particularly the fact that he could only use five singers, shaped the way he told the story. One of the five he chose was Bertha Mason and he gave her a much more central, and visible, role than is usually the case.

Professor Tim Dolin, from Curtin University, gave a talk entitled *Together Alone: Charlotte Brontë, the Woman Writer & the Industrial Novel*, focussed on *Shirley*. His



excellent talk neatly complemented the one given recently by Andrew Shields on *Shirley* and the Luddites. He also reminded us of the way the Brontë children were fiercely self-sufficient when it came to companionship and the difficulties Charlotte had when in company with strangers, especially eminent ones, as she was when she went to London.

After lunch Professor Helen Groth spoke on *Charlotte Brontë & 'The Listening Reader'* and made us aware of the importance of sound in the novels. This is a dimension that when tend to overlook in our reading and she has inspired us to re-read the Brontës with our listening ears on.



Charlotte Brontë & Jean Rhys in Modern Dress was the title of our final talk, by Professor Sue Thomas. She spoke of the *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the life of Jean Rhys, as well as some of the plays by Polly Teale where Bertha Mason plays a central role.

Celebrating Charlotte Brontë

PROGRAM FOR THE REST OF 2016

The Australian Brontë Association meets in Sydney five times a year. Meetings are held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel (near Town Hall Station) at 10:30am, though we serve morning tea from 10:00am. Those who wish to do so, have a light lunch at the hotel. At each meeting, a paper on some aspect of the Brontës' life and work is presented. There is a meeting charge of \$5 (members and non-members).



4 June Dr Christopher Cooper – Was Charlotte a ‘Closet Catholic’?

Charlotte Brontë grew up in a staunchly Protestant household. She made veiled, and often explicit, criticism of Catholicism in her letters and her novels. Yet, reading between the lines, one can detect the fact she was secretly fascinated by the forms and rituals of the Catholic Church. Intellectually she was repelled by Catholicism, but emotionally she seemed to be drawn to it. Her ambivalence began during the time she spent in the very Catholic environment of the school she attended in Brussels and her love-hate relationship with her very Catholic teacher, Monsieur Heger.

6 August Jenny McLennan - The Cinematic Afterlives of Jane Eyre

The era of movies and TV productions, which lend themselves to rich colour, impressive scenery and great acting which brings the characters to life, has brought out a large number of versions of this classic novel. Jenny will look back at the many and varied film and television adaptations over the years.

1 October Christine Gietz – Jane Matters

Will the real Jane Eyre please stand up? A close study of all the matters pertaining to Jane including her five incarnations and her Gothic and Victorian origins and an exploration of Jane the woman and Jane the character.

3 December ABA/Dickens Christmas Lunch The Grand Dining Room (Cello's), Castlereagh Boutique Hotel

This year, the entertainment will be provided by the harpist Georgia Lowe. She studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music under Louise Johnson, Principal Harpist of the Sydney Symphony, and later in New York where she completed a Master of Music with Sivan Magen at the Brooklyn College Conservatory. She is a casual performer for the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra where she recently performed in *Turandot*.

