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VAMPIRES AND WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Annie Neugebauer's column in Litreactor (litreactor.com) Aug 2016

Vampires in *Wuthering Heights*. Seriously? Yes, seriously. This is no movie adaptation taking liberties; this is a valid interpretation with textual evidence to support it. Whether you choose to push that interpretation to metaphorical or literal levels is up to you. But first, a spoiler warning: in the process of explaining my interpretation, I will spoil the hell out of this novel. And yeah, it came out over 150 years ago, but if you've had it on your to-read list, go ahead and bookmark this post and come back once you've read it. (And go read it now, because it's awesome.)

Okay, let's cut right to the chase. Within *Wuthering Heights* there's plenty of evidence to read this plot: Cathy becomes a vampire, haunting Heathcliff for years before finally turning him into one as well, so they – joined at last – can roam the moors eternally as the undead.

Think I'm smoking something? Let's break it down. Brontë structured the novel

unchronologically, but if we take the events of the book in order, the vampiric motifs begin with Cathy's illness. Nelly, our inner-layer narrator, repeatedly describes Cathy with classical vampiric traits, such as glowing or flashing eyes, sharp teeth, wicked smiles, pale skin, hollow cheeks, thinness of limbs, preternatural strength, and bloodlessness. At the beginning of Cathy's "illness," which represents her initiation into vampirism, Nelly details her "[starting up]—her hair flying over her shoulders, her **eyes flashing**, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out **preter-naturally**." And





although Nelly says that Cathy's "countenance had a [...] **bloodless lip**," Edgar exclaims, "She has **blood on her lips**!" [Note: bolded phrases throughout will be my emphasis, not the author's.]

Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?' I mused. I had read of such hideous, incarnate demons.

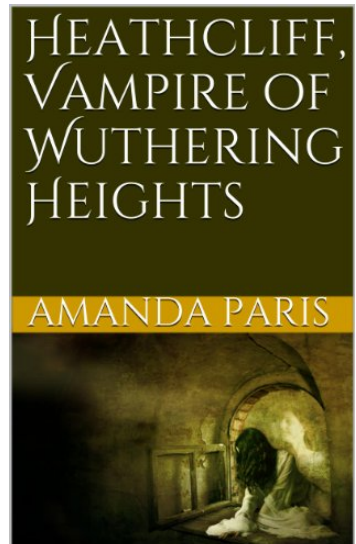
After this vivid description, Cathy flees to her bedroom and locks herself up for three days. Three is key; it's the mythical length needed to transform in vampire lore. What's more, Cathy's bed is singular: a "large oak case, with squares cut out near the top, resembling coach windows [...]. In fact, it formed a little closet." Sounds eerily like a coffin, doesn't it? During her three days locked in her room, Cathy refuses to eat. (In some lore, vampires can't eat, only drink blood.) When she finally unbars the door, she tells Nelly that she believes she's dying. Her transformation has begun.

During Cathy's prolonged death, the connections to vampirism multiply. Perhaps the most striking scene is when Cathy sees "someone" in the mirror across her bedroom, demanding to know who it is. Nelly cannot seem to make Cathy realize that she sees her own reflection, and covers the mirror with a shawl. Yet Cathy continues in fear: "It's behind there still! [...] And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted!" The fact that Cathy doesn't recognize her reflection is reminiscent of the legend that vampires cannot see themselves in mirrors, either because they have no reflection or because they're unable to look at themselves.

"There's nobody here!" [Nelly] insisted. 'It was yourself, Mrs. Linton; you knew it a while since.' 'Myself!' she gasped, 'and **the clock is striking twelve!** It's true then, that's

dreadful!" At this point Cathy realizes what she is becoming, and she fears her future.

Heathcliff vehemently questions Cathy, "Are you **possessed with a devil**[?]" Possession has always been one theory of vampirism, which serves as the basis for their being 'damned' souls. Likewise, Heathcliff curses Cathy once she dies: "**May she wake in torment!** [...] Where is she? Not there – **not in heaven – not perished** – where? [...] I pray one prayer – I repeat it till my tongue stiffens – Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living. [...] Be with me always – **take any**



form – drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot **live without my soul!**”

May she wake in torment! [...] Where is she? Not there – not in heaven – not perished – where?

(Who says romance is dead?) Heathcliff’s declaration that Cathy hasn’t “perished” even though she’s dead comes to interesting fruition. When he digs her up twenty years later, he finds her unchanged. A body failing to decompose after that long more than hints at the supernatural. No doubt, Brontë knows what she’s doing.

The final nail in the coffin (sorry) that proves Cathy’s vampirism? Her return. Vampires always come back for their loved ones. When Lockwood, our outer-layer narrator, opens the novel, it’s twenty years after Cathy’s death. And before he even knows her story, he spends the night at Wuthering Heights in Cathy’s creepy oak-panelled coffin bed, pressed up against the bedroom window.

In what is certainly the most chilling scene in the novel – and arguably in any novel – Lockwood ‘dreams’ that he lies listening to the creepy sound of a branch continuously scraping against the window. Maddened by it, he eventually busts through the glass (the window is sealed shut) and reaches out to move it, only to be grabbed by “a little, ice-cold hand!” Lockwood tells, “The intense **horror** of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, ‘Let me in—let me in!’”

The girl, of course, is Cathy, dead and begging to be let in. What’s vampire rule number one? ~~We~~ They have to

be *invited* in. Understandably terrified but perhaps not understandably brutal, Lockwood sees Cathy’s wrist across the broken glass until she lets go. Then he blocks the hole and refuses to let her in. Heathcliff, however, hearing the commotion, bursts in, flings open the window, and yells, “Come in! come in! [...] Cathy, do come.” Although by then the “wraith” is gone, this invitation seals Heathcliff’s fate.

The reader never receives an explicit depiction of Cathy transforming Heathcliff by biting his neck, sucking his blood, etc. (The only overt reference to such a thing comes when at one point Heathcliff threatens, “I would have torn his heart out, and **drunk his blood!**”) The reader knows when something occurs because Heathcliff says, “Nelly, there is a strange change approaching—I’m in its shadow at present.” However, the method, manner, and form of his interaction with Cathy are left to the reader’s imagination. In fact, when Nelly questions Heathcliff about his strange behaviour, he simply replies, “You’ll neither see nor hear anything to frighten you, if you refrain from prying,” which quite beautifully implies that there *is* something there to frighten.

Just as when Cathy fell ill, Nelly tells Heathcliff, “The way you’ve passed these **three last days** might knock up a Titan. Do take some food, and some repose. You need only **look at yourself, in a glass**, to see how you require both. Your **cheeks are hollow**, and your **eyes blood-shot**, like a person starving with hunger, and going blind with loss of sleep.” Again, after several such descriptions, we get starvation within the mystic period of three days, a refusal to look in the mirror, paleness, strength, and extraordinary eyes. It’s clear to a discerning

reader that what befell Cathy is now befalling Heathcliff.

Nelly explains that “**At dusk**, he went into his chamber—through the whole night, and far into the morning, we heard him groaning, and murmuring to himself.” This physical agony reflects that of people turning into vampires. Dusk is a significant time, marking the beginning of a vampire’s active period. Nelly continues to describe him with phrases such as “unnatural,” “bloodless,” and “ghastly.” At one point she sees him and admits, “It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin; and, in my **terror**, I let the candle bend towards the wall, and **it left me in darkness.**”

Finally, as Heathcliff’s illness draws to a close, he obsesses over the conditions of his burial. He mentions specifically that his coffin “is to be carried to the churchyard, **in the evening**. [...] and mind, particularly, to notice that the sexton obeys my directions concerning the two coffins!” He wants his to be open to Cathy’s, implying their bodies will be mobile and their essences not departed. He even tells Nelly that if the people bury him against his specifications, “[Y]ou must have me removed secretly; and if you neglect it, you shall prove, practically, that **the dead are not annihilated!**”

The climax of the vampiric plot occurs when Nelly finally witnesses Heathcliff ‘dead.’ The reader now has the opportunity to view him as a full vampire. First, Nelly notes his position: “Mr. Heathcliff was there—laid **on his back.**” This is classic vampiric posture, like someone in a coffin. She refers again to the strangeness of his eyes: “His eyes met mine so keen, and fierce, I started; and then, he seemed to smile.” She debates his state of being: “**I could not think him dead**—but

his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill—**no blood trickled from the broken skin**, and when I put my fingers to it, I could doubt no more—he was dead and stark!”

Her first reaction is perhaps the most important, due to its instinctive correctness; he is not quite dead. She draws attention to his throat again, to his bloodlessness, and even to the window, that symbol through which the vampire was invited in. Nelly says, “I tried to close his eyes—to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation, before any one else beheld it. They would not shut—they seemed to sneer at my attempts, and his parted lips, and **sharp, white teeth** sneered too!” The transformation is complete; Heathcliff has joined Cathy in the realm of the undead.

With all of the connections to vampirism that Heathcliff and Cathy claim, perhaps the most elemental is the spreading of fear. People have always passed down vampire lore through tales and rumors, which Nelly describes at the end of the novel: “But the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their bible that **he walks**. There are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house—Idle tales, you’ll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms **he has seen two of ’em** looking out of his chamber window, on **every rainy night, since his death.**” Nelly admits, “[Y]et still, I don’t like being out **in the dark**, now—and I don’t like being left by myself in this grim house.”

I would have torn his heart out, and drunk his blood!

It's clear there's plenty of textual evidence for the theory of Cathy and Heathcliff as vampires, but it does beg the question: Was there enough cultural knowledge at the time of Emily Brontë's writing to produce such intention? The short answer is yes. In fact, the word 'vampire' appears in *Wuthering Heights*: "Is he a ghoul, or a **vampire**?" I mused. I had read of such hideous, incarnate demons." Nelly's use of the word at minimum puts the thought in the reader's head and proves the author's knowledge of its existence.

What's more, Emily Brontë was writing *Wuthering Heights* in the thick of what scholars call the 'vampire mania' that hit England. We know Brontë had access to some popular vampire literature in her father's library (Byron), and likely many more (Polidori, the famous penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire*).

Indeed, when Emily Brontë decided to subtly weave a tale of vampirism – whether she intended it literally or metaphorically, and I do believe there's a strong case for literalism here – she was contributing to a long, complex lineage that authors and readers continue to this day.

Indeed, with her striking feminist portrayal of what may be the first female vampire in English literature, she could well have influenced such classics as Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Stoker's *Dracula*, notorious in critical circles for its themes of sexuality and gender.

In sum, I believe that in the long list of genres that Emily Brontë influenced with her seminal work – the gothic novel, romance, horror, literary fiction, family saga, and drama – we can rightfully include the vampire novel.

Annie Neugebauer likes to make things as challenging as possible for herself by writing horror, poetry, literary, and speculative fiction—often blended together in ways ye olde publishing gods have strictly forbidden. She has work appearing in over fifty venues, including *Black Static*, *Apex Magazine*, and *Fireside*. She's the webmaster for the Poetry Society of Texas, an active member of the Horror Writers Association, and in addition to LitReactor, a columnist for *Writer Unboxed*. She's represented by Alec Shane of Writers House. She needs to make new friends because her current ones are tired of hearing about *House of Leaves*. You can visit her at

www.AnnieNeugebauer.com

for discussions, poems, organizational tools for writers, and more.



WHY ARE JAPANESE WOMEN STILL BEWITCHED BY THE BRONTËS?

by **Damian Flanagan** *Japan Times* (June 2016)

Some years ago a sassy Osaka lady asked me to introduce her to the pleasures of Western literature. I duly handed her a variety of classic books, including *The Turn of the Screw*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lolita* and *A Study in Scarlet*. They were all methodically if unenthusiastically read, but when I presented her with a copy of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, she devoured the book, raved about it, rereading it again and again.

Japan seem to be besotted with the three Brontë sisters: Charlotte, Emily and Anne. It's a fascination that goes beyond reading and imagining. A disproportionately high number of Japanese women visit the Brontë's home village of Haworth in the north of England each year, a pilgrimage that has recently been turned into the subject of a novel by Man Booker Prize-shortlisted author Mick Jackson, *Yuki Chan in Brontë Country*.

Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* may have bewitched generations of Japanese readers, but Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (rendered as *Arashigaoka* in Japanese) arguably stands as the most influential novel in Japan written by a non-Japanese woman. It inspired a 1988 Japanese film adaptation, which replaces the wild Yorkshire moors with a rocky Japanese volcano, but has also had a profound influence on some of the country's most important 20th-century women writers, such as Yuko Tsushima and Taeko Kono.



Lucy North, translator of Kono's collection of stories, *Toddler-Hunting and Other Stories*, says Kono was fascinated by Emily and the other Brontë sisters. The pent-up longing, anger and violence in their writing is reflected in the sexually transgressive desires of Kono's female protagonists. The Japanese author even wrote a screenplay of *Wuthering Heights*, which has been used in several theatre productions, and she made the Haworth pilgrimage in 1985 with fellow writer Taeko Tomioka. A year later, the two published a travelogue, *Arashigaoka Futari-tabi* (*Wuthering Heights, Travelled Together*), based on their experiences.

"The elements of sadomasochism in the writing of the Brontë sisters — and indeed in their lives — is a subject that has only just begun to receive clear-eyed scrutiny in the West, from biographers such as Claire Harman," North says, "but it was acutely understood by Kono decades before."

Judith Pascoe, a literature professor at the University of Iowa, has devoted several years to investigating the connection between the Brontës and Japan, and her forthcoming book explores adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* by local writers. She believes the Japanese fascination with the book is exceptional.

"If you buttonholed a random person in Iowa City and asked them to chat about Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters* you would not find many takers," Pascoe says. "But

Japanese people, more often than not, are prepared to venture an opinion on Emily Brontë's novel."

The extravagance of the heroine Catherine's passionate behaviour and her ardour for the enigmatic Heathcliff is one aspect of the novel's appeal to Japanese female readers, according to Pascoe.

"An older Japanese woman told me that the novel filled her with longing," she says, "both for the foreign English locale and for the possibility of being a different, less subdued kind of person."

This year is the 200th anniversary of Charlotte Brontë's birth, and Brontë-mania was in full swing at the U.K.'s Bradford Literary Festival in May, where experts gathered to discuss the sisters' enduring influence.

The latest heavyweight Japanese female author to have rechannelled *Wuthering Heights* in a contemporary Japanese setting is Minae Mizumura, whose 2002 novel *Honkaku Shosetsu* was translated into English by Juliet Winters Carpenter as *A True Novel* in 2013. The complex narrative in this work, which moves from the streets of New York to the mountains of Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, has put Japan at the centre of the worldwide reconsideration of the Brontës' novels. Speaking at the Bradford festival with Carpenter, Mizumura remarked that she read both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* as a child, but had been more affected by the former. It was only after graduating from university and having shied away from English literature that Mizumura re-read *Wuthering Heights* and was deeply moved by the intensity of Emily's forceful imagination.

In May, Mizumura and Carpenter journeyed not just to Haworth, but to Elizabeth Gaskell's House in Manchester,

the former home of Charlotte Brontë's close friend and biographer.

What is it about the condition of modern

Japanese women that made them empathize so strongly with the stories of the Bronte sisters?



"The Brontës were a product of the modernity created by the Industrial Revolution," says Mizumura, adding that this modernity offered "unprecedented opportunities" for women. "In Japan, too, women in the last few generations have been offered freedoms that they have never known before." Embracing these freedoms, Mizumura argues, created a conflict between comforting traditional values and the exhilaration of following one's heart, a theme that the Brontës explored in their novels.

Debate still rages as to what extent the Brontës' works might be termed "feminist": Charlotte was opposed to voting rights for women and was painfully shy and socially conservative. Yet although she did not hold traditional feminist beliefs, the characters she created are intrinsically feminist because of their individuality and intelligence.

The appeal of the Brontë sisters' work lies in the way it depicts psychologically complex heroines, who are often burning with anger and disappointment; wishing simultaneously to be liberated from cruel constraints while retaining an erotic desire for masculine strength.

"It's a mistake to see the Japanese passion for the Brontës as meaning that Japanese women are 'oppressed,'" says North. "That's too much of a cliché — and a crude generalization. What many Japanese women may feel is, like the Brontës before them, both the desire to be 'free' and the contradictory impulse to remain loyal to a comforting patriarchal tradition."

LIGHT SHINING OUT OF DARKNESS

From a review of Claire Harman's biography:

Charlotte Brontë – A Life

480pp. Viking. £25. ISBN 978 0 670 92226 0

Review by Trevor Broughton from the Times Literary Supplement

At the bicentenary of Charlotte Brontë's birth, the cultural marketplace is awash with new work, exhibitions and *hommages* in every genre and medium. The late Victoria Wood's brilliant "Haworth Parsonage Tour Guide" sketch has once again done the rounds on social media, reminding us of all the clichés we so love: the "blustery old Yorkshire community of long ago", the Reverend Brontë "hunched over a sermon", and Charlotte, the gloomy individual so badly in need of a touch of blusher and a perm. Amid all this, do we need another biography of Charlotte Brontë?

We probably don't, but Claire Harman's scholarship is impeccable. Her book reveals few facts not otherwise available in existing biographies and editions, nor is her interpretation of those facts particularly startling. What *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* does with conviction is to remember what many biographies forget: that this is a terrific story. Brimming with indomitable personalities, trials and ordeals, passions and disappointments, it has all the elements of a traditional romance. At the same time, its protagonist, a restless, dissatisfied heroine struggling to make and remake the world in her quest for growth and recognition, is the quintessential modern subject: the subject of the modern novel.

Harman places the propulsive force of story-telling at the heart of her narrative, and Charlotte Brontë steps forth newly minted, as if we've never met her before. Harman's portraits are always three-dimensional and humane, even when they

treat of energetic, creative, sometimes monstrously difficult people. Her account of Charlotte's father, the Revd Patrick Brontë is characteristic. As a young man, Patrick wrote a poem for his fiancée Mary Burder praising her eyes of sparkling blue. When the Burder option fizzled out (Patrick seems to have got cold feet because she was a Dissenter), the poem found its way into his slim volume of *Cottage Poems*. He then presented the volume, with the poem, to another young woman, pointedly inking in a correction to "sparkling hazle eye". As Harman observes, this efficient repurposing might at a push have seemed engagingly "familiar and jocular" if the message of the poem had been less dour. "But hark, fair maid! whate'er they say / You're but a breathing mass of clay / Fast ripening for the grave" were lines "unlikely to delight a twenty-year-old girl" even if he had got the colour of her eyes right. "[A] reckless and rather chilly lover" is Harman's crisp verdict.

A little more than a decade later, and Patrick, recently widowed and now living in Yorkshire, cast vigorously about for a wife to take the place of Maria, the shrewdly resilient woman who had finally acceded to his charms. After a number of ill-judged approaches to convenient friends of friends, he eventually laid siege once more upon blue-eyed Mary Burder. Having established that she was still single, he "revived his suit in a letter of quite remarkable crassness and egotism". "You were the *first* whose hand I solicited, and no doubt I was the *first* to

whom you promised to give that hand However much you may dislike me now, I am sure you once loved me” Nothing, his letter assumes, can possibly have happened to her in the intervening ten years. Meanwhile, the death of his wife has led him to believe “this world to be but vanity”. Come to Haworth and ripen for the grave with me, he seems to suggest, offering her “a competency” and the chance to share the endearing ways of his “sweet little family” (of six). The *faux pas*, the sensitivity that begins and ends with his own feelings, the confidence that the world can and should revolve around his own needs, are all there in the archive, all come direct from the Revd Patrick Brontë himself. The tact that can forgive tactlessness, the Austenian ear for tone and detail, and the bravery to see – occasionally and very economically – the ludicrous side of the Charlotte Brontë story, are all Harman’s.

While fully acknowledging what a difficult man Patrick Brontë was to live with – in the surviving documents he seems to be alternately stormy and withdrawn – Harman never falls into the trap of demonizing him or victimizing his children. Living with the Revd Patrick Brontë may have been both infuriating *and* productive. In 1844, she notes, Charlotte refused a perfectly good offer of well-paid work in charge of a school for what sounded like a rock-solid reason: her father needed her at home. But Emily was at home. Without casting doubt on Charlotte’s genuine concern for her father’s welfare she was very capable of overlooking it when she really wanted to do something and was capable also of using it as an excuse for inaction, as she did on many occasions over the next years.

Taking his meals alone, Patrick left his household to their own devices much of the time. He seems to have supported their various schemes for earning money – even Branwell’s self-evidently hopeless career as an artist (and nowhere is Harman more withering than when describing Branwell’s artwork) – but to have accepted them back

home without demur when the schemes failed. There were times – some months in 1847 for instance – when Patrick, nearly seventy years old, was effectively supporting six adults on his clerical income: himself, the three surviving daughters then in retreat from teaching, the feckless Branwell in retreat from everything, and the ageing servant Tabby. That 1847 was also the year Charlotte, Emily and Anne burst into view with their first novels can easily occlude Patrick’s obdurate style of paternal accommodation.

Harman is characteristically clear-sighted in the face of murky family dynamics. Her Patrick is not, or at least not simply, a bully and a tyrant. For example, having spent a decade or more satirizing curates in letters and print, Charlotte eventually accepted the hand of Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1854, countering her father’s objections to his lowly status with the words “I must marry a curate if I marry at all; not merely a curate but *your* curate”. Only by marrying his curate could Charlotte continue to oversee her father’s household. By this point Charlotte Brontë was Currer Bell, the successful author of *Jane Eyre* and the respected author of *Shirley*; locally lionized and internationally fêted. Why, as an adult, as the published author she had so longed to be, and with the literary world at her feet, did she feel the need to marry anyone, much less the unremarkable, unliterary Arthur? Biographers from Elizabeth Gaskell onwards have struggled with what seems an unromantic capitulation to paternal neediness. Harman makes it clear that someone can be worthy of admiration, respect, love and – in Charlotte’s case – lifelong service if not always implicit obedience, while still being, in non-negotiable ways, an arse. It is not a paradox, but a fact of everyday life.

Shortly after Charlotte’s death in 1855, her friend Elizabeth Gaskell began researching *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). Mary Taylor, one of Charlotte’s two lifelong friends from Roe

Head school, recalled for Gaskell's benefit how the whole Brontë family "used to 'make out' histories, and invent characters and events. I told her sometimes they were like growing potatoes in a cellar. She said, sadly, 'Yes! I know we are!'" Harman has a fine ear for such exchanges; one learns much from its combination of dank ordinariness and mystery, from its peculiar mixture of pathos and pungency. It is never quite clear, from Gaskell's telling of the anecdote through its repetitions in subsequent Lives, what or who "they" are in Taylor's reminiscence. In a way, the whole difficulty of Brontë biography, and of literary biography generally, hangs on whether or not one's potatoes – the trope one is attempting to explain – are literary works or literary lives. Are "they" the imaginative games and story-tellings to which Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne were addicted, in the absence of other stimulation or company? The context in Gaskell's biography implies as much.

Literary critics routinely link the potatoes in the cellar to a passage in *The Professor*, in which the narrator William Crimsworth, exasperated beyond endurance by his life as his brother's clerk and underling, compares himself to "a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well". The image of the plant growing in darkness is then taken variously as a trope for Romantic or Gothic subjectivity: of heroic resistance, or of perverted energy.

There is, of course, another possibility: that "they" in Mary Taylor's anecdote are the Brontë siblings themselves: creatures struggling to grow and flourish without the light of stimulation or the nutriment of encouragement. Certainly Charlotte's response, with its note of wistful recognition, suggests as much. What would it mean to read the image back into the Brontës' lives, as Charlotte seems to do?

Here one butts up against another set of clichés: the lonely Brontës wandering across the lonely windswept moor, poring over tiny handwritten manuscripts for lack of anything better to do, or resentfully shut up in other people's houses teaching other people's children. It cannot be denied that Charlotte's was often a confined and pent-up existence: one has only to see the parsonage dining table and think of the miles the siblings paced around it night after night, without decent lighting or an episode of *Happy Valley* to look forward to. But as the historian Juliet Barker has emphatically revealed, and as Harman rightly allows, the Haworth parsonage and its inhabitants were also involved in sectarian debate, political discussion, civic activity and a lively cultural life. From an early age, for instance, Charlotte was an impressive if unoriginal draughtswoman, and when she visited London as an adult, she wore her companions out with the pictures she knew about and wanted to see. She may have fallen disastrously in love in Belgium, but she also learned French to exacting standards. There is plenty of evidence in Harman's biography that such isolation as the siblings endured was at least partly sizarish stand-offishness and social embarrassment; Charlotte seems to have thrown it off as soon as her marriage to a clergyman required it, helping out in the routines of parish life. She remained attuned to current affairs – one of her last letters commented on the sufferings of the Crimean War. Charlotte may have felt misplaced, unrecognized and culturally undernourished, but, as Claire Harman's book vividly shows, she also lived among frank and pithy men and women who cared about her, were interested in her, and, like Mary Taylor, were not afraid to call a spud a spud.

THE 2016 BRONTË SOCIETY CONFERENCE

by Emily Prince

The afternoon kicked off with an introductory lecture from Professor Christine Alexander on Charlotte Brontë's early literary ambitions. The theme of the conference was: "the business of a woman's life" – Charlotte Brontë and the Woman Question. This title refers to the infamous exchange between Charlotte at the age of twenty and the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, who (probably meaning well) advised her that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be". Professor Alexander's lecture was therefore well-placed to introduce us to Charlotte as a young writer, and explore how this advice was to affect her literary trajectory, transitioning from her copious amounts of juvenilia through to her adult, post-teaching career as a novelist.

This was followed by a drinks reception doubling as a launch for a bicentenary publication by the Bronte Society – *Celebrating Charlotte Brontë: Transforming Life into Literature in Jane Eyre*. The authors, Professor Alexander and Sara L. Pearson were both present to sign our copies and tell us about the writing process, and so commenced my potentially unwise spending spree at the conference book stall.

We started again promptly at 9.30am on Saturday morning for the keynote address from Professor Germaine Greer. I just can't overestimate how wonderful this was. It was bold and controversial (no surprises there, it was written by Germaine Greer), and argued that *Jane Eyre* as a text broaches the last great taboo, positioning Rochester as a father-figure and Jane as the daughter-figure and seducer of the father. Basically labelling the novel as an exploration of father-daughter incest is an unusual claim to make in a room full of Brontë devotees, but in true

Greer fashion, she was unapologetic without being aggressive, firm in her words while inviting us to argue with her, and presented some truly nuanced and brilliant observations on femininity, physicality, the relationship between Patrick Brontë and his children, and Charlotte herself. I know Germaine Greer is a divisive figure, and there are positions of hers that I most definitely disagree with, but hearing her speak was an honour, and a memory I will cherish forever.

After a short indulgence, we re-assembled to hear a group of speakers discussing Charlotte Brontë's 20th century impact – Dr Siv Jansson on the biographical films of the Brontës, Dr Catherine Han on contemporary literary adaptations and how they relate to Gilbert and Gubar's 1979 seminal critical text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and Dr Sarah E Fanning on feminism and representations of Jane Eyre on screen. All of these presentations were wonderful, and this section was a conference highlight for me.

After lunch, a group of us went to Elizabeth Gaskell's House in Manchester, and although the visit was a bit rushed, it was a delight to see the residence that Charlotte had visited during her friendship with Mrs Gaskell and hear about the way the Gaskell family lived and worked. I will definitely return for a longer visit at a later date.

We returned to the hotel just in time for the next set of speakers, discussing the theme of writing and a woman's life – Heather Williams on the plight of unwed daughters standing in as substitute wives for their widowed fathers in Victorian literature, Professor Temma Berg on the business and representation of coquetry in fiction, and Dr Jian Choe on Charlotte's urban

experiences and the impact on her life and art. After dinner there was a talk by Claire Harman on the lives of Charlotte's school friends, Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey, and their behaviour and influence on Charlotte's work.

This morning Professor Sally Shuttleworth spoke to us about justice and injustice in Charlotte Brontë's fiction, particularly as seen through the experience of the child characters. Professor Shuttleworth has written extensively on child psychology and how this is represented in literature of the Victorian period.

We leapt straight into the last section afterwards, on employment, education and economics. Margaret Mills was also absent, so the Vice President of the Brontë Society, Dr Patsy Stoneman, read her article on education and employment in Charlotte's work, while Professor Joanne Rostek spoke about feminist economics and different economic readings of *Shirley*, and Professor Deborah Wynne discussed the influence of the textile trade and manufacturing industries of Yorkshire and how they framed Charlotte's life and work.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE JUNE

Lynne Granger
Wendy James
Catherine Job

IS THIS CHARLOTTE'S SCRAPBOOK?

Mystery surrounds a scrapbook thought to belong to Charlotte Brontë that could be worth a staggering £100,000. The anonymous owner bought the album for £20 in the 1980s from a book binder in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. He took the album, which is crammed with poetry, prints and watercolours, to Sotheby's but the auction house showed no interest and he put it in a drawer.

But last year he dug it out to show his son and noticed words scrawled between the first

two pages, which were glued together. When they are held to the light, an inscription reading "C Bell her book" can be seen, being Charlotte's pseudonym. Underneath is the signature "C Brontë".



Experts at antiquarian bookshop, Jarndyce, in London, are intrigued but say because the pages are glued together they cannot date the ink and therefore authenticate the album. The album's owner said: "I would just like to know what the truth is."

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Ashmount, the 8 bedroom boutique hotel in Mytholmes Lane, Haworth, is for sale due to the ill health of the current owners. It is expected to sell for £650,000.



The house belonged to Dr Amos Ingham, the doctor who attended to Charlotte and her father when they died – in 1855 and 1861 respectively. At the time he was living elsewhere in the village but built this house in 1870.

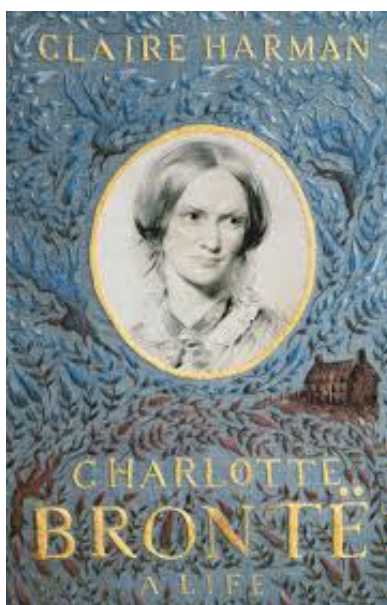
Dr Ingham was the source of the story of Branwell setting fire to his bed when he was drunk.

DID CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND CHARLES DICKENS EVER MEET?

by Michelle Cavanagh

That's a question many members of the Australian Brontë Association and NSW Dickens Society have often wondered and was explored by Canadian Professor Sara Pearson in the talk she gave at a dinner held in Sydney two years ago.

According to Claire Harman, in her excellent Bicentennial biography *Charlotte Brontë A Life*, the pair did meet. "George Smith's inspired generosity changed Charlotte Brontë's life in ways she had not imagined possible, but she retained a clear sense of her own social limitations, and fended off many of his initiatives on her behalf, knowing that they would exhaust her physically and mentally...She turned down invitations to meet Dickens socially, though the two seem to have been introduced, fleetingly, after a play that Smith took her to. In later life Smith said he had introduced them, and Charlotte told John Stores Smith, an early fan, that she had met Dickens but didn't like him (although she admired his books). The

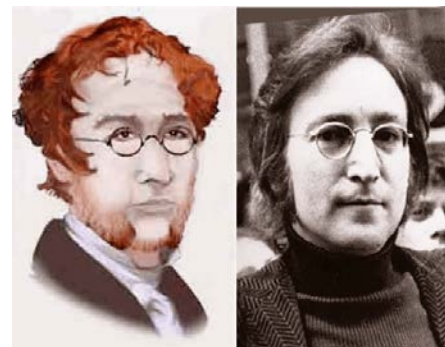


contact of their imagination, however, went much deeper. Dickens' depiction of systematic negligence and cruelty in *Nicholas Nickleby* had impressed Charlotte and, as we have seen, probably contributed to her picture of Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Dickens told Lockhart that he had never read *Jane Eyre*...His friend Forster, who had read *Jane Eyre* and was struck by the astonishing power of the early chapters being told from the oppressed child's point of view, suggested to Dickens that it would be an interesting experiment to try the same thing, and Dickens, with his keen appetite for novelty, took up the idea immediately in the composition of *David Copperfield*...We think nothing now of stories told from a child's point of view, but Charlotte Brontë was the first to do it, and Dickens the second."

Food for thought for members of both Societies to ponder!

THE INFERNAL WORLD OF BRANWELL BRONTË 2017

In 2017 we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Branwell Brontë. Was he merely the wastrel who was a drunkard and a drug addict? Or did he have talent like his sisters? At one of our meetings next year we will meet a few of his friends, who will reminisce about their unusual friend. Meanwhile, have a look at these images and ask yourself whether it is possible that John Lennon was the reincarnation of Branwell!



2017 Program

The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë

26 June 1817 – 24 September 1848

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 February** **AGM; *Jane Again* – Jennifer Livett**
“Reader, she did not marry him, or rather, when at last she did, it was not so straightforward as she implies in her memoirs.” The opening line of Jennifer’s debut novel, ***Wild Island***, is intriguing and has us asking what happens next? Jennifer takes us on a journey to a young Van Dieman’s Land, interweaving beloved fictional characters with well-known historical ones.
- 1 April** ***The Life & Art of Branwell Brontë* – Professor Christine Alexander**
Branwell was a promising writer and artist with a rich imagination. Although he was the first of the Brontë siblings to appear in print, he would never gain money or success and was destined to live in the shadow of his three sisters. Mrs Gaskell described his best-known painting, now hanging in the National Portrait Gallery, as a “*rough, common-looking*” thing. Christine will discuss the life and art of this extraordinary man.
- 3 June** ***Wuthering Heights* – Associate Professor Debra Adelaide**
Debra, author of *The Women’s Pages*, will look closely at the function of the reader in the novel, and discuss some of its iterations (eg Sylvia Plath’s poem, Kate Bush’s song).
- 26 June** **Branwell Brontë Bicentenary Dinner**
- 5 August** ***Branwell Brontë & Friends* – introduced by Dr Christopher Cooper**
Branwell’s friends were both famous and infamous, ranging from prominent literary and fine arts men to mill owners, boaties and those who worked on the railways and, of course, Mrs Robinson.
- 7 October** ***Gypsies in Europe* – Souha Korbatiéh**
Heathcliff is referred to as “*that gipsy brat*” and Rochester masquerades as “*the Sybil*” in his own home “*to tell the gentry their fortunes*”. Souha will examine the history of the gypsies in Europe and what such references tell us about the central characters, themes and issues of both novels whilst highlighting the plight of marginal classes and the dangers of romantic imaginings.
- 2 December** **ABA/Dickens Christmas Lunch**
The Grand Dining Room (Cello’s), Castlereagh Boutique Hotel

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a wonderful year we have had *Celebrating Charlotte* full of great speakers, events and friendship.

Since our last newsletter, Christopher Cooper posed the question as to whether Charlotte could have been a “closet Catholic”, Jenny MacLennan again delighted us a look at some of the many film and TV adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, and Christine Gietz left us wanting more after her exploration of Jane Eyre, the woman and the character, reinforcing our belief that Jane matters!

Jane Eyre was our book of this bicentenary year. Many thanks to those members who read extracts from the novel at our Saturday meetings – Rodney Pyne, Louise Owens, Vasudha Chandra, Cindy Broadbent and Jo Henwood. You really set the scene on each occasion.

Our Patron, Christine Alexander, as well as members Vasudha Chandra and Susannah Fullerton have continued to give great talks on Charlotte and the Brontës throughout the year and promote the ABA. The new brochures for the Association we produced this year have been very successful and well received at each event. Susannah’s recent talks at the Art Gallery of NSW were on Charlotte Bronte and *Jane Eyre*. 250 brochures with next year’s program were taken by attendees which is very pleasing. We hope to see new members and/or visitors at our meetings and events in the future.

Thanks to Wendy King who manages our Facebook page. I know there has been much interest in what we have planned for the coming year. Follow us at *Australian Bronte Association*.

In 2017 we will be delving into **THE INFERNAL WORLD OF BRANWELL BRONTË**. A dinner will be held on his 200th birthday, 26th June, and meetings during the year will

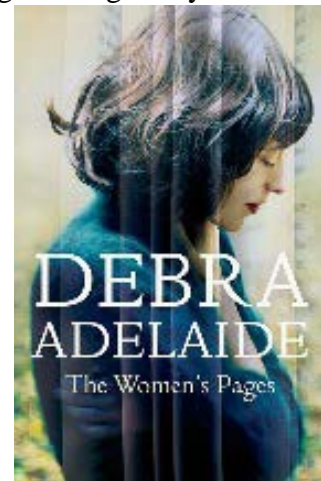
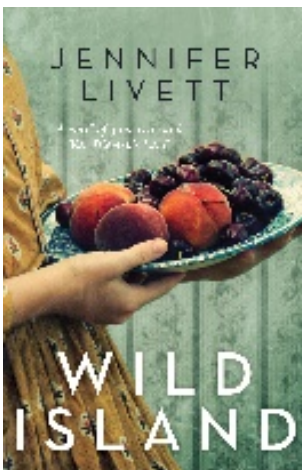
include Christine Alexander’s talk on Branwell’s life and art, and a collaboration by ABA members to look at some of his friends, both famous and infamous. Our program will also include talks by two local writers – Jennifer Livett and Deborah Adelaide.

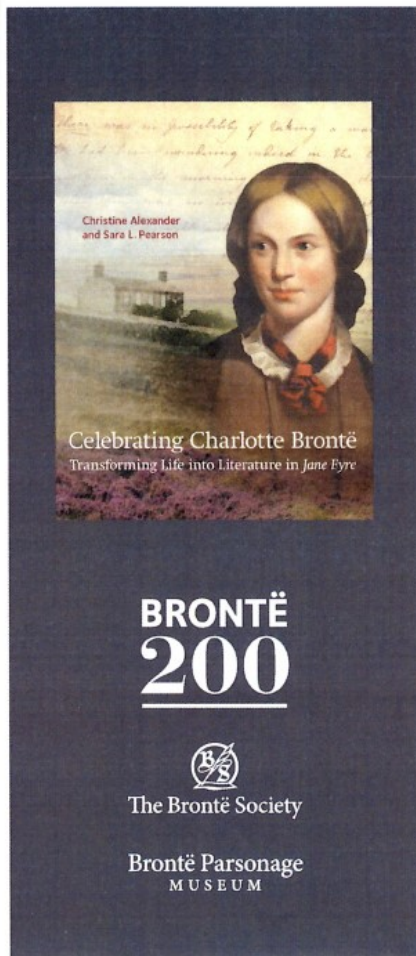
Having taken on the role of President of the ABA in mid 2011, I have decided not to stand for re-nomination in 2017. I would like to sincerely thank all the committee – Michelle Cavanagh, Christopher Cooper, Michael Links, Carmel Nestor, Annette Harman, Gary Corkill and Mandy Swann for their contributions to the ABA and assistance to me personally over the

years. We are all volunteers and lead busy lives but have endeavoured to provide interesting, informative and fun talks and events and I know this will continue in the years ahead. Thank you also to our Patron, Christine Alexander, for her support and guidance. Most of all, I would like to thank you, the members, for your friendship, encouragement and support. I couldn’t have done it without you! Membership has more than doubled during this time and will continue to grow. I look forward to our times together at future meetings.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Sarah Burns





Celebrating Charlotte Brontë Transforming Life into Literature in *Jane Eyre*

Christine Alexander and Sara L. Pearson

Charlotte Brontë filled her wildly successful novel *Jane Eyre* with people, places, and things from everyday life, anchoring the Gothic plot in what was 'real, cool, and solid'. Her reading audience of 1847 would have entered into a fictional world that felt comfortably familiar, populated by wealthy landowners, clergymen, teachers, governesses and servants; enacted in settings including recognisable Yorkshire landscapes and detailed architectural descriptions of manor houses, inns, villages, and cottages; furnished throughout with a host of objects ranging from exotic 'sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red' and 'Tyrian-dyed' curtains to burnt porridge and sewing needles.

Celebrating Charlotte Brontë: Transforming Life into Literature in Jane Eyre invites the twenty-first century reader into Charlotte's material world, both the world of the author and the world she created in her most famous novel. Providing detailed commentaries and lavishly illustrated with objects and images from the author's own life and times, this book explores Charlotte Brontë's accomplishment in imaginatively transforming her lived experience into a fictional masterpiece.

ISBN: 9780950582900
RRP \$40.00



Christine Alexander is Scientia Professor of English in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts at UNSW, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. She has written extensively on the Brontës, especially on their early writings—including a British Academy prize-winning book and a multi-volume edition on *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Blackwells, 1983, 1987, 1991).

Her other publications include the co-authored books *The Art of the Brontës*, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, and *Tales of Glass Town, Angria and Gondal*.



To order a copy of *Celebrating Charlotte Brontë: Transforming Life into Literature in Jane Eyre* please visit www.unsw.to/brontebooks