

DID CHARLOTTE BRONTË READ JAMES FENIMORE COOPER?

An edited version of a talk given by Ann Lock to the Australian
Brontë Association on 7th February 2004

In the article ‘Keighley Mechanics Institute’ in the Australia Brontë association Newsletter No. 11, Christopher Cooper quotes from Mr Clifford Whone’s paper published in the 1950 Brontë Society Transactions entitled ‘Where The Brontës Borrowed Books’. This paper lists books available at the Mechanics’ Institute in 1841. The list includes a set of eleven books by James Fenimore Cooper, including *The Last Of The Mohicans*.

Christopher asked the question – ‘Did Charlotte ever read Fenimore Cooper?’ It is quite possible because in her novels she makes reference to the Red Indian. I decided to take up the challenge so I reread *Shirley*.

Shirley is the story of two brothers, Robert and Louis Gerard Moore. Their ‘Belgian mother, Hortense Gerard, had married her father’s English business associate Robert Moore uniting two merchant families, but the fortunes and standing of the family business tumbled, under the impact of the French Revolution. Robert tried to rebuild the fallen house of Gerard and Moore on a scale at least equal to its former greatness’. He ran a mill in England, owned by Shirley Keeldar ‘but his plans are frustrated both by the opposition of local workers and the depression of trade caused by the war with France and its impact on relations with America’.

Robert was a victim of politics and history and felt he must deny his love for Caroline Helstone, who was poor, and marry a rich woman. So he proposed to Shirley Keeldar who refused him. Shirley was rich and secretly loved Robert’s brother Louis. Louis worked as a tutor to Shirley’s cousin in England. Shirley was also once his pupil. Louis was frustrated with his work and the repression of his love for Shirley because of the difference in their status. Money was the obstacle for Robert and Caroline, and money, equality and status the obstacles for Louis and Shirley.

So Charlotte needed to provide hope for Robert and Louis, as well as Caroline and Shirley. She chose the North East coast of America as an emigration goal for her brothers. Charlotte probably chose this area as it represented freedom, liberty, individuality, a chance at a fresh start and an untamed wilderness. She was probably thinking of her beloved English moors near Haworth and freedom. Also the romance of the area probably appealed to Charlotte. Robert said to Mr Yorke: ‘... I will take an axe and an emigrant’s berth and go out with Louis to the West – he and I have settled it.’

Charlotte resolved Robert’s and Caroline’s love dilemma with the repeal of the Orders In Council and Robert was able to declare his love for Caroline because of the now anticipated financial security. He said to Caroline: ‘Yesterday evening at this time I was packing some books for a sea-voyage: they were the only possessions except some clothes, seeds, roots and tools which I felt free to take with me to Canada.’

But Charlotte also needed to resolve the impasse of inequality in status between Shirley and Louis. Louis felt inferior to Shirley in status and this was the obstacle for declaring his love. Shirley tried to show Louis that, to her, he is equal in other respects. Charlotte used taunting repartee between the pair. She chose American Indian culture as one reference for this taunting possibility because it represented freedom from class distinction, though not race, illustrated the taming of the wild, and provided a means for them both to get each other to reveal their true feelings. What do you think Shirley and Louis are trying to say to each other in the following quotations?

Shirley said to Louis: ‘... Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her piccaninny’s head in an unmolested corner of her wig-wam. I’ll emigrate to the western woods.’ Louis Moore laughed. ‘To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo: and after wedlock to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord’s maize-field, while he smokes his pipe or drinks fire-water.’

And later in the book Louis said to Shirley: ‘And any Indian tribe of Black-feet, or Flat-heads, would afford us a bride, perhaps?’ ‘No (hesitating); I think not. The savage is sordid: I think – that is, I

hope, -- you would neither of you share your earth with that to which you could not give your heart.’ ‘What suggested the wild West to your mind, Miss Keeldar?’

I felt like asking, “what suggested the Wild West to your mind Miss Brontë?” Was it reading James Fenimore Cooper’s books or newspapers of the day? Was it discussions about the American colonies in the Brontë home or the Taylor home?

So the Moore brothers saw the North East coast of America as their future. Finally Louis and Shirley declared their love for each other and Louis said to Shirley: ‘... wherever my home be I have chosen my wife. If I stay in England, in England you will stay; if I cross the Atlantic, you will cross it also.’

So where did Charlotte find her American Indian references? Was it James Fenimore Cooper’s books or other books, magazines, or newspapers?

In *Shirley* Charlotte refers to the American Indian culture about nine times. General words such as the following are used: archers, arrows, buffalo, rifle hot, savage, weaving mats, string beads, wigwam, maize-fields, smokes pipe and drinks fire water.

When Charlotte refers to the area to which the brothers wish to emigrate she uses the geographical words: Canada, west, Wild West, North American Indian, western woods, American woods and cross the Atlantic. The Wild West for English people then was the North East Coast of America, including Canada, that is, going west across the Atlantic from England. In *Shirley* Charlotte describes the sitting room at Briarmains, the Yorke home. ‘Some Canadian views hang on the walls – green forest and blue water-scenery ...’

However Charlotte uses specific terms and shows a knowledge of American Indian culture. She uses the words Blackfeet, Flatheads, White Cloud and Big Buffalo. But more about the specific words later.

So after rereading *Shirley* and taking out the American Indian quotes I then read *The Last of the Mohicans* and researched James Fenimore Cooper and American Indian culture.

James Fenimore Cooper was born in 1789 in New Jersey, America, 26 years before Charlotte Brontë was born. He read an English novel and declared that he could write a better novel. His wife dared him to do so and so he wrote his first novel in 1820. It was *Precaution*, a domestic comedy based on Jane Austen's novels. It was not very good and was not successful. He then wrote *The Spy* in 1821 and this was based on Sir Walter Scott's novel *Waverley*. Cooper was inspired by Scott and became friends with him when he visited Europe in 1826-1833.

Cooper included in his writings a series of five novels called *The Leatherstocking Tales*. These novels are about pioneering on the frontier in America and include *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841).

The hero is Natty Bumppo and he has a different nickname in each of the five books. The nicknames describe Natty and his skills.

Cooper was the first American author to achieve international recognition, including recognition from Sir Walter Scott. Cooper was considered the American Scott and his books were second to Scott in popularity. Cooper was America's first professional novelist and the first novelist to make the American Indian a familiar and romantic figure. Like some of Scott's novels these Leatherstocking Tales were historical adventures with violence and light and dark. The hero, Natty Bumppo, is a rebel heroically opposed to industrial development and society.

'The character of Natty drew upon folk traditions of historical pioneers such as Daniel Boone. Natty's friendship with the Delaware chief Chingachgook established him as a mediating figure between the white, advancing settlers, and the threatened culture of the native Americans.'

The action in *The Last of the Mohicans* takes place largely in the forests of upper New York during the French Indian wars. In the latest film adaptation of the novel Daniel Day-Lewis plays Natty Bumppo (Hawkeye) and establishes Natty's character in the opening scene.

We all know how much Sir Walter Scott was admired by the Brontës and how much he influenced their writings. Charlotte would have encountered the name “Keeldar”, which she gave to the heroine of Shirley, in Scott’s poem “The Death of Keeldar”. When Shirley talks about taking Caroline on a holiday she discusses the Shetland Islands. Charlotte used Scott’s geography about the Shetland Islands from his novel *The Pirate*.

When Cooper visited Europe from 1826 to 1833 he was at the height of his fame and admired by Scott and other authors. Because of his association with the Marquis de Lafayette in Paris, Cooper became increasingly interested in republican politics and started writing non-fiction books about democracy, politics and society. The public did not like these books, preferring his American adventures. He became increasingly unpopular in America, but in his later years he was forced to go on writing for income and returned to writing novels.

I then read the other four books in the Leatherstocking series. The setting for *The Last of the Mohicans*, the north east coast of America, matches exactly the area to which the Moore brothers are considering to emigrate. I could also match the general words in *Shirley* and *The Last of the Mohicans* but I could not find the specific words used by Charlotte in Shirley in *The Leatherstocking Tales*.

Now for the specific words. In *Shirley* Charlotte refers to Flatheads twice. Shirley says to Louis: ‘And peacefully flattening her piccaninny’s head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam..’ And Louis says to Shirley: ‘And any Indian tribe of Blackfeet or Flathead would afford a bride perhaps.’

From the *Encyclopaedia of Native American Tribes* (Waldman) I established that the Flathead Indians are also known as the Salish people. Some of these Indians ‘practised a custom known as head-flattening, a gradual process of deformation by tying a padded board to the forehead of infants. With growth their heads took on a tapered, pointed look.’ These Indians laughed at people with normal heads. ‘The Blackfeet were traditional enemies of the Flatheads.’ The Blackfeet were a northeastern American tribe, so called because of their black-dyed moccasins.

Both the Blackfeet and the Flatheads are of Algonquin stock. Mohican was a spelling popularised by Cooper and refers to the

Mohegan and Mahican. Both of these tribes are of Algonquin stock and are from northeastern America.

So in referring to Flatheads and Blackfeet, Charlotte used accurate, factual information. Significantly the Indian tribes Charlotte refers to are northeastern American Indian tribes. Once again this matches the area to which the Moore brothers were planning to emigrate.

In *Shirley* Louis Moore says ‘To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo ...’

From *The Encyclopaedia of Native American Tribes* White Cloud preached against white culture and called for a return to traditional Indian ways in 1832. He was also known as the Winnebago Prophet. The Winnebago are a tribe of northeastern American Indians. I could not find any information about Big Buffalo.

Also in *Shirley*, Charlotte says when describing Malone: ‘... not Daniel O’Connell’s style, but the high featured North American Indian sort of visage ...’

The above quotation and the two previous ones about the Flatheads suggest that Charlotte read about American Indians in some other book, newspaper or magazine and that she looked at pictures of American Indians. The Moravian missionaries kept the English public informed of conditions in America. It is interesting to note that Anne Brontë turned to the Moravians when she had religious doubts. Natty Bumppo was raised by the Moravians and Charlotte, through Ellen Nussey, probably knew about the Moravian Frances Jane Eyre in Leeds. Cooper drew on Moravian missionaries’ accounts of opposing tribes.

When Louis is trying to assess Shirley’s feelings they both engage in a repartee in which Shirley says: ‘I always think you stand in the world like a solitary but watchful, thoughtful archer in a wood; and the quiver on your shoulder holds more arrows than one; your bow is provided with a second string. Such too is your brother’s wont. You two might go forth homeless hunters to the loneliest western wilds; and all would be well with you. The hewn tree would make you a hut, the cleared forest yield your fields from its stripped bosom; the buffalo would feel your rifle shot, and with lowered horns and hump pay homage at your feet.’

The above description of Louis Moore could be a description of Natty Bumppo. The character of Natty Bumppo was one of the main reasons for the popularity of *The Leatherstocking Tales* and I feel Charlotte would have liked the character of Natty. There are other similarities between the characters of natty Bumppo and Louis Moore.

Both Natty and Louis are 'declassed'. The circumstances of Natty's life have put him entirely outside society. He belongs to no group. He is a loner. Louis once belonged to a wealthy, respected family and enjoyed the accompanying status. He then became a tutor because of the bankruptcy of his father. He has no social status.

Both men feel that nature belongs to everyone – that if you have nothing else, you have nature. They see nature as an equaliser. They are one with nature and not exploiting nature. In *The Pioneers* Natty (as Leatherstocking) says: 'Now here am I, a hunter and a scout and a guide, although I do not own a foot of land on 'arth yet do I enjoy and possess more than the great Albany Paltroun. With the heaven over my head to keep me in mind of the last great hunt, and the dried leaves beneath my feet, I tramp over the ground as freely as if I was its lord and owner; and what more need heart desire?'

And Louis, alone with Shirley's dog Tartar in the garden, says: 'Old boy! ... the autumn sun shines as pleasantly on us as on the fairest and richest. This garden is none of ours, but we enjoy its greenness and perfume, don't we? ... no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me, they are mine.'

Both Louis and Natty love and respect the environment and animals. They are both associated with very faithful dogs. Tartar is Shirley's dog but loves to go to Louis. In *The Prairie*, when Natty is dying and his dog dies just before him, the Indians stuff the dog, hoping that Natty will think he is stroking his live dog.

Both men have a natural, essential goodness. They are the strong silent types with strong principles. Both men are entirely trustworthy. They are intelligent thinkers and like to think before acting. They are not impetuous and both men never change their ideals. They are very faithful.

Both men are kind and hate cruelty. They are loners and self-sufficient. They are taciturn and yet when they do have something to say they impress people.

Natty would not marry an American Indian and Louis would not marry an American Indian or a slave girl. This suggests that race lines are more firm than class lines.

Class does not prove an obstacle for Shirley, and Judith Hutter in *The Deerslayer*. Shirley Keeldar appreciates Louis Moore's fine qualities and Judith appreciates Natty's fine qualities. Yet Natty disapproves of Judith wanting to improve her class status.

There are a few similarities in the writings of Charlotte Brontë and James Fenimore Cooper. *Shirley* and *The Last of the Mohicans* are both concerned with the impact of industrialisation and/or colonisation on society and the environment. Both writers were influenced by Sir Walter Scott. They both address the reader – 'Reader I married him' (*Jane Eyre*) and 'The reader may better imagine.' (*The Last of the Mohicans*). They both have no wish to 'pollute' the page with unpleasant language. They both seem to enjoy describing the natural environment. They both refer to the bible and other authors, such as Shakespeare.

Both authors use the same suspense technique of anticipating a character's name after the character has appeared in the story. At the beginning of Chapter Four in *The Last of the Mohicans* a group of riders appear along a path and a long conversation follows, and at the end:

"We will not dispute concerning the excellence of the passage," returned Hayward, smiling; for, as the reader has anticipated, it was he.'

In Chapter 11 of *Jane Eyre*, Jane arrives at Ferndean and is looking at the house:

'It opened slowly: a figure came out into the twilight and stood on the step; a man without a hat: he stretched forth his hand as if to feel whether it rained. Dusk as it was, I had recognized him – it was my master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and no other.'

I realise this last argument concerning the similarities in the writings of both authors, is a very tenuous one, as the perceived similarities could be just typical of the writings of the day. Emily was an original.

I think Charlotte would have wanted to read James Fenimore Cooper's novels, most notably *The Leatherstocking Tales* because they were some of the most popular books of the time. They were the

first novels about the American Indians and about colonisation, an area of great interest for England. They were the first internationally recognised novels by an American author. They were written by an author admired by Sir Walter Scott and this would have impressed Charlotte. They were readily available at the time in the Keighley Mechanics' Institute, and probably in the local circulating library.

I think it is quite possible that Charlotte did read Cooper's novels because of the number and nature of the American Indian references in *Shirley*. Then again, Charlotte might reply to me as *Shirley* replied to Louis Moore when he asked 'What suggested the wild west to your mind, Miss Keeldar?' *Shirley* replies 'I know nothing, I am only discovering them now. I spoke at hazard.'

I came to the above conclusion in October 2003, just before our Three Sisters weekend. A couple of days before, I received my copy of *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* by Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith. I immediately looked up "Cooper" and "American Indian" but found no entries. I then saw an entry on 'Books Read By The Brontës'. In a letter to Ellen Nussey in July 1834, Charlotte enthusiastically tells Ellen to 'read Scott alone – all novels after his are worthless'. 'but her later letter to Hartley Coleridge (10 Dec 1840) shows that by the age of 24 she was familiar with a range of novels from authors as various as Samuel Richardson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charlotte Smith, Revd. George Moore, Charles Dickens, James Fenimore Cooper, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Samuel Warren.'

So Charlotte Brontë did read James Fenimore Cooper. As *The Last of the Mohicans* was the most popular and successful of his novels it can be assumed that Charlotte read it. I feel Charlotte read other Fenimore Cooper books. There were eleven in the Keighley Mechanics' Institute library in 1841 and there were probably some of his books in the Keighley Circulating Library.

Further quoting from the Oxford Companion: 'In November 1840 Charlotte writing as CT sought Coleridge's evaluation of a manuscript, probably *Ashworth*. Her 10 December reply to his letter expresses pleasure that her prose left her sex indeterminate but implies that his assessment was discouraging.'

I then looked for this letter in *The Brontës – A Life In Letters*, edited by Juliet Barker. I am quoting from the end of this letter: 'I am

pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I belong to the soft or the hard sex – and though at first I had no intention of being enigmatical on the subject – yet as I accidentally omitted to give the clue at first, I will venture purposely to withhold it now – as to my handwriting, or the ladylike tricks you mention in my style and imagery – you must not draw any conclusions from those – Several young gentlemen curl their hair and wear corsets – Richardson and Rousseau – write exactly like old women – and Bulwer and Cooper and Dickens and Warren like boarding school misses. Seriously Sir I am very much obliged to you for your kind and candid letter – and on the whole I wonder you took the trouble to read and notice the demi-precious novelette of an anonymous scribe who had not even the manners to tell you whether he was a man or woman, or whether his common place ‘CT’ meant Charles Tims or Charlotte Tomkins.’

So Charlotte thought James Fenimore Cooper wrote like a ‘boarding school miss’. On the other hand the latest web site assessment says his writing could be ‘oppressively schoolmasterish’!! Mark Twain wrote a very funny criticism of James Fenimore Cooper’s work called *Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences* and one of his criticisms was ‘the discrepancy between the polished, poetic lines in Natty Bumppo’s speeches and his semi-literate backwoods dialect’. This criticism virtually destroyed James Fenimore Cooper’s standing as a novelist.

I will give the last word to an assessment of Natty. ‘But of course the most attention, critical and popular has been focused on the Leatherstocking Tales. Beginning with D.H. Lawrence’s provocative discussion of them in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), the Tales have been viewed with increasing respect as an American prose version of the epic poem. The fact that their hero is now considered one of the most original, revealing, and significant characters in the country’s literary history means that, although boys no longer grow up with him, Natty will probably never die.’

I wonder if James Fenimore Cooper ever read Charlotte Brontë? When Cooper was first married he had an arrangement with a London bookseller to send him the latest novels. They arrived monthly by ship. I wonder if he continued this arrangement later in his life and whether *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley* were sent to him.

WHAT GREAT BIG EYES YOU HAVE, LUCY SNOWE!

**An edited version of a talk given by Christopher Cooper to the
Australian Brontë Association on April 3rd 2004**

“Are You Anybody Miss Snow?” That was the title of the talk Maureen Peeck gave in Brussels last year when the Brontë Society made a week’s excursion to the city of Villette, the city we all know as Brussels. The occasion was the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Villette* and Elisabeth and I were fortunate to be part of this exciting experience. [The talk has recently been published in *Brontë Studies* (Vol 29, part 3 November 2004).]

I had been thinking along vaguely similar lines in preparation for the excursion and Maureen’s talk brought these vague ideas into focus. While I think that what I have to say here is somewhat different to the content of Maureen’s talk I’m sure my thinking has been influenced by it.

“Are You Anybody Miss Snow?” *Villette* is written in the first person, which gives us the opportunity to be taken deep into Lucy’s inner world. We see through her eyes and hear through her ears. We eavesdrop on her thoughts and share in her emotional pain. She reveals her impressions of people and places. We feel every palpitation of her heart and when she swoons we experience it from within, not merely as a concerned bystander. Yet do we really ever get to know her real self? We might think we do, but as the novel progresses we begin to realise that she’s very careful what she reveals and she even misleads us. We discover that we’ve never really got to know the real Lucy.

“Who are you, Lucy Snowe?” That was the question that Ginevra asked her, two thirds of the way through the novel. Ginevra Fanshawe, the giddy young, attractive and vivacious girl whom Lucy met on the channel crossing – she was together with Lucy at Madame Beck’s – she thought she knew Lucy pretty well. She had dismissed Lucy as a nobody, a useful companion who could be persuaded to do

her mending and was a convenient foil for her own vanity. Lucy was her Cinderella figure – someone too unimportant to be invited out into society herself but who could be impressed by Ginevra’s stories of social adventures and triumphs.

But when she discovers that Lucy has gone to the ball and is mixing with the same set as herself, she says to Lucy, “it seems so odd that you and I should now be so much on a level, visiting in the same sphere; having the same connections. If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand.”

“Who are you, Lucy Snowe?” To some extent I’ll address that question and no doubt some of the things I’ll say will be influenced by what Maureen O’Toole had to say. But I’d like to ask a different question.

“What great big eyes you have, Lucy Snowe!”

You might have two objections to this. For a start this isn’t a question. By the strict rules of grammar it’s not. But remember, when little red riding hood makes this statement to her supposed grandmother it elicits an answer from the wolf, “all the better to see you with”.

“What great big eyes you have, Lucy Snowe!”

Am I really suggesting that Lucy Snowe is “the big bad wolf”? Well, she’s not exactly that, though you have to admit that she’s not considered to be the most endearing of heroines. Charlotte certainly didn’t like her! It’s funny, that, because *Villette* is generally regarded as Charlotte’s most autobiographical novel. It draws very heavily on her experiences at the Pensionnat Heger in the Rue d’Isabelle. Madame Beck is Madame Heger, Monsieur Paul is Monsieur Heger and Lucy is Charlotte. The detail of the school is described so faithfully that one can take a floor plan of the actual school and follow the characters accurately around the fictional one.

So if Charlotte was projecting herself onto Lucy could it really be true that she disliked her? She wrote to George Smith while the work was still in progress, “I am not leniently disposed towards Miss

Frost: from the beginning, I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places”.

Then, in March 1853, two months after the publication of *Villette* she makes this stunning appraisal of her heroine. You’ll remember that, after effectively having proposed to Lucy, Monsieur Paul has to go abroad for three years on family business. He never returns and the reader is left in doubt, at the end of the novel, as to whether he has been shipwrecked. George Smith, her publisher, was swamped by enquiries as to Charlotte’s intention. He asked her what fate she had in mind for him and she replied:

“With regard to that momentous point – Monsieur Paul’s fate – in case any one in future should request to be enlightened thereon – they may be told that it was designed that every reader should settle the catastrophe for himself, according to the quality of his disposition, the tender or remorseless impulse of his nature – Drowning and Matrimony are the fearful alternatives. The merciful ... will of course choose the former and milder doom – drown him to put him out of pain. The cruel-hearted will on the contrary pitilessly impale him on the second horn of the dilemma – marrying him without ruth or compunction to that – person – that – that individual – ‘Lucy Snowe’.”

It may well be that Charlotte was writing facetiously but it’s clear that while Lucy’s circumstances paralleled her own, Charlotte certainly didn’t identify with her personality.

Lucy wasn’t an easy person to get to know – not because she was shy, but because she went out of her way to place barriers. There are shy people, reserved people and private people and it’s important to be aware of the differences. Shy people *want* to relate to other people – it’s just that their natural modesty, or lack of confidence holds them back at first. Anne Brontë was shy. Private people live in their own world cut off, so far as they can manage, from everyone else. That would be Emily.

Reserved people have a one-way relationship with the rest of the world. They want to observe and often even influence the world outside, but they set up a hard shell around themselves to prevent that outside world observing or influencing them. The boundaries of their selves are like those one-way mirrors – looking outwards they’re transparent but looking in from the outside they’re opaque. Charlotte

was reserved in this sense. Despite her distancing herself from Lucy's reserved personality Charlotte's reserve was in fact the basis for Lucy Snowe's coldness. Where they differed, of course, was in the *degree* of their coldness.

Being reserved doesn't necessarily mean being cold. Many of us are reserved to some extent. Many characters in novels are reserved. It's not necessarily a bad thing to be reserved because generally the shell of reserve has a little door that is opened, for select people, revealing warmth, and perhaps even fire, beneath the cooler exterior.

Jane Eyre was reserved, but underneath she was passionate. It's interesting to compare, and contrast, these two heroines, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. They were different in many ways yet in many other ways their lives were parallel – both were orphans, both were brought up by relatives. In both cases they're thrust out into the world to make a living and in both cases education becomes their employment. They each come under the spell of an older man with a very strong personality who is demanding and difficult and seems not to know what it is to be considerate. In both cases the heroine thrives under this treatment – the rougher the treatment the more her love grows. Of course neither Rochester nor Monsieur Paul is a scoundrel. Deep down they're both good men – it's just that they have funny ways of showing it. In both cases there's an impediment to their growing love. Each heroine has a second man in her life, much more her own age (St John Rivers and Dr John) and very different to the middle-aged alternative.

Yes there are many similarities but there are also many important differences. While we hear extensively about Lowood and see how Jane's experiences there shaped her adult personality, we learn nothing of Lucy's school. Jane eventually marries what's left of Rochester after the fire, while Lucy is still waiting for her ship to come in. Beneath her reserved exterior Jane is passionate while Lucy is cold through and through. When instinct tells her that all may not be well with Rochester Jane runs off to find out what's happened, while there's no evidence of Lucy making any enquiries as to her lover's fate. And if Rochester had died in the fire you feel that Jane would have been inconsolable, while Lucy seems quite philosophical and contented with her single life.

It could be that, while Charlotte didn't believe herself to be as cool as Lucy, she rather wished she were. She'd lost all those she felt closest to – Monsieur Heger whose friendship had evaporated and her sisters Emily and Anne who died at about the time of her writing *Villette*. If only she could become cold and practical like Lucy Snowe she would be immune to grief and unhappiness.

However the main difference between Jane and Lucy is that Jane Eyre is no spy – Lucy is.

What great big eyes you have, Lucy Snowe.

“A spy”, you say, “surely you mean Madame Beck.” Well, indeed, Madame Beck was the mistress of the art of surveillance. She had a network of spies in the school, both teachers and pupils. She prided herself that nothing took place that wasn't made known to her. Where necessary she would move around the school as noiselessly and unobtrusively as a shadow. And she thought nothing of going through the private possessions of her pupils or her teachers. Madame Beck is the arch spy in *Villette*.

Monsieur Paul, her cousin, was less concerned in knowing everything that took place in the school, but where something was close to his heart he thought nothing of using Madame Beck's methods. Lucy would never have rifled through some one else's drawer or desk – or would she? If she did so, she never tells us about it.

By the way remember when Charlotte just *happened* to stumble on Emily's poems? “Oh Emily dear, I just happened to come across these poems of yours. They're very good – you really should get them published.”

Do you honestly think that Emily, who was such a private person, would have been so careless as to leave her poetry lying around for Charlotte to come across accidentally? Perhaps Emily had a very good reason for being so angry with Charlotte on that occasion.

I guess the word “spy” is too strong a word for Lucy. Perhaps “hidden spectator” would describe her better. You remember how Lucy would often find herself in a darkened room or in the *allée défendue* just at the right time to secretly observe somebody.

Even when she discovered that she was being spied upon she would always spy back. When Madame Beck, thinking Lucy was asleep, was going through her things Lucy didn't do what you or I would have done – jumping up and saying “what the hell do you think you're doing?” Well, this might not have been a wise thing to say to one's employer. At the very least we would have made some sort of stirring noise as if we *had* been asleep but were now beginning to wake up. But what did Lucy do? She just pretended to be fast asleep and allowed Madame Beck to rifle through her things.

“... I own I felt curious to see how far her taste for research would lead her.”

Madame Beck took a bunch of Lucy's keys and withdrew to her own room. “I softly rose in my bed and followed her with my eye: these keys, reader, were not brought back till they had left on the toilet of the adjoining room the impress of their wards in wax.”

In the garden Lucy is sitting in the “hidden seat reclaimed from fungi and mould, listening ...” Listening to what? Oh, just the “far-off sounds of the city”. Now listening is an active thing. One might *hear* the traffic noises, but as she sat frequently on this hidden seat she would have become so used to that background hum she wouldn't have noticed it any more. But here she was listening, and when you're listening for something the sounds that you don't normally notice become very obvious. She's listening for something and she isn't disappointed. She hears the sound of a casement window opening. A casket drops at her feet, a casket containing a note addressed to “la robe grise”.

Of course she wouldn't dream of reading a piece of private correspondence and she admits that she didn't dream for a moment that it could be meant for her. But she *is*, after all, wearing a grey dress so she feels quite justified in reading it. It's only *after* she has read it in full that she suddenly remembers that grey is quite the fashion at the moment and a number of the Pensionnat are wearing grey. If she had remembered this she wouldn't have dreamt of opening the note.

This desire to want to observe in secrecy is expressed at the art gallery. She notices that Dr John, who's come to collect her, is looking at some paintings. But rather than reveal her presence she

“remained quiet; yet another minute I would watch” and she waits, observing his reaction to the paintings.

Monsieur Paul admits to Lucy that he has hired a room, nominally as a study, but actually as an observation post. “There I sit and read for hours together: it is my way – my taste. My book is this garden; its contents are human nature – female human nature.”

Whether or not Lucy has noticed him watching isn’t clear. But whatever he may have found interesting she must have observed with equal interest from her own observation post. He’s seen, on a number of occasions, the white nun in the garden. She’d seen this nun in the attic, but quite probably had seen her in the garden too. Sitting, and listening, from her secret bench was done for motives other than enjoying the cool night air. Lucy was as much a secret observer as he was. So it is with some hypocrisy that she rebukes him.

“It is not right, Monsieur.”

“By whose creed? Does some dogma of Calvin or Luther condemn it?”

She replies with a very clear statement by which she condemns herself. “Discoveries made by stealth seem to me to be dishonourable discoveries.”

Monsieur Paul reveals that the evenings in the garden are a hot bed of spying and counter-spying. “Night after night my cousin Beck has stolen down yonder steps and glidingly pursued your movements when you did not see her.”

Paul Emmanuel has been observing Madame Beck observing Lucy and it’s inconceivable that Lucy has failed to notice either of them. Yet “discoveries made by stealth seem to me to be dishonourable discoveries.” What great big eyes you have Lucy Snowe!

And great big ears, too. She doesn’t often admit to eavesdropping. Sometimes she just happens to overhear something without meaning to. But when Paul Emmanuel comes to visit the school just prior to going on his travels she knows he’s in the school but she’s forced to do some translation work with Madame Beck with the doors closed.

“I listened as I had never listened before; I listened like the evening and winter wolf, snuffing the snow, scenting prey and hearing the far off traveller’s tramp.”

And what is she doing at the midsummer night fête? Of course she doesn't go to the park with that intention of spying on her friends. She has no idea they'd be there. At least that's what she tells us. But once she sees them, does she come up to them and greet them? Or does she run off to a different part of the park in embarrassment? No, she hides in the shadows and listens. And when Graham catches sight of her and thinks he recognises her she hides her face.

“He could not see my face, I held it down; surely he could not recognise me: I stooped, I turned, I would not be known. He rose, by some means contrived to approach, in two minutes he would have my secret ... there was but one way to evade or check him. I implied, by a sort of supplicatory gesture, that it was my prayer to be left alone ...”

What great big eyes you have, Lucy Snowe.

To be a spy you must be invisible. And Lucy is just that – Miss Cellophane. In the opening chapters of the novel she's merely the detached narrator, just like Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*. Whoever is to be the hero or heroine of this novel it certainly isn't going to be Lucy Snowe.

When you read *Villette* for the first time you probably think that little Polly, Paulina Home, is to be the heroine: so much space is devoted to her diminutive appearance and her endearing little personality. Polly is a little girl, not much younger than Jane Eyre was in the opening chapter of her story – just the right age to meet our heroine. In fact at one stage Charlotte did intend that Paulina would be the main character.

In these scenes at Bretton Lucy is as invisible as a servant. In fact Lucy does act as if she's just that – a maid. Paulina has come with Harriet as her maid but Lucy, barely out of childhood herself, acts as if she is a second maid.

Just as servants are not expected to have private lives so Lucy's family and circumstances are so barely hinted at that she may as well have been just another servant. We even have to guess her age. It's only many chapters later that she reveals the fact that she was at Bretton “in her fourteenth year”.

We hear nothing of her childhood. Did she ever have one? She acts like some middle-aged servant woman when, in assisting Harriet to put Polly to bed, she says, “Child, lie down and sleep.”

All we learn of Lucy’s background is that she appears to be an orphan (she doesn’t exactly say so) and is being raised by some vague body of people called “kinsfolk” – an uncle and aunt perhaps, or grandparents maybe? Lucy doesn’t think we need to know.

It’s not that her early life was without incident. There was some sort of shadow about to descend on her somewhat shadowy life that necessitated her removal to her godmother’s care for six months. And on returning to these “kinsfolk” the crisis seems to have erupted. It was sufficiently dramatic, whatever it was, for Lucy to compare it to a tempest and a shipwreck – a storm that lasted eight years. But does she think the reader should be burdened with the details? No, not Lucy Snowe. Let the spotlight seek out some other actor in the drama so that she can sneak into the shadows where she can observe without being seen.

What sort of storm could it have been that forced her to experience the “rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs.” Was it an actual shipwreck? No, she says that she had no one to complain about these troubles, so whatever it was it must have extended over a long period.

Perhaps it was the death of one or more of these kinsfolk. Charlotte Brontë might have been justified in referring to the events of 1848 and 1849, that left her the sole survivor of six children, as a shipwreck. But Lucy’s kinsfolk seem to be too distant from her emotionally for their deaths to have had much an effect.

Whatever it was it wasn’t something that was accompanied by severe financial problems. Lucy wasn’t rich, but whoever was looking after her was able to continue to do so until she reached the age of 22. It was only then that she first had to go out into the world of employment.

Was it illness? She feels it necessary to describe both Graham and his mother as enjoying good health: “clearness of health” and “health without flaw”. And only a hypochondriac, which Lucy admits later to being, would answer the question “how do you do” with the reply “I have the honour to be in fair health, only in some measure fatigued”.

Perhaps there was a failed love affair and instead of entering a convent, she buries herself as the carer of the old invalid, Miss Marchmont. If we had allowed to be told the cause of that imaginary shipwreck no doubt we would have been able to understand Lucy better. But Lucy's not telling. She doesn't want to be understood.

Charlotte took great care in naming Lucy. She wanted a cold name to reflect Lucy's emotional coldness. At first it was "Snowe", then she toyed with calling her "Miss Frost" until finally she settled on "Snowe". Just as much thought must have gone into the name "Lucy". It's the female equivalent of "Lucien" and it's derived from the Latin word "lux", meaning light. Not that Lucy shone out with great radiance. But remember that windows were called "lights". In the early chapters Lucy is merely a window through which we observe the events. Then, as the story proceeds, Lucy is forced, against her will, to occupy centre stage. I sometimes wonder if Lucy disliked Charlotte as much as Charlotte disliked her!

It's an interesting thought, isn't it, that a character can in some way be part of the same world as the author. It's certainly true that many authors have described the experience of having to fight a character over the way the story should develop and in some cases the character wins!

I sense the same tension between Charlotte and Lucy in *Villette*. Even before the opening pages of the novel were written this struggle was going on in the aborted first drafts. In the final version Charlotte has forced Lucy onto centre stage, but in some ways Lucy gets her own back. She sneaks back into the shadows whenever she can.

What's more she delights in misleading the reader. The most obvious example is the fact that we discover in chapter 16 that the Graham Bretton, whom she met in chapter 3, the English gentleman who assists her on her arrival in Villette in chapter 7 and Dr John, whom she meets at the Pensionnat in chapter 10, are one and the same person.

Now Charlotte was renowned for having been shortsighted. Her condition was so severe that she couldn't participate in ball games at school. Had it been her, and not Lucy, who kept meeting up with Graham Bretton without realising that he was the same person, we might have understood. But Lucy's eyesight suffered from no such

defect. She is the silent observer. When the casket had been found and she is standing in the garden with Dr John, at dusk, she sees Madame Beck descending the stairs from a long way off.

“I looked. Behold Madame Beck, in shawl, wrapping-gown and slippers, softly descending the steps, and stealing like a cat around the garden: in two minutes she would have been upon Dr John.”

Perhaps we should blame Charlotte Brontë, for the improbability of Lucy not having recognised Graham Bretton? No, the fault is well and truly Lucy’s because she finally admits that she recognised him a long time ago.

“The discovery was not of to-day; its dawn had penetrated my preconceptions long since. ... I first recognised him on that occasion – noted several chapters back – when my unguardedly-fixed attention had drawn on me the mortification of an implied rebuke.”

She justifies herself to the reader by saying:

“To say anything on the subject, to hint at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to myself. I liked entering his presence covered by a cloud he had not seen through ...”

What a sneak! She wants to see without being seen – to know about others without them knowing about her. And does she apologise to Dr John for this rudeness? Of course not, she doesn’t even tell him that she had recognised him much earlier.

But why in heavens name did she keep the fact from us all that time? Was she afraid that by some strange interaction between the world of the novel and the world of the reader we might have told him? Are we, the readers, not to be trusted?

There are certain conventions that normally apply to a first-person novel. The narrator’s views are not necessarily those of the author but the factual details of the narrative can be relied on. The narrator doesn’t tell lies – she is completely frank with the reader. Not so in *Villette*.

So now we that we know this, when we read *Villette* for the second time we read that scene in chapter 10, where she observes Dr

John closely, in a new light. He's her childhood friend, she knows it, we now know it, but of course Dr John doesn't know it yet. He won't know until chapter 16.

But when you reach chapter 16 on your second reading, and read the words "the discovery was not of today" the thought hits you. Is she even now telling the whole truth? Maybe she recognised him even earlier than she admits to. After all, for several weeks before that supposed recognition, Dr John had been attending to little Fifine daily and she admits that during these weeks she "often saw him when he came".

Admittedly he was now 26 and she last saw him as Graham Bretton at 16. But she admits herself that he hadn't changed greatly. His eyes, particularly, were quite distinctive. In Bretton she'd lived under the same roof as Graham for several months. And this wasn't the first time she'd stayed with her godmother and her son. So she knew him well at 16 so it's inconceivable that she didn't recognise him when he first attended the Pensionnat.

We might perhaps understand Graham not recognising her. After all he didn't take much notice of her in Bretton and he doesn't seem to be a very observant person anyway. But Lucy Snowe doesn't miss a thing. She surely knew that Dr John was Graham Bretton long before she claims to have.

What of the kind young English gentleman who helped her to find lodgings? Can she have failed to recognise him then? He'd walked with her from the coach station across the park. It was dark but that didn't prevent her from noticing that he was "a young, distinguished and handsome man ... his face was very pleasant, he looked high but not arrogant, manly but not overbearing". The stranger leaves her on the other side of the park with directions to an inn where they speak English. He's only been with her for maybe twenty to thirty minutes but he has made a deep impression on her.

"The remembrance of his countenance, which I am sure wore a light not unbenignant to the friendless – the sound in my ear of his voice, which spoke a nature chivalric to the needy and feeble, as well as the youthful fair – were a sort of cordial to me long after."

She seems to have fallen a little in love with him. Except that she must surely have recognised him as Graham Bretton with whom

she had fallen in love some ten years before. Oh Lucy, why don't you admit it?

Was she in love with him back then? She doesn't say so. No, she wouldn't would she, not even to us. But the clues are there.

Paulina asked her "Do you like Graham, Miss Snowe?"

"Like him! Yes a little"

"Only a little! Do you like him as I do?"

"I think not. No: not as you do."

"Do you like him much?" "I told you I liked him a little. What's the use of caring for him so very much: he's full of faults."

Do you think perhaps that Lucy was feeling a little jealous of Paulina? After all she, Lucy, had visited Bretton twice a year for some time, and this particular visit was a rather long one. So she should have got to know Graham rather well, but she doesn't give us any hint of how she and Graham got on with each other.

On the opening page she remarks that "one child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of", which is interesting because she was 14 and Graham was 16. So Graham was a grown person while she was yet a child! Then she goes on to say "in a quiet way I was a good deal taken notice of by Mrs Bretton"

Now there's a lot hiding behind those words 'in a quiet way'. They're said as a sort of apology. Mrs Bretton does take a good deal of notice of me, really. If it's not so obvious it's because she does it in a quiet sort of way. Reading between the lines Mrs Bretton, though kind, doesn't take any more notice of Lucy than she can help, and certainly when Graham is at home he eclipses all others.

With so much of the later part of the novel based on her personal experience, Charlotte in these opening chapters is writing about something quite foreign to her – what it's like to be an only child. It's true that she was the only one left by the time she came to write *Villette*, but she'd grown up in a large and bustling household with more than usual close sibling interaction. Here she is writing of three only children (we presume that Lucy has no brothers and sisters – she certainly never mentions them) thrown together by circumstance into a single household.

Graham has no father but he's much loved and the apple of his mother's eye. Paulina has no mother but is made very much of by her father, and in his absence she's made very much of by the newly grown-up Graham. But does anyone really make much of Lucy (except in a quiet sort of way)? Is there anyone who would say of Lucy, 'she's my comfort'?

There's a hint that all her life Lucy has been deprived of love. She's not been treated unkindly like Jane Eyre – all that is missing is the warmth of love – someone who can make her feel special.

What was particularly upsetting was that Graham failed to take much notice of her. Far from being a very grown up 16 year old, who might not be indifferent to a young lady of 14, he seems to have been a rather childish 16 year old who was much more at home with his school fellows and their pranks. In other words, though two years older than Lucy she may have been too old for him!

But when a little girl comes into the house he takes a good deal of notice of her (at least when his school friends aren't around). Reading between the lines we can see that Lucy had a strong crush on him, which wasn't in the least reciprocated. So did she feel any jealousy towards Paulina?

As I said, these are questions we might ask on a second reading. The first time around we're focused on Paulina or Graham. We hardly notice Lucy.

Subsequent to writing *Villette* Charlotte wrote the first two chapters of a new novel, *Emma*. She never got to finish it, and in 2003 Claire Boylan published her version of how the novel might have developed. It's interesting to wonder what would have happened if *Villette* was the unfinished fragment, with just the first three chapters extant. How might a later writer have completed it? We'd have expected Paulina and Graham to have been the major characters, and we'd probably have expected Lucy to have continued to be the uninvolved narrator.

But on reaching chapter four we find that Lucy is still on stage. Could it be possible that she's meant to be the heroine? Impossible. She leads such a confined and uninteresting life as companion to the invalid Miss Marchmont. There's the briefest hint that the intervening years were full of incident. Something about a wreck and falling overboard. Our interest is aroused as we expect a flashback. But no,

she's not going to go into details – she'd rather us think of her 'idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft'.

In this fourth chapter it's Miss Marchmont whose past throws up exciting incident. Her husband's horse comes home late one night dragging the nearly lifeless body of her husband along the ground. Perhaps the story will go back thirty years and the young Miss Marchmont will take centre stage. But no, Charlotte is there in the wings pushing Lucy back onto the stage. Lucy Snowe, this is *your* life!

For the next, almost forty, chapters Lucy more or less remains on stage. Every so often she sneaks into the stalls, trying to become one of the audience, until she's dragged back. In the final chapter she's allowed to slink back into obscurity where she can live alone untroubled by the storms of relationships. Perhaps as the years roll on, with no returning Paul, she can do what she enjoys best – getting her excitement by living vicariously at the edge of the lives of others, perhaps the lives of her ex-pupils.

Lucy's version of the beatitudes is:

- **Blessed is she who never gets too excited for she won't ever be disappointed.**
- **Blessed is she who keeps her heart locked for she will never suffer the pain of unrequited love.**
- **Blessed is she who hides her feelings for she will never be scorned.**
- **Blessed is she who never takes chances for she can never lose.**
- **Blessed is she who is a spectator in life for the protagonist is often hurt.**
- **Blessed is she who waits for Fate to direct her life because if things go wrong she can comfort herself with the thought that it wasn't her decision that caused it.**

Perhaps you think I'm too hard on poor Lucy. For all her faults I do like her. I like her better than Jane Eyre who, despite her deep-seated passion is a little too moralistic for my liking. And Emily's

Catherine would have been impossible to live with. I fantasise that if I had been a teacher at the Pensionnat I could have defrosted Lucy's heart. I'm not sure that Paul Emmanuel really did that. I mean, think about the proposal scene.

"Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth." Full stop! I'm sure I could have done better than that. Perhaps he was proposing in English and his vocabulary had run at out that point.

I like to think that there's nothing basically wrong with Lucy Snowe that the warm love of the right man couldn't fix. The trouble was, that man wasn't Monsieur Paul Emmanuel.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND RELIGION

An extract from a talk to the ABA by Annette Harman on 30th
October 2004.

"He probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat." (*Wuthering Heights*, chapter 34).

Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is a passionate exploration of human relationships centred on earth, the pivot of heaven and hell. I believe that *Wuthering Heights* is not an unsolvable mystery, but rather it marks the beginnings of the literary exploration of secular religion as individually experienced. "They know god in themselves rather than themselves in God" (Maynard 2002 p204). *Wuthering Heights* is not a direct morality tale in the style of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Rather it grapples with the perennial adolescent question of how life should be lived – is individual expression more valuable as extreme states of emotion or governed by Christian societal laws? If Northern folk live more in earnest than Southern Londoners, what gives them the edge? If Cathy Linton is able to resist evil more successfully than her mother, how does this occur? Why do those who align themselves with Christian teaching

triumph over adversity, whereas those who do not, live a ‘hellish, soulless’ existence on earth?

Much has been said regarding Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* as an early psychological exploration of depression and nervous breakdown. I would like to argue that Emily in *Wuthering Heights* presents an early psychological exploration of deliberate secularisation on Cathy and Heathcliff’s part – a rejection of Christian living and afterlife of early Victorian adulthood.

Cathy and Heathcliff do not reject Joseph’s teachings of Christianity as young children: rather they rebel against him because of his ability to ‘ransack a Bible to keep the promises to himself and fling the curses onto his neighbours’. The three hour length of his sermons, whilst tedious to the recipients (young children), were not atypical in early Evangelical Victorian England and would be punctuated by prayer and hymn singing in more liberal circles, such as the Methodists and Moravians. Hymn singing flourished by the end of the 18th century, a contrast to 17th century psalm-singing which was unaccompanied and led by the parish clerk. At the beginning of 19th century England men, children and then women, were admitted to psalm singing groups and instruments were added, most commonly bass viol, clarinet, violin and flute. Other less common instruments were oboes, trumpets, guitars and drums. Musicians were mostly working class people, sometimes with the benefit of a local “singing master”. From the 1830s onwards barrel organs and then pipe organs replaced gallery ands, but the music of the gallery bands (the working class) had a particularly strong tradition in the Midlands and the North, and from these grew musical societies which emphasized the performance of oratorio. These amateur musicians would have been familiar with Handel and with folk songs and the new hymns. A wide variety of hymns expressed personal religious thoughts and feelings in vigorous, emotional language. They spoke of god’s love for sinners, salvation for the individual, the liberating power of Jesus, the inner experience of the Holy Spirit, strength to withstand oppression and the promise of future glory. Initially the established church, the Anglicans and the upper classes, resisted such religious enthusiasm, but as their desire was to reform society rather than replace it with God’s Kingdom on earth, new hymn singing was absorbed into mainstream worship.

Joseph is characterized by his selfishness, his self-serving discipleship based on a God of punishment, not of love. Joseph's Calvinistic Christianity relies not only on 'those chosen and picked out from the rubbige', knowing their place, but also on an awareness of a primitive code of morality. God as a punisher, a wrathful patriarch – not the 'font of all love' determines Joseph's teaching relationships with Cathy and Heathcliff. It is hardly surprising that they reject his impoverished view of Christianity. After the deaths of Mr and Mrs Earnshaw the children require love and nurturing, not punishment, isolation and hectoring as meted out to them by Hindley, Frances and Joseph. The children's Sunday rebellion signifies their emotional acuteness towards the early infatuation between Hindley and Frances and the corresponding dearth of authoritative love in their own lives.

These are the children who, at the death of Mr Earnshaw, were able to jointly picture heaven more beautifully than any parson could, to comfort each other in their loss – Heaven as a refuge of safety, where Mr Earnshaw has gone, 'a saint' according to Joseph. Religious education within the family, and with Joseph and the curate, has resulted in these children believing that their father has lived his earthly life as a worthy entrant to Heaven. His illness may have diminished his discrimination and increased his partiality towards Heathcliff. But both Heathcliff and Cathy love him and are traumatized by his death. The phrase 'more beautifully than any parson' suggests to me that as children, not adult parsons, Emily is implying the value of children's faith in Heaven. "To believe as a child" has been the goal of many ministers. Emily is not rejecting organized adult religion. Rather she is claiming the instinctive wisdom of children, as did Rousseau, and later, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The emotional intensity of Heathcliff and Cathy was one of their greatest gifts: if they had learnt to discipline and refine their passions their tragedy would have been more acute.

SHIRLEY AND HER UNCLE

Adapted from *Shirley* by Christopher Cooper

Charlotte Brontë is not known for being a comic dramatist, and yet she was capable of writing very witty dialogue. The following little dramatic piece from *Shirley* is reminiscent of Elizabeth Bennett's defence to her mother for the crime of not accepting Mr Collins' proposal.

Shirley and her uncle Mr Sympson are sitting in the drawing room, each in an armchair, placed opposite, a few yards between them.

Mr Sympson: I have been to De Walden Hall

He pauses. Shirley's eyes are lowered.

Mr Sympson: I have learned.... I have learned a circumstance which surprises me.

Shirley rests her cheek on her forefinger, waiting to be told what circumstance.

Mr Sympson: It seems that Nunnely Priory is shut up, that the family are gone back. It seems that the baronet – that Sir Philip himself has accompanied his mother and sisters.

Shirley: Indeed?

Mr Sympson: I mean – I mean – I mean to have a thorough explanation. I will not be put off. I – I – shall insist on being heard; and on – on having my own way. My questions must be answered. I will have clear, satisfactory replies. I am not to be trifled with.

(Silence.)

Mr Sympson: It is a strange and an extraordinary thing – a very singular – a most odd thing! I thought all was right: and there – the family are gone!

Shirley: I suppose, sir, they had a right to go.

Mr Sympson: Sir Philip is gone!

Shirley: (*raising her eyebrows*) Bon voyage!

Mr Simpson: This will not do: this must be altered, ma'am.

He draws his chair forward; he pushes it back; he looks perfectly incensed, and perfectly helpless.

Shirley: Come, come, now, uncle do not begin to fret and fume, or we shall make no sense of the business. Ask me what you want to know: I am as willing to come to an explanation as you: I promise you truthful replies.

Mr Simpson: I want – I demand to know, Miss Keeldar, whether Sir Philip has made you an offer?

Shirley: He has.

Mr Simpson: He made you an offer that night we dined at the Priory?

Shirley: It is enough to say that he made it. Go on.

Mr Simpson: You received a letter from him. On what subject – of what nature were the contents?

Shirley: No matter.

Mr Simpson: Ma'am, is that the way in which you speak to me?

Shirley taps her foot on the carpet.

Mr Simpson: There you sit, silent and sullen – you who promised truthful replies!

Shirley: Sir, I have answered you thus far: proceed.

Mr Simpson: I should like to see that letter.

Shirley: You cannot see it.

Mr Simpson: I must and shall, ma'am. I am your guardian.

Shirley: Having ceased to be a ward, I have no guardian.

Mr Simpson: Ungrateful being! Reared by me as my own daughter –

Shirley: Once more, uncle, have the kindness to keep to the point. Let us both remain cool. For my part, I do not wish to get into a passion; but, you know, once drive me beyond certain bounds, I care little what I say: I am not then soon checked. Listen! You have asked me whether Sir Philip made me an offer: that question is answered. What do you wish to know next?

Mr Sympson: I desire to know whether you accepted or refused him and know it I will.

Shirley: Certainly: you ought to know it. I refused him.

Mr Sympson: Refused him! You – you, Shirley Keeldar, refused Sir Philip Nunnely?

Shirley: I did.

Mr Sympson bounces from his chair, and trots through the room.

Mr Sympson: There it is! There it is! There it is!

Shirley: Uncle, you tire me: I want to go away.

Mr Sympson: Go you shall not! I will be answered. What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?

Shirley: In what respect?

Mr Sympson: In respect of matrimony.

Shirley: To be quiet – and to do just as I please.

Mr Sympson: Just as you please! The words are to the last degree indecorous.

Shirley: Mr Sympson, I advise you not to become insulting: you know I will not bear that.

Mr Sympson: It will end in infamy, sooner or later: I have foreseen it all along.

Shirley: Do you assert, sir, that something in which I am concerned will end in infamy?

Mr Sympson: That it will – that it will. You said just now you would act as you please. You acknowledge no rules – no limitations.

Shirley: Silly stuff! and vulgar as silly?

Mr Sympson: Regardless of decorum, you are prepared to fly in the face of propriety.

Shirley: You tire me, uncle.

Mr Sympson: What, madam – what could be your reasons for refusing Sir Philip?

Shirley: At last, there is another sensible question: I shall be glad to reply to it. Sir Philip is too young for me: I regard him as a boy: all his relations – his mother especially – would be annoyed if he married me: I am not his equal in the world's estimation.

Mr Sympson: Is that all?

Shirley: Our dispositions are not compatible.

Mr Sympson: Why, a more amiable gentleman never breathed.

Shirley: He is very amiable – very excellent – truly estimable, but not my master. I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check.

Mr Sympson: I thought you liked to do as you please: you are vastly inconsistent.

Shirley: When I promise to obey, it shall be under the conviction that I can keep that promise: I could not obey a youth like Sir Philip. Besides, he would never command me: he would expect me always to rule – to guide, and I have no taste whatever for the office.

Mr Sympson: You no taste for swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling?

Shirley: Not my husband: only my uncle. And I know full well, any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me, as a husband, must be able to control me.

Mr Sympson: I wish you had a real tyrant.

Shirley: A tyrant would not hold me for a day – not for an hour. I would rebel – break from him – defy him.

Mr Sympson: Sir Philip — he is a baronet, a man of rank, property, connexions, far above yours. And he is a poet: he writes verses.

Shirley: Neither his title, his wealth nor his poetry invest him with the power I describe.

Mr Sympson: You rave about poetry! You used to catch fire like tinder on the subject when you were a girl.

Shirley: Oh ! Uncle, there is nothing really valuable in this world; there is nothing glorious in the world to come, that is not poetry?

Mr Sympson: Marry a poet, then, in God's name!

Shirley: Show him me, and I will.

Mr Sympson: Sir Philip.

Shirley: Not at all. You are almost as good a poet as he.

Mr Sympson: Madam, you are wandering from the point.

Shirley: Indeed, uncle, I wanted to do so; and I shall be glad to lead you away with me. Do not let us get out of temper with each other: it is not worthwhile.

Mr Sympson: Out of temper, Miss Keeldar! I should be glad to know who is out of temper?

Shirley: I am not, yet.

Mr Sympson: If you mean to insinuate that I am, I consider that you are guilty of impertinence.

Shirley: You will be soon, if you go on at that rate.

Mr Sympson: You described just now, with far too much freedom for your years and sex, the sort of individual you would prefer as a husband. Pray, did you paint from the life?

Shirley: I have been in love several times.

Mr Sympson: This is cynical.

Shirley: Once I loved Socrates.

Mr Sympson: Pooh! No trifling, ma'am.

Shirley: To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him: but, to speak of the actual present --

Mr Sympson: Ah! The actual present.

Shirley: To quit crude schoolgirl fancies, and come to realities.

Mr Sympson: Realities! Make haste about it, if you please; confess you shall.

Shirley: Confess, I must: my heart is full of the secret; it must be spoken.

Mr Sympson: Madam -- I will know the name -- does the person reside in Briarfield?

Shirley: Uncle -- I am going to tell you -- his name is trembling on my tongue.

Mr Sympson: You shall tell me --

Shirley: Listen! It is ... Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington.

Mr Sympson rises furiously: he bounces out of the room, but immediately bounces back again, shuts the door, and resumes his seat.

Mr Sympson: Do you know the whole neighbourhood teems with rumours respecting you and a bankrupt tenant of yours -- the foreigner Moore?

Shirley: Does it?

Mr Sympson: Is it that person who has power to influence you?

Shirley: Beyond any whose cause you have advocated.

Mr Sympson: Is it he you will marry?

Shirley: He is handsome, and manly, and commanding.

Mr Sympson: You declare it to my face! The Flemish knave! The low trader!

Shirley: Mr Sympson... I am sick at heart with all this weak trash: I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, bundle them off: Mr Sympson – go, offer them as a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them: I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed than you.

Mr Sympson: Another creed! I believe she is an infidel.

Shirley: An infidel to your religion; an atheist to your god.

Mr Sympson: An – atheist! ! !

Shirley: Your god, sir, is the World. Sir, your god, behold how hideously he governs! See him at work, making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. Your god rules at the marriages of kings. Your god is a masked Death.

Mr Sympson: This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer, Miss Keeldar: there is danger in such companionship.

Shirley: Now, sir, do you begin to be aware that it is useless for you to scheme for me? My heart, my conscience shall dispose of my hand – they only. Know this at last.

Mr Sympson: Never heard such language! Never was so addressed in my life – never was so used.

Shirley: You are quite confused, sir. You had better withdraw, or I will.

Mr Sympson rises hastily. He makes his way to the door; he comes back for his handkerchief; he drops his snuffbox; leaving the contents scattered on the carpet, he stumbles out. Tartar lays outside across the mat -- Mr Sympson almost falls over him: in the climax of his exasperation he hurls an oath at the dog.

THE HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN BRONTË ASSOCIATION

An extract from a talk given by Christopher Cooper at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts to members of other literary societies.

The Australian Brontë Association, like Australia itself, had a colonial history. It all started back in 1893, when the Brontë Society was formed in the U.K., with the blessing of Arthur Bell Nicholls, Charlotte's husband, who was then still alive.

In the early years there were many American members, and one or two from other countries, such as Canada, South Africa, Holland, France and even Latvia. Somehow we Australians didn't seem to hear about what was going on, on the other side of the world for quite some time. In fact it wasn't until 1919 that the first Australian joined – a certain Miss Davis from Toowoomba. But she only lasted 4 years. Then in 1928 Robert Kelly, from Sydney, joined and for the next 9 years he was the only Australian member.

You see, I've been doing some research within the *Brontë Society Transactions*. Until 1966 they published the names and addresses of all their members, and it makes interesting reading. By 1966 there were 1302 members of the society, of which only 11 lived in Australia, and only 2 in Sydney. Clearly it wasn't yet possible to have a local branch.

Things seemed to change in 1985. In that year Sydney University's Centre for Continuing Education managed to attract 65 people to a *Weekend in the Country with the Brontës*, at the Victoria & Albert Guesthouse in Blackheath. So clearly interest in the Brontës in the Sydney region was growing. Perhaps, now, local meetings might be possible.

In that year, Fergus McClory was appointed the Australian Representative of the Brontë Society and he called together a meeting in his home. The first Australian meeting of the Brontë Society took place on February 28th 1986, with 12 members. I was one of them.

Over the next 11 years we had one or two meetings a year. There was no committee and no local funding. Every decision had to go through the headquarters of the Brontë Society in Haworth and by 1997 many of us were finding this unworkable. Besides we wanted to have more activities and to carry out publicity. But this would require a committee and freedom to make our own decisions.

The Brontë Society had served us well but, just as Australia reached the stage where it needed to be independent from the old country, so it was with the Brontë lovers in Sydney. Christine Alexander urged us into a bloodless coup, and a unilateral declaration of independence was made.

Haworth didn't mind and so with the blessing of the Brontë Society, we formed an independent organization – the Australian Brontë Association. The Brontë Society still has a presence in Australia, and as well as being the president of the ABA I happen also to be the current Australian Representative of the Brontë Society.

The two organizations complement one another. By belonging to the Brontë Society you can support the important work they do in maintaining the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth and purchasing letters and other items of Brontë interest.

By belonging to the Australian Brontë Association you support the local activities. We meet 5 to 6 times a year and we produce a twice-yearly newsletter [and now this annual journal].

We currently meet, on certain Saturday mornings, right here in the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and at these meetings we generally have a speaker. We think we strike a nice balance with the talks between being academically respectable on the one hand, and being informal and down to earth on the other.

In 2001 we went away for a weekend with the Three Sisters at the Three Sisters, in Katoomba. We've had a couple of talks focussing on Emily and Anne and various talks focussing on several of the Brontë novels and we've watched some of the Brontë novels on video. But some more unusual topics have been *The Health of the Brontës*, *The Art of the Brontës*, *Sadism and the Brontës*, *The Church of England in the Age of the Brontës*, the novel *Villette's* indebtedness to a series of cartoons in *Punch Magazine* and *Charlotte Brontë and DH Lawrence*.

Christine Alexander has spoken to us about her experiences of editing the *Juvenilia*, and also about an album of poems and pictures that she discovered recently to which many of the pupils of Roe Head School, including Charlotte Brontë, had contributed. So we're kept right up to the cutting edge of Brontë scholarship.

The author of *Coldwater*, a novel loosely based on the Brontës, but set in Australia, came to talk to us last year. Next year we'll have another Australian writer, who's based his novel *Cedar House* on *Wuthering Heights*.

An interesting excursion last year was to Ebenezer, on the Hawkesbury, where there's a little chapel that was built before any of the Brontë sisters were even born. We had a picnic, followed by a service of celebration for the lives of the Brontës, like they do in Haworth each year. And we finished the day with some dramatic readings of scenes from the novels that take place in a church.

* * * * *

Well, that's who we are, and that's where we've come from. What I'd like to do now is to very briefly look at the connections between the Brontës and the other two authors represented here today.

George Henry Lewes, author and reviewer, and husband of George Eliot, wrote to Currer Bell (that was Charlotte's pseudonym) to say that he intended to review *Jane Eyre*. In so doing, he warned her to 'beware of Melodrama' and 'adhere to the real', suggesting that she ought not to 'stray far from the ground of experience'.

Well, having read Lewes's review, Charlotte wrote to thank him for his generous treatment, adding an explanation for her defence of the imaginative over the real. "I mean to observe your warning about being careful how I undertake new works ... if ever I do write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call 'melodrama', I think so, but I am not sure. I think too I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's 'mild eyes'; 'to finish more, and be more subdued'; but neither am I sure of that."

Until Lewes suggested it, Charlotte had never read any Jane Austen. But, then she read *Pride and Prejudice* and having finished it, she wrote: "An accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a common-place face, a carefully-fenced, highly cultivated garden with neat borders

and delicate flowers – but no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy – no open country – no fresh air – no blue hill – no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses.”

Let’s now hear what she had to say about Jane Austen’s *Emma*. “She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well, there is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting: she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her ... Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what she sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient of Death – this Miss Austen ignores ... Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete, and rather insensible (not senseless) woman, if this is heresy – I cannot help it.”

So Charlotte didn’t think much of Jane Austen, I’m afraid. Which is a pity, because over half of our members think so well of Jane that we belong to the Jane Austen Society as well.

Rather fewer of us belong to the Byron Society, which is a shame. Now that I’m retired and hopefully will have a bit more time I intend to sample Byron and his society here in Sydney. And I venture to say that if they were alive today both Charlotte and Emily would have been staunch members of the Byron Society. They adored him! Especially Emily.

Let me quote from F. B. Pinion’s paper ‘Byron and *Wuthering Heights*’ that appeared in the *Brontë Society Transactions* in 1993.

“The greatest literary influence on *Wuthering Heights* was that of Byron. It was from him more than from life or intuition or any other source that Emily Brontë gained those psychological insights which powerfully influenced, and validated, she must have thought, Heathcliff’s almost inhumanly criminal and relentless pursuit of revenge.”

In their adolescence the Brontë children read Byron’s poetry as well as whatever biographies of him they could lay their hands on. All this must have become part of their imaginative apparatus. Pinion makes a

strong case for Byron's *Manfred* to have been strongly in Emily's mind as she wrote *Wuthering Heights*.

Well, this isn't supposed to be a lecture on Byron and the Brontës or Austen and the Brontës. I just wanted to point out how you can't study one writer in isolation. You're constantly bumping up against others who influenced them, or were influenced by them.

Which just goes to show that it's hard to belong to just one literary society – these writers are so interconnected.

Let me finish by mentioning a connection between Jane Austen, the Brontës and Lord Byron in which I have a personal interest. You see, many years ago I wrote a series of little mathematics books for A-level students in the U.K. They were published by John Murray. I remember sitting in the little room, with a domed skylight, at the rear of John Murray's Georgian premises in Albemarle Street, London and thinking "Jane Austen might have sat here", because her novel *Emma* was published by the first John Murray. As I later discovered it would have been more likely that Henry, her brother, would have come to Albemarle St to attend to the business end of the novel. Still, it gave me a buzz to think that I shared the same publisher as Jane Austen.

Whether or not she ever met John Murray is debatable. But there's no doubt that Lord Byron did. They weren't just publisher and client but very good friends. Indeed Murray was present that day when Byron sent his diaries up the chimney in flames, in that very house in Albemarle St.

So Jane Austen and Byron used the same publisher. What about Charlotte Brontë? Well, she used Smith, Elder & Co and I discovered, last time I visited Albemarle St, that John Murray had bought them out, so even Charlotte has now become one of the family.

And family, it is. John Murray's, though one of the leading British publishers, is still a family business. It's run by John Murray the fourth, or is it the fifth. His son is the next John Murray and his parents are hoping that he will take over the business one day.

Brontë, Austen and Byron – one big happy family. And that's just what the literary societies of Sydney are – one big happy family. The wonderful experiences we all have by studying our favourite writers, and the friends we make, are very similar.