The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

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BRONTËË PICNIC AT EBENEZER 10th NOVEMBER 2002

A number of our members relaxing among the graves at the historic Ebenezer Church.

The weather was very kind to us. What promised to be a sweltering day turned out to be very pleasant with cool breezes. Following the picnic we had a service of remembrance and thanksgiving for the lives of the Brontës in the old church, conducted by the Uniting Church minister at Ebenezer, Rev. Grant Bilbey. The sermon, delivered by our president, explored the spiritual lives of the Brontë family. Following the service we witnessed some dramatic readings. Grant, as the Reverend Woods, officiated at the aborted wedding of Rochester (Michael) and Jane Eyre (Gayle). Lockwood (Irene and Marloesje) relived the dream in which the reverend Brandherham preached on the Seventy times Seven sins and the First of the Seventy-First, as he did in *Wuthering Heights*. And Patrick Brontë (Christopher) preached his famous sermon on the Bog-Burst, while Emily fidgeted in the pews. We finished the afternoon with Devonshire teas served by the ladies of the church under the trees. (More photos inside.)

James Taylor: Charlotte's St John Rivers

Review of an article from the Times Literary Supplement 16th Aug 2002 by Charlotte Cory.

On a trip to Bombay the author of this piece, Charlotte Cory, was struck by how much the old Victorian buildings reminded her of similar buildings in her home city – Manchester and she thought how much at home her namesake, Charlotte Brontë, would have been in this city.

Charlotte Brontë stayed in Manchester while her father was recovering from his cataract surgery. (No day surgery in those days!) It was while she was there that Charlotte Brontë began to write *Jane Eyre*.

Charlotte Cory comments that she was not the only person to have reflected on Charlotte Brontë while walking the streets of Bombay.

When James Taylor came in 1851 to set up Smith Taylor & Co, an Indian branch of the publishers Smith Elder, he had called at Haworth en route and – as if in bizarre imitation of St John Rivers's proposal at the end of the novel – asked the authoress to marry him. Charlotte Brontë turned him down flat, for he was ugly, red-headed and Scottish. She did not fancy a life in India but she liked writing letters, so for a few years the pair maintained a desultory, rather desperate long-distance correspondence

Cory wonders, if Charlotte had become Mrs Taylor and had gone to live in Bombay, whether the climate would have been kinder to her and whether she would have lived longer.

Knowing that Taylor had died in this city and was buried in the Sewree Christian Cemetery, Cory determined to visit his grave. The obituary in *The Times*, cited in a biographical note in Margaret Smith's *Letters to Charlotte Brontë*, mentions that Taylor's grave is near the entrance gates.

I found Taylor's grave within minutes of entering the cemetery – and found myself face to face with a man who had proposed to Charlotte Brontë. A life-sized portrait is carved in a stone roundel on top of the big impressive gravestone. I could see for myself the "determined dreadful nose in the middle of his face which, when poked into my countenance, cuts into my soul like iron. Still, he is horribly intelligent, quick, searching, sagacious, and with a memory of relentless tenacity".

While Cory was photographing the stone, with its worn and somewhat illegible inscription, a cemetery worker, thinking she was a relative, asked if she wanted him to clean up the grave for 1,000 rupees. She agreed and when she returned the next day, not only was it cleaned and tidied, but the lettering of the inscription had been painted. This made possible a much clearer photograph.

The inscription reads:

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JAMES TAYLOR
SECRETARY TO THE BOMBAY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND TO THE
BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY
AND REGISTRAR OF THE BOMBAY UNIVERSITY
WHO DIED ON THE 29TH 1874
AGED 57 YEARS.

THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED
BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
IN TESTIMONY OF ITS ADMIRATION
OF HIS HIGH CHARACTER
AND OF ITS APPRECIATION
OF THE ABLE AND ZEALOUS SERVICES
WHICH HE RENDERED TO THE CHAMBER
AS ITS SECRETARY
FOR A PERIOD OF NEARLY 10 YEARS
FROM SEPTEMBER 1864 TILL HIS DEATH

SOME THOUGHTS ON *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

A Revised Version of the Talk Given to the ABA on 14th September 2002

by Jack NELSON

In dealing with *Wuthering Heights*, I will summarise and comment on both contemporary and recent critics and then offer my own opinions on it.

The contemporary reviews are taken from the Everyman Library edition, which includes a useful introduction by Margaret Drabble, a chronology of Emily's life and times, Charlotte Brontë's Biographical Notice and her preface to the 2nd edition of 1850, a summary of he novel, excepts from critical writings in it, suggestions for further reading and an extensive selection of Emily's poetry: in all a very useful and comprehensive edition.

The first review is from an unsigned article in *The Atlas* of 22nd January 1848. The reviewer finds "the general effect is inexpressibly painful but there are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power – an unconscious strength" and that "the reality of unreality has never brought so vividly before us". Interestingly, this reviewer is disturbed by what they see as the unrelieved gloom in the novel, saying that:

… *the book wants relief. A few glimpses of sunshine would have increased the reality of the picture and given strength rather than weakness to the whole.*

About the characters in the novel, the reviewer is totally negative, finding that "there is not in the entire dramatis personae a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible". He finds Hindley to be a brutal, degraded sot; Linton Heathcliff an abjectly selfish coward and Heathcliff "a creature in whom every evil passion seems to have reached a gigantic excess". Even the female characters are not acceptable; the elder Catherine is wayward, impatient, impulsive and "sacrifices herself and her lover to the pitiful ambition of becoming the wife of a gentleman of station". Of the love of Heathcliff and Catherine he says that "we cannot persuade ourselves that even a happy love would have tamed down the natural ferocity of the tiger". Of the younger Catherine, he says that she "is more sinned against than sinning and, in spite of her grave moral defects, we have some hope of her at the last".

However, his quite positive conclusion about the novel is that "the work of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one".

My comment on this reviewer's criticism of the characters in the novel is that it is of some interest that there is no mention of Lockwood, Nelly Dean or Hareton Earnshaw. Might this omission be because they would not fit in with the generalisation that all the characters are such a bad lot?

The second review is unidentified (neither author nor source is given); it was found as a cutting in Emily's desk after her death and is uniformly complimentary in distinct contrast to the previous review. In general, the reviewer found it to be "a work of great ability" and "one of the most interesting stories we have read for many a long day". He further states that:

The loves and marriages, separations and hatreds, hopes and disappointments of two or three generations are brought before us at one moment with a tenderness, at another with a fearfulness, which appeals to our sympathies with the truest tones of the voice of nature.

He concludes that:

To give the contents in detail would be depriving many a reader of half the delight he would

experience from the perusal of the work itself … and may he [the reader] derive from it the delight we have ourselves experienced and be equally grateful to the author for the genuine pleasure he has afforded him.

I would like to think that Emily was particularly pleased with this review and that that was why she kept it in her desk.

The final contemporary comment is that by Charlotte Brontë in her preface to the 1850 edition, reprinted in the Everyman Library Edition. Her comments were, on the whole, rather ambivalent. She stated that "many will find its subject repulsive and ill-chosen and its artistry rough". Her better known, indeed notorious, comment from the same source, concerned Heathcliff:

Whether it is right or advisable to create things like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is. We should say that [Heathcliff] was a child neither of Lascar nor gipsy, but a man's shape animated by a demon life – a Ghoul – an Afreet.

Charlotte is quite positive concerning the other characters and does not believe all of them to be either contemptible or despicable.

For a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity, look at the character of Nelly Dean, … for an example of constancy and tenderness, remark that of Edgar Linton … there is a dry saturnine humour in the delineation of old Joseph, and some glimpses of grace and gaiety animate the younger Catherine. Nor is even the first [Catherine] destitute of a certain strange beauty in her fierceness, or of honesty in the midst of perverted passion and passionate perversity.

I will take as my first commentator a biographer, Edmund Chitham, whose *A Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published in 1987. His comments on both the written and oral sources used by Emily are a considerable contrast to earlier critics who saw *Wuthering Heights* as a freak, not related to any other work and as being uniquely different from any other work. Chitham sees the novel as being basically oral. While narrative techniques clearly owe something to Scott, Lord Lytton and other novelists, the story is heard aloud, whether the speaker is Lockwood, Nelly Dean, Joseph or Catherine. At the lowest, deepest, level of Emily's unconscious mind lies the layer formed when a fascinated little girl heard the magical and arresting tales told by her Irish father. Another layer underlying *Wuthering Heights* is that of ballad forms and ballad speech, as is the use of dialect in the character of Joseph. Chitham sees Emily's use of dialect as being surprisingly good, better than either of her sisters:

It looks as if Emily's superior ear and memory are responsible for her greater accuracy. The evidence underlies the oral nature of the novel, which is clearly meant to be spoken and heard rather than read silently.

Irene and Fran inspect the graves at Ebenezer

Literary exemplars played some part in the creation of Emily's novel … [there are] traces in her work of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelly, as well as of Byron and Shakespeare. (p 201)

Chitham, as biographer, realistically states a cautious caveat as follows:

The biographer cannot explain Wuthering Heights. The process of using the novel to understand the life, and the life to understand the novel, can easily become circular. What is clear, surely, is that Wuthering Heights is in all ways consistent with Emily's life as we know it and in particular with her inner life, as that

emerges before us is her rare oracular statements and especially in her poetry. (p 214)

For my final summary of critical comment on Wuthering Heights I will deal with four works:
(1) Gillian FRITH *Decoding Wuthering Heights* (the final chapter of *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*, edited by Thomas John Winnifrith, 1997).
(2) Stevie DAVIS *Emily Brontë* 1988.
(3) Lyn PYKETT *Emily Brontë* 1989.
(4) Stevie DAVIS *Emily Brontë* 1998.

Gillian Frith was commissioned to write a summary of the criticism of *Wuthering Heights* from 1975 to 1995 to conclude Winnifrith's book of critical essays on Emily. In her chapter she summarises the various critical approaches taken to the novel, starting with J. Hillis Miller's statement that "*Wuthering Heights* simultaneously invites interpretation and resists it". The reader is drawn into a narrative structured like Chinese boxes – text within text. Various critical approaches have been applied to Wuthering Heights: psychoanalytical, Marxist, feminist, cultural. Some of the questions asked by recent critics are:

- What is Emily's place in the literary tradition?
- How does the Grange relate to the Heights?
- What is the status of Nelly's narrative?
- What is the relationship between the stories of the two Catherines?
- Who is Heathcliff?

The most significant shift in *Wuthering Heights* criticism since 1975 has been the impact of feminism. Such pioneering critical works as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* see *Wuthering Heights* as a Victorian woman's myth of origins: "the myth of how culture came about, and specifically of how nineteenth-century society occurred, the tale of where tea-tables, sofas, crinolines and parsonages like the one of Haworth came from".

Other aspects of Emily and her novel dealt with in recent criticism are:

- A novel hunted by Milton's bogey.
- Emily as Milton's rebellious daughter.
- *Wuthering Heights* as a parodic, topsy-turvy retelling of Paradise in which the central characters fall from hell into heaven.
- Catherine's fall into the constraints of adult sexuality, a fall from "hell" (the Heights) into the heavenly gentility of the Grange, where she is cosseted into ladyhood.

Stevie Davies' 1988 work, *Emily Brontë*, considers *Wuthering Heights* to be concerned with familial desire. The story of the second generation recapitulates that of the first: the union of Catherine and Hareton is the marriage of kin with kin, like with like. She states that the novel is one that "answers back" and is a "sublime act of filial, literary and religious disobedience. It presents a child's-eye view of Scripture, specifically a girl-child's. The work mocks God and his angels; it derides the godly community. It reverses scriptural values, elevating woman above God, and the creation above the Creator." (p 249)

Davies suggests that Emily was able to write as she did because she managed to escape the usual constraints upon Victorian women: she refused, in effect, to grow up. She suggests that Emily's particular circumstances – self-educated, living in the remote north, free from the taming influence of a natural mother – gave her a unique immunity from a sense of guilt that was the burden and incentive for Victorian womanhood.

Lyn Pykett's 1989 *Emily Brontë* deals with *Wuthering Heights* in chapters on:

- Gender and genre: Gothic plot and domestic fiction.
- Changing the names: the two Catherines.
- Nelly Dean: memoirs of a survivor.
- The male part of the poem.

Pykett believes that some of the themes of *Wuthering Heights* may well have come from Emily's own experiences; for example, the local story of a usurping adopted son, Jack Sharp and a natural son would have been heard by her

during her brief stay at Law Hill. She also suggests that *Wuthering Heights* is not a "sport" but is part of the development of late 18th and early 19th century fiction and that the particular genre mix of the novel is of interest in itself.

She believes that *Wuthering Heights* combines elements of the Romantic tale of vile possession and Romantic developments of the 18th century Gothic novel with the developing Victorian tradition of Domestic Fiction in a realistic mode. She feels that Emily's novel is both similar to and very different from the kinds of fiction usually written by women in the early 19th century; his comment is somewhat analogous to Charlotte's statement that Emily's poetry was "unlike that usually written by women".

Pykett states that the reader of *Wuthering Heights* has the feeling of finding themselves in two really quite different novels: the beginning chapters are like the 18th and 19th century Domestic Novel – a date (1801), a genteel narrator's ironic description of a social visit and the careful description of the domestic interior at the Heights, but even in Chapter 1 the codes and conventions of polite fiction do not seem adequate enough to comprehend or express life at the Heights. By chapters 2 and 3 the appearance of Catherine's ghost and Heathcliff's passionate response take the novel into the Gothic genre. Heathcliff is consciously presented as a Gothic villain: a demonic, almost otherworldly figure.

Embedded within this Gothic framework is the second narrative which moves progressively in the direction of Victorian Domestic Fiction in the story of the second generation (Linton Heathcliff, Hareton Earnshaw and Catherine Linton). The story moves from the monstrous Hareton, involved in the abduction of Catherine, her enforced marriage to Linton and virtual imprisonment at the Heights to the conventional closure of the Victorian Domestic Novel in which Hareton and Catherine have overcome social obstacles and withdrawn into a private world of domesticity where social, co-operative values are renewed within the bosom of the family. In this case, the pattern of closure is completed by the planned marriage of Hareton and Catherine and their proposed removal from the Heights to Thrushcross Grange. (p 76)

Pykett also sees as an important theme in *Wuthering Heights* the role of women in 19th century society; for example, the story of the first Catherine hinges, as do most novels of the period, on her choice between two men. Catherine's reasons for marrying Edgar Linton are, on the surface, rational and prudent:

Julie, Carol, Catherine, Patricia and Ann enjoy their Devonshire tea at Ebenezer

… because he is handsome and pleasant to be with … because he loves me … and he will be rich, and shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband

Pykett's opinion of the younger Catherine is of some interest; she sees her cultivation of Hareton as a fairly open portrayal of a form of sexual control: "having wrapped a handsome book, she sends it to Hareton via Nelly who is instructed to 'tell him if he'll take it I'll come and teach him to read it right … and if she refuse it, I'll go upstairs and never trouble him again'."

Pykett also deals with the novel's narrative structure: of the use of Lockwood and Nelly Dean, with Lockwood as the dramatic present and Nelly as the voice of the enclosed, inner and introspective narrative. She also deals with the male characters, particularly Heathcliff, seeing them as authority figures in the novel.

Her work is well informed and well expressed, offering many valuable insights into both the novel itself and the social matrix in which it was

written, thereby giving a good historical context to what is often seen as a one-off work without relationship to either its time or other novels.
Stevie Davies' 1998 *Emily Brontë* (one of the *Writers and Their Work* series, issued under the auspices of the British Council) contains a biographical outline, a select bibliography and three short chapters on Emily's life, her intellectual knowledge and poetry, and *Wuthering Heights*. It is certainly the best single

Michelle, Carol, Geraldine and June at the Christmas Lunch

work on Emily that I have read. Within the compass of 128 pages it covers all the necessary aspects of Emily and her work. It is thorough, original and insightful. Davies is very sceptical of the concept of Emily as an unsophisticated, unlettered woman and gives a good analysis in a chapter entitled "The well-spring of other minds: what Emily knew", of her knowledge of music and of her ability as a pianist. She also deals with Emily's apparent interest in learning German and the possible extent of her ability in the German language. The Brussels essays, written as class exercises for M. Heger while Emily and Charlotte were in school at Brussels, indicate a more than reasonable ability in written French and are an interesting reflection of Emily's independence of thought. For example the essay *Le Papillon* (The Butterfly) emphasises evolution and the way cruelty is a pervasive element in the world of creation.

Davies sees Emily's religious beliefs, as expressed in both her poems and her novel, as being a new heresy:
There will be dogs in Heaven … trees and heather. Hers is a green and animal beyond, welcoming all comers. God would have to face some tough questioning at the gates of Heaven. [Above all, for Emily] Heaven would not be Heaven without Keeper." (p 58)

Davies is particularly useful in her analysis of the characters in Wuthering Heights. For example she points out that Nelly, who has charge of much of the tale, does everything possible to sabotage its Romanticism. (p 82)

Nelly's comment on Catherine's shredding of a pillow in her delirium (the "lapwings speech"): "Give over with that baby-work." For Nelly, Catherine is only creating a mess. (p 83) And of Heathcliff: "The novel is full of secrets. Where did Heathcliff come from? How did he acquire his wealth and gentlemanly status? (p 84). And "In this novel of so many secrets, what is being repressed? Some taboo? Some unthinkable trespass?" (p 85). Is Heathcliff the illegitimate son of Mr Earnshaw and therefore the half-brother of Cathy, thus introducing an element of incest.

Davies' concluding comments on why Wuthering Heights has fasciated its readers are as follows:

Readers thrill to Heathcliff because he excites, more than any other character, own own curiosity …"And what happened next?" is every child's question. *Wuthering Heights* leads us into a state of curiosity which is conclusively inconclusive. The country folk think Heathcliff walks: Nelly wobbles on the subject of ghosts – "I believe the dead are at peace, but it is not right to speak of them with levity". Lockwood, passing the kirk that is reverting to nature, satisfies us with a reflective reverie that affirms nothing, while he allows words to bury themselves in that quiet earth . Desire remains unfulfilled; the book perpetuates its mystery". (p 118) his is, perhaps, arguably the best one-line evaluation of Wuthering Heights that any critic has as yet offered us.

I will now conclude with my own ideas on *Wuthering Heights*. My immediate lasting reaction is one of great admiration for the skill with which the overall narrative stream is

handled; the use of multiple time changes, of flashback and of multiple narrators (such as Lockwood, Nelly Dean, Isabella Heathcliff, Zillah). Such techniques as flashback (quite common today, especially in the cinema) were not so common in Emily's time and their use no doubt explains some of the real bewilderment with which the novel was originally met. The idea of working backwards in time, with Lockwood encountering, in 1801, the much older Heathcliff, and the younger Catherine, and then moving on to Nelly Dean's story of the childhood of Heathcliff, Catherine and Hindley, is a brilliantly original method of telling a story, permitting the use of multi-faceted interactions between the various characters and their motivations. It works well in involving us, as readers, intimately with their personalities and actions as individuals and members of society.

Emily does not rely on set "purple passages" of descriptive detail for the topographic setting of her novel; rather, the moors act as a very pervasive background. Indeed it is very easy to forget that much of the action takes place indoors, either at the Heights or at the Grange, which act as strong symbols respectively of wildness and of civilisation. The removal, by their own free choice, of two members of the second generation (the younger Catherine and Hareton) from the Heights to the Grange rounds off the novel very well and acts as a fitting end to all the violence that has gone on before. Stevie Davis' comment that generations of teenage schoolgirls can attest to the fascination of Heathcliff and the contemporary criticism that all or most of the characters were hateful and/or despicable: these are just some of the critiques that have been made about the characters of the novel. I do not have any strong problems with most of the novel's characters.

Nelly Dean acts well as narrator and as commentator on

the older Catherine's behaviour and also acts effectively as a mother figure (it is noteworthy that there are no significant mother characters in the novel, possibly because Emily had no real memory of her own mother). Nelly also acts as a confidant to Cathy. Lockwood is the eternal outsider: foppish, conceited, the recipient of Nelly's narrative and also a narrator himself. His conceit as to his sexual attractiveness is credible, if not very endearing; for example, his fantasy about union with the younger Catherine.

However Hareton is something of a problem. His conversion to the role of the younger Cathy's mate is necessary for the ultimate resolution of the plot of the novel. His acceptance by Catherine, their developing love, their intended marriage (even the passing touch of the primroses in the porridge!) are well done but they are not necessarily credible when compared to the earlier brutal Hareton with his wholehearted involvement in the enforced marriage of Catherine to Linton Heathcliff.

Both Catherines are relatively complex; somewhat spoilt and indulged; wilful and headstrong but ultimately redeemed by death and childbirth in the case of the elder Catherine and a slowly maturing love, in the case of the younger Catherine (although her earlier love for Linton Heathcliff is, in my opinion, more than a little hard to believe). Her love for Hareton is well told and justified through the device of her teaching him to read, as is their final scene of them reading together with a kiss as reward for work well done, even though this is perhaps a little sentimental and a jarring note.

Finally there is the problem of Heathcliff: the centre of the novel?; the embodiment of evil?; asexual love for Cathy and vice-versa? Charlotte's reservations about creating such a "thing" as Heathcliff; his necrophilia (exhuming Cathy's body twice). Interestingly enough, Heathcliff dies in flashback, narrated by Nelly Dean to Lockwood, in a fairly restrained scene compared to the usual overdone scenes in Victorian novels, such as those of Dickens (Little Nell, Paul Dombey).

I feel, given his life history, his treatment by Hindley, and his apparent rejection by Catherine (which was to lead to his disappearance for three years) that his various behavioural reactions are extreme but not incredible.

(continued on page 13)

THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF THE BRONTËS

A sermon preached by Dr Christopher Cooper at a Service of Thanksgiving for the Lives of the Brontës at Ebenezer Uniting Church on 10th November 2002

This church here at Ebenezer was built in 1809. Now at that time, on the other side of the world, a young unmarried Irishman, commenced as curate at Dewsbury in Yorkshire. This 31 year-old curate, with a shock of bright red hair and a strong Irish accent, was Patrick Brontë.

A couple of years later, in 1812, he married Maria Branwell, a staunch Methodist lass from Cornwall. When Patrick and Maria, with their six young children, moved into the parsonage at Haworth, this church at Ebenezer had already been a place of worship for 11 years.

Now it would take far too long to retell the fascinating stories of this unique literary family, and in any case many of us have heard them many times. I would like to focus here on their Christian faith.

Patrick, the father, preached and lived his faith in a very down to earth manner. He didn't align himself with any particular faction of the Church of England and he distanced himself from church politics. He could perhaps be described as a conservative evangelical but he shunned all the –isms of the day. He simply made up his own mind on every question.

Patrick Brontë came from a very poor family in what is now Northern Ireland and one of his great themes, both in his sermons and in his devotional poetry, was that one can be happy, though poor – that God is much more at home in an earth-floored hovel among simple folk than He is among the nobility in a stately home or a castle.

Patrick Brontë was a very practical servant of God. He was not only faithful in visiting the sick and needy, but he also worked for practical amenities in Haworth such as improved sanitation. His theology was sound and he preferred to exhort his flock rather than frighten them with hell-fire.

Perhaps he came closest to fire and brimstone when he preached a sermon inspired by the Great Haworth Bog Burst.

It had been raining very hard for many days when, out on the moors, a whole hillside started slipping down in a huge muddy avalanche. Fortunately it moved so slowly that nobody was hurt. But it changed the whole landscape and when it came to a halt, and the rain stopped, everyone for miles around came to see the result of this meteorological phenomenon.

This was a marvellous opportunity for a sermon on. On the following Sunday he took as his text the reading we had today from Psalm 97 and everyone knew what was mean by the words:

The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

But his message was not intended to frighten the sinners, along the lines of "Repent or the Lord might do this again." His main message was to get his flock to marvel at God's power. God is a great God, and the bog-burst was just a reminder of His great power.

Charlotte Brontë's religious outlook was a fairly conventional one, fairly typical for a daughter of a Church of England minister. She was contemptuous of Methodism, Quakerism and the extreme forms of High and Low Church. As for Catholicism she wrote of it from Brussels with condescending pity. Yet her hero in *The Professor*, was of this faith.

Although she was wedded to the hierarchical Church of England she believed that the authority of Christ was to be found within her own heart rather than in the

authority of bishops and archbishops. She wrote:
I love the Church of England. Her ministers, indeed, I do not regard as infallible personages. I have seen too much of them for that, but to the Establishment, with all her faults … I am sincerely attached.

Charlotte passionately believed in the doctrine of Universal Salvation – the doctrine that potentially all men and women can obtain salvation, rather than those who have been pre-ordained by God. The fact that this was not an Anglican doctrine did not seem to disturb her.

I am sorry the clergy do not like the doctrine of Universal Salvation; I think it is a great pity for their sakes, but surely they are not so unreasonable to expect me to deny or suppress what I believe the truth.

Charlotte found great comfort in her faith, especially amid all the tragedy that surrounded her. She had a stoic attitude to life. She confessed to Mrs Gaskell that she had to school herself against ever anticipating any pleasure in life, that it was better to be brave and submit, and accept sorrow and disappointment as the normal lot of life, face it with religious faith and await a hereafter to find the explanation of it all.

We might be disappointed that Charlotte missed out on the joy that a religious faith can bring, even when things look dark. The psalmist wrote, in the 23rd Psalm, about walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But his faith brought him not only the comfort of fearing no evil, he experienced great joy as his cup ran over. For Charlotte it was enough to fear no evil. She certainly did experience happiness, especially during her brief marriage to her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls. But one gets the impression that her cup never completely ran over.

So while we might not agree with her that this life is full of troubles which have to be endured simply for the sake of reward in the next, we can nevertheless learn from her steadfastness in the face of adversity.

Emily's faith was very different to Charlotte's. If Charlotte thought that the centre of one's faith was one's own experience of God, Emily seemed to believe that this was both centre, circumference and everything in between. For her, religion was something that could only be shared between the individual and her God. She detested organised religion of any form.

She has been variously described as an atheist, agnostic or Christian mystic. Because her faith was an intensely personal one we can see very little of it. But what we have are her poems, which were written, secretly, with no thought of publication. Her most famous poem, *No Coward Soul is Mine*, reveals that she had a deep faith. It's just that she didn't want to talk about it to others or share in the fellowship of the Church.

Both Charlotte and Emily had great assurance in what they believed. Poor Anne's faith was sometimes filled with doubt. She believed that only the elect would be saved and was worried that she might not be part of that number. At one stage, when she was away governessing, she had something of a crisis of faith and sought help from La Trobe, a minister of the Moravian sect.

Of the three girls, Anne was the one most concerned about social justice. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* she portrays the destruction that the misuse of alcohol can bring to family life, and the suffering brought about by the over-rigid marriage laws which sought to prevent a wife from escaping an intolerable domestic situation.

In what way does a reflection on the lives of the Brontë sisters provide an inspiration for us today? Nobody would make the claim that they were great saints in the traditional sense. They were great writers and are known for that reason, not because of the quality of the religious lives. But they were saints in the sense of the Sainthood of all Believers for all that. Like us they struggled with adversity and tried to live out their Christian lives to the best of their ability. They didn't always succeed as well as they might. (continued on page 12)

HOW I FOUND ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS ON THE INTERNET

An edited excerpt from Letter From Bombay by Cathy Cory, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 16th August 2002. (Thanks Susannah Fullerton for passing it on.)

Late one night some months ago, idly surfing the Internet, I found some books that had once belonged to Arthur Bell Nicholls for sale by auction. Internet auctions differ little from sale-room auctions in that, even in the privacy of one's own parlour, one can get alarmingly carried away. Thinking it would be wonderful to own something that had once belonged to Charlotte Brontë's husband, I placed a bid. Ten days later, it was less wonderful to receive an email requesting $180 for three books I did not want: turgid liturgical volumes, each signed and dated by Nicholls when he had been at Haworth as Patrick Brontë's curate, in the months before his marriage to Charlotte.

In Thackeray's introduction to "the last fragmentary sketch from the noble hand which wrote *Jane Eyre*", he quotes from Nicholl's account of the writing of *Emma*:

One evening at the close of 1854, as Charlotte Nicholls sat with her husband by the fire, listening to the howling of the wind about the house, she suddenly said to her husband, "If you had not been with me, I must have been writing now." She then ran upstairs, and brought down and read aloud, the beginning of a new tale. When she had finished her husband remarked "The critics will accuse you of repetition." She relied, "Oh, I shall alter that. I always begin two or three times before I can please myself." But it was not to be. The trembling little hand was to write no more.

A few months later, after only nine months of marriage, the thirty-eight-year-old novelist died from excessive bleeding in pregnancy. Nicholls lived on in Haworth, looking after his aged father-in-law until he died, enduring the publicity from Mrs Gaskell's sensational biography of his wife (written with indecent haste after her death). He then took the surviving Brontë dogs, servant and everything of sentimental value connected with Charlotte back to his home town of Banagher in Ireland, where he married his crippled cousin and lived quietly as a gentleman farmer.

When the package of musty books arrived from Sotheby's, a photograph fell out of one of them, together with a letter sent in 1970 to Winifred Gerin, Charlotte Brontë's 1960's biographer. The books had been sold by her estate. The photograph, taken in 1904, depicted Arthur Bell Nicholls as an old man. standing with his dog Pincher and a little girl outside his home, Hill House. The letter was from the girl (now aged seventy-eight) whose father had been the Rector at Banagher before the First World War, congratulating Gerin on her biography. "The Nicholls were our nearest neighbours and dearest friends. I was devoted to Mr Nicholls and looked on him as a sort of extra grandfather … "

I propped the picture on my desk and found myself haunted by this kindly old man whom Brontë mythologists have often treated badly. It is typical that Thackeray's account, intended merely to emphasize the early stage of the unfinished work, has been frequently quoted out of context, to berate Nicholls for discouraging his wife's writing. Mrs Gaskell abused him because he did not give her everything she required for her own intrusive biography, while Charlotte's friend from schooldays, Ellen Nussey, bitterly resented his usurpation of her role as confidant and took every opportunity to paint him in a bad light. Sadly, Charlotte herself was the cause of his greatest trial after her death. While going through her papers, poor Arthur Bell Nicholls discovered letters from James Taylor in Bombay, and was distressed to think that he had not been her only suitor.

It is sad that the widowed Nicholls should have been perturbed by those letters, for there is no doubt that he is the unsung hero of the whole Brontë story. Charlotte was amazed by how happy being Mrs Nicholls made her.

THE NSW DICKENS SOCIETY

was formed late in 2002. In 2003 it will meet 6 times (see page 16 for the dates). The meetings will be on Saturday mornings at 10 am in the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts. Contact the president Valerie Weekes (9909-2828) for further information.

HEATHCLIFF AS A YOUNG GIRL

A modern take on *Wuthering Heights*

An edited version of a review of the BBC series *Sparkhouse* by Sean Day-Lewis in the September 2002 issue of *Country Life*. (Thanks Meg Haywood for forwarding it on.)

Sally Wainwright's three part *Sparkhouse* (BBC1) builds a 2002 melodrama round the Cathy and Heathcliff relationship of *Wuthering Heights*. Darkness and discomfort are conveyed with energy, and the airing of present issues may help immediate accessibility, but it is Emily Brontë's story which still haunts from its enduring heights.

In accordance with present television fashion, the characteristics have been swapped so that the heroine Carol Bolton (Sarah Smart) becomes the strong, passionate, turbulent Heathcliff figure. Her lover Andrew Lawton (Joseph McFadden) is the Cathy of the version, a comparative weakling (does anybody really think of Cathy Earnshaw as a weakling? – ed) about to start his university studies, attracted to independence but at bottom the unreconstructed son of his doctor father and schoolteacher mother. In part one the pair enjoyed plenty of innocent – or childish – giggling, running and tumbling round a bleak Yorkshire moor but their apparent equality is soon shown to be false.

The screenwriter made her name with the funny *At Home With the Braithwaites*, the saga of a dysfunctional family whose way of life is turned upside down by a large lottery win. In that Sara Smart plays a chaotic lesbian daughter. In this new screenplay she plays a very heterosexual Carol but her family hits depths of dysfunction way beyond the Braithwaites's range.

Seven out of ten farms in their valley have become empty relics. The Boltons still exist on their crumbling Sparkhouse Farm and keep a few animals but are losing whatever money they previously made. Before the end of part one (that's all that had been shown at the time of the review – ed) Carol's mother has escaped with a drinking companion from the pub. Then it s admitted that Carol's supposed kid sister is actually her own daughter, the result of a rape by her bullying and drunken father Richard (Alan Armstrong) when she was a 12 year-old. The Wainwright gift for comedy emerging from character appears at intervals, but director Robin Sheppard understandably finds it hard to ease this into grim melodrama. Most of what Carol has to endure, largely from the variously unattractive men in her life, is way beyond a joke.

The Religious Lives of the Brontës (continued from page 10)

It's the fact that, through their writings, they have revealed so much of their inner lives. Even Emily, mysterious and secretive as she was, has left rather more of her inner self open for the inspection of the whole world, than I think she would have liked. Through their novels, poems, and letters we have come to know more of their inner world than we often do of our own brothers and sisters.

And it's by sharing the deepest thoughts of another person that we can come to know ourselves better.

Furthermore, those of us who have a Christian faith, like Charlotte, Emily and Anne did all those years ago, we find that by being privileged to enter another's inner world, their insights into the nature of God and their victories and failures over spiritual doubts and fears strengthens our own spiritual life and brings us closer to God.

Whether at the level of religious faith, or at the level of coming to terms with who we are and what we want to be, the magic of literature is a window that heightens our experience. We read to be entertained and informed, but I'm sure that most of us read great literature because we come away from that experience changed in some deep way.

NEW THOUGHTS ON WUTHERING HEIGHTS

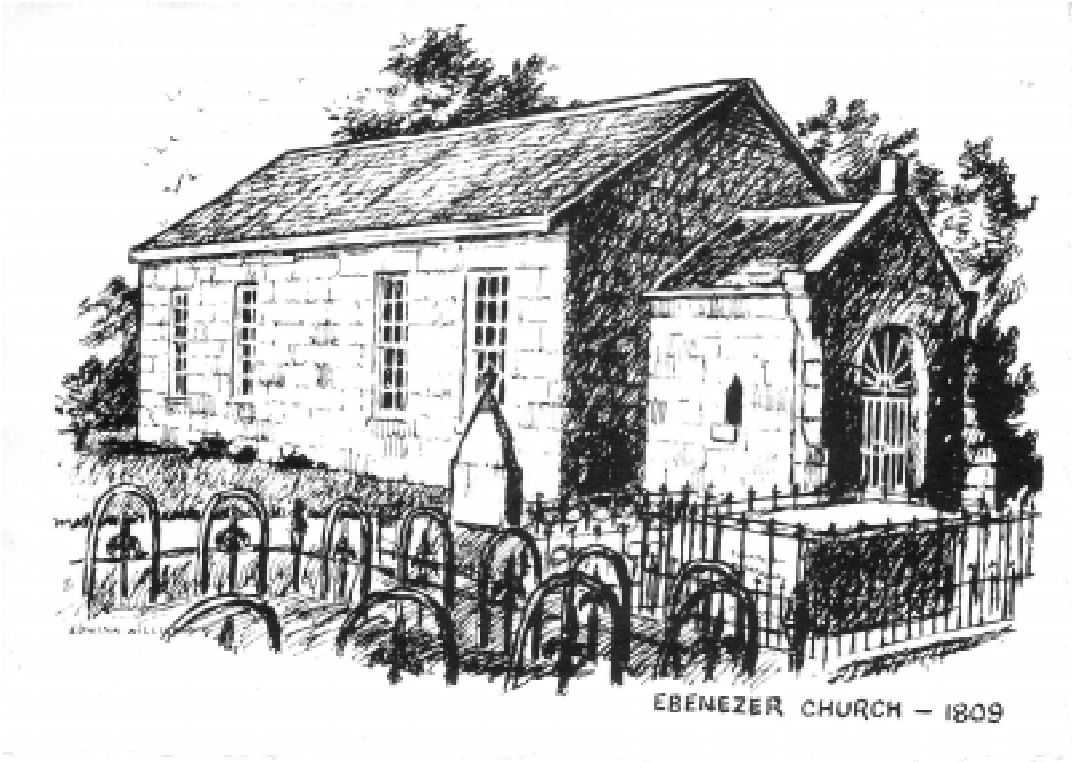
continued from page 8

Emily does convince us of his credibility while we are reading the novel and any further re-readings tend to reinforce us in our acceptance of the behaviour of Heathcliff and of the other characters in the novel. This full-hearted acceptance is surely a sign of ultimate success.

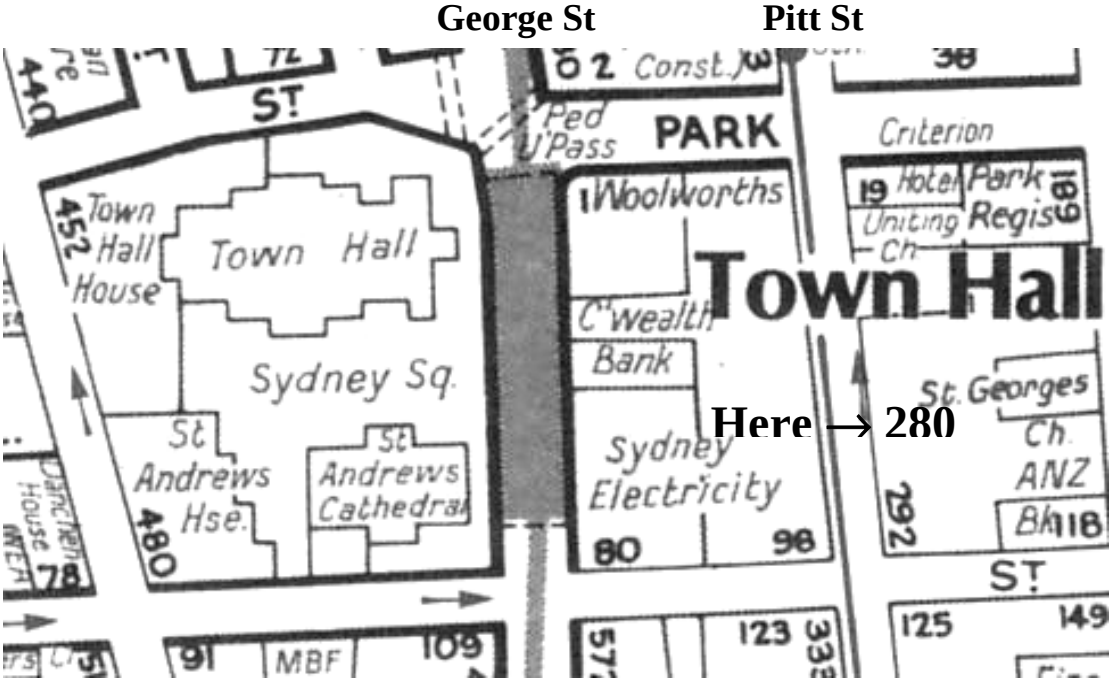
I have little or no sympathy with those who claim that *Wuthering Heights* is a seriously flawed novel; indeed, on the contrary, it seems to me to be a very finely constructed piece of writing, with an impressively high level of interest maintained throughout. Emily Brontë is a superb communicator and tells her story well, fully involving her readers from the outset and maintaining a firm hold on their attention to the end. It is a novel that fully rewards several re-readings, offering both rich new insights as well as the worthwhile bonuses involved in the renewed pleasure of previous insights.

Suggestions or Further Reading

ALLOTT, Miriam, ed. (1992). *Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights: a Casebook.* Revised ed.
BRONTË, Emily (1992). *Wuthering Heights*; intro. by Margaret Drabble (Everyman Library).
CHITHAM, Edward (1998). *The Birth of Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë at Work.*
CHITHAM, Edward (1987). *A Life of Emily Brontë.*
DAVIES, Stevie (1998). *Emily Brontë.* (Writers and Their Work).
GERIN, Winifred (1971). *Emily Brontë: A Biography*. (includes, as Appendix A, Emily's French essays written by her for M. Heger during her time at Brussels).
PYKETT, Lyn (1989). *Emily Brontë.*
WINNIFRITH, Thomas John, ed. (1997). *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë.*



OUR NEW VENUE
Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts 280 Pitt St Sydney



EVENTS FOR 2003

Saturday 14th February, 7:30pm at 31 Epping Ave EASTWOOD

AN EVENING WITH JANE EYRE

No doubt Rochester and Jane Eyre were looking forward to spending a quiet Valentine's Day alone. However we have other ideas. We will be sharing it with them. In preparation for our Jane Eyre Workshop in June we will relive the story of *Jane Eyre* by watching excepts from some of the film and video productions. The segments of video will be interspersed with opportunities for discussion about the different versions.

Saturday 1st March, 11am at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES AT KEIGHLEY AND IN SYDNEY

The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was founded in 1833 (200 will be the 170th anniversary). Just eight years earlier, in Yorkshire, the Keighley Mechanics Institute was founded. Patrick Brontë was an early member. There are reports that around 1835 Charlotte, Emily and Anne would walk the eight mile trip to Keighley to collect some books from he Institute library for their father.
To mark our first meeting at our new venue we will hear about the Keighley Mechanics Institute and the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts. The meeting will begin with a short AGM at which office bearers for 2003 will be elected.

Saturday 10th May, 11am at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney

WHY ANNE BRONTË?

Aimee Chan (a research student at the University of New South Wales)
Why is Anne is an important writer to read and study, and what were some of the revolutionary things that she did in her writing that her sisters didn't do? "I will probably do a study of Anne's sociological approach to governesses in Agnes Grey and her approach to the contemporary legal position of women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*."

Saturday 28th JUNE, 10am at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney

JANE EYRE WORKSHOP

This workshop will examine the plot, the characters and several themes that have been picked up in literary critiques of the novel. There will be a variety of activities, ranging from short lectures, and group discussion. This will be particularly suitable for HSC students who are studying the novel. It would be a good idea if you can re-read the novel in preparation for the workshop. (Note the earlier starting time.)

Saturday 9th AUGUST, 12:30pm at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney

THE HISTORY & RELEVANCE OF LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS

This event is being organized by the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts as part of their monthly lecture series. Representatives from the Australian Brontë Association, the Jane Austen Society of Australia, the NSW Byron Society and the NSW Dickens Society will speak about the history of heir organizations and their various types of activity.

Friday 24th OCTOBER, 8pm – early afternoon Sunday 26th OCTOBER

THREE SISTERS' WEEKEND

Following the success of our weekend away in 2000 we will return to La Maison guesthouse, near the "Three Sisters" at Echo Point in Katoomba. The program will be very informal and relaxing. One feature will be a "Virtual Literary Tour" A couple of those who will have recently returned from Susannah Fullerton's Literary Tour of England will talk briefly about some of the highlights and, with the help of slides, take you to many of the haunts of your favourite writers. While it isn't essential to stay at La Maison, we hope that the majority of participants will. This will maximize your experience of being part of the group but will also justify our free use of the conference facilities at La Maison. Accommodation bookings should be made direct to La Maison. In addition there will be a small registration fee payable to the ABA to cover sundry costs. Further details will be in the next newsletter, but I know that some members will be booking early to secure their favourite room.

Contact Details for La Maison:
175-177 Lurline St KATOOMBA 2780
Telephone: 02-4782-4996
Fax: 02-4782-3595

Saturday 6th DECEMBER at 12 noon (venue and cost to be announced)

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

ABA CALENDAR FOR 2003

See page 15 for further details

MECHANICS: Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt St SYDNEY
EASTWOOD: Home of the ABA President, 31 Epping Ave EASTWOOD (9804-7473)
KATOOMBA: La Maison Guest House, 175-177 Lurline St KATOOMBA 2780 (02-4782-4996)

(For convenience of members of the Jane Austen Society of Australia and the NSW Dickens Society dates for those meetings included. However you should check these against these society's publicity.)

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
	1st at 10am Dickens **10th ABA Committee (Eastwood)** **14th at 7:30pm (Eastwood)** **AN EVENING WITH JANE EYRE** 15th at 2pm Jane Austen	**1st at 11am (Mechanics)** **MECHANICS' INSTITUTES AT KEIGHLEY AND IN SYDNEY** **Ellen Elzey*/Christopher Cooper** 17th – 9th Jane Austen Country Weekend
APRIL	**MAY**	**JUNE**
5th at 10am Dickens 12th at 2pm Jane Austen	**5th ABA Committee (Eastwood)** **10th at 11am (Mechanics)** **WHY ANNE BRONTË?** **(Aimee Chan)** 17th at 10am Jane Austen Study Day 24th at 10am Dickens	21st at 2pm Jane Austen **28th at 10am (Mechanics)** **JANE EYRE WORKSHOP**
JULY	**AUGUST**	**SEPTEMBER**
19th at 10am Jane Austen Day Conference 26th at 10am Dickens **28th ABA Committee (Eastwood)**	**9th at 12:30pm (Mechanics)** **LITERARY SOCIETIES OF SYDNEY** **(Brontë, Austen, Byron, Dickens*)** 16th 2pm Jane Austen	27th at 10am Dickens
OCTOBER	**NOVEMBER**	**DECEMBER**
18th at 2pm Jane Austen **19th ABA Committee (Eastwood)** **24th – 26th (Katoomba)** **THREE SISTERS WEEKEND**	22nd at 10am Dickens	**6th at 12 noon** **ABA CHRISTMAS LUNCH** 13th at 12 noon Jane Austen Christmas Lunch

* to be confimed