The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

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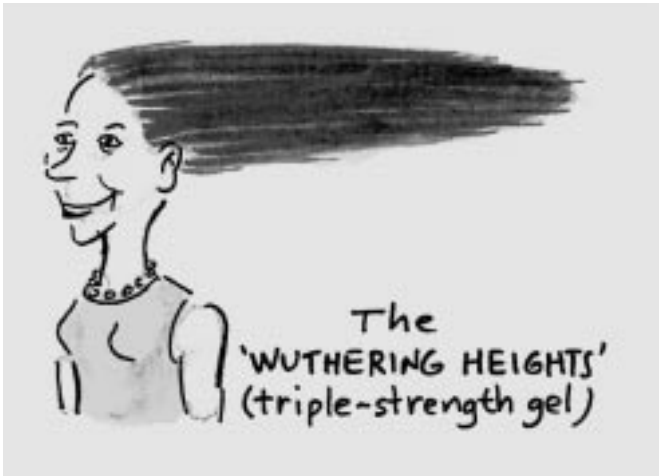
SPEND A WEEKEND WITH THE THREE (Brontë) SISTERS

24th – 26th Oct, La Maison Guest House Katoomba

The Australian Brontë Association second weekend away.
Details and Registration Form in the enclosed lift-out.

LATEST HAIRSTYLE!

One of three imaginative hairstyles recorded by Phil Somerville in a recent issue of the Sydney Morning Herald.



KEIGHLEY MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The text of a talk to the ABA by Christopher Cooper on 1st March 2003.

To set the scene here's an excerpt from an 1834 guide book.

KEIGHLEY is a respectable market-town, 202 miles from London, situated in a beautiful deep valley, at the junction of two rivulets, which empty themselves into the river Aire. The town gave name to, and was the residence for nearly four centuries of, the knightly family of Kighley. One of the daughters of Henry Kighley was married, in the time of Elizabeth, to Lord Cavendish, from whom the present Duke of Devonshire is lineally descended.

The town is rather irregularly built, principally of stone, of which the neighbourhood affords an ample supply: it is furnished with water, under an act of parliament obtained in 1816; and lighted with gas under the improvement act, procured in 1824.

Besides being the neighbourhood in which the manufactures of low stuffs and worsted yarns are carried on to a great extent, and principally conveyed to the Bradford market, it has some very respectable and valuable cotton manufactories, and furnishes a considerable proportion of the materials and the machinery necessary for the manufacturing of commodities belonging to both branches.

The Leeds and Liverpool canal passes within a mile of the town, affording, by its means, a cheap and expeditious conveyance for the manufactures of the town, and other heavy goods, benefiting the adjacent districts through which it passes, and forming a communication between the Atlantic and the German oceans.

And now here's a very brief history of the Keighley Mechanics' Institute:

Free education in the parish of Keighley can be traced back to the early part of the 18th century, when a churchwarden, maltster and innkeeper left by will two dwelling houses with outbuildings, for the maintenance of an unmarried schoolmaster to teach children of the parish "in the English, Greek and Latin tongues".

In 1823 a Mechanics' Institute was set up in Glasgow. There had been one or two similar institutions before this, but the Glasgow one seemed to set off a chain reaction. In 1824 nine others were established in Scotland and England and in 1825 a further 65 were added, including one at Keighley. By 1850 there were altogether 538 Mechanics' Institutes in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the colonies, including our own one here in Sydney.

One of the Keighley men had seen an article in the first issue of *The Mechanics Magazine* describing the educational aspirations of a group of Glasgow workmen. He met with three others and they decided that Keighley must have a similar institution and were very pleased at the number of working class men who attended the first public meeting held at the Free School, all eager to enrol as members of this society. The aims of the Institute was "mutual Instruction in Mechanics, Experimental Philosophy and Mathematics". This society flourished as the Keighley Institute and met in the Free Grammar School in Cook Lane. In 1832 a new building was planned on Skipton Road which was erected and eventually opened in 1834.

In 1836 a significant development in public education took place which was characterised by the formation of classes in which arithmetic, algebra, geometry, drawing and history were taught. In 1844 regular art classes were begun and, in succeeding years, more emphasis was laid on all aspects of design.

It was typical of the enlightened outlook of the Committee of the Institute that in 1850 they should play an active part in petitioning both Houses of Parliament for shorter hours of work for factory operatives. The scope of the instruction offered continued to expand and in

1854 evening classes were systematically organised for the first time.

In 1864 the committee, wishing to improve the facilities for art and science, began to consider seriously the question of building a new institution. By this time the School of Art had achieved a national reputation.

These successes, together with the growth of evening classes, provided the necessary impetus to launch the new building project and in 1866 the committee resolved to erect a new building which would "include a Hall, Elementary Classrooms, School of Art, Library, Newsroom, Clubroom and Dwelling". However, it was not until 1870 that the new Mechanics' Institute was declared open by the Duke of Devonshire. The land, building and furniture cost £15,000, a large part of which was raised by public subscription.

A leading member of the committee, Mr Swire Smith, became a powerful advocate for technical education throughout England. As a result of their labours, Keighley, in the 1870s, became a pioneer in technical education and the Mechanics' Institute served as a pattern for the whole country. Mr Swire Smith was invited by Gladstone to represent the woollen industry as a member of a Royal Commission into Technical Instruction. His work attracted the attention of the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who gave £10,000 to be used to found a public library in the town - the first Carnegie Library in England.

In 1904 the Committee of the Mechanics' Institute resolved to hand the Institute over to the Municipality. The Institute was disbanded in 1944 and the building was used as a school. Unfortunately, it went up in flames after a Saturday night dance in 1962. It was partially rebuilt and in 1965 became Keighley Technical College, later renamed as Keighley College.

In 1950 the Brontë Society Transactions published a paper, by Mr Clifford Whone, entitled *Where the Brontës Borrowed Books*. I'll read a short extract.

The Earl of Burlington, Lord of the Manor of Keighley, was Patron of the Institute, and his protégé, the Rev. Theodore Dury, Rector of Keighley (1814-1840), was its guiding spirit. (One of his hobby-horses was electricity and he gave lectures on the subject). There were other clergymen, including the Rev. P. B. Brontë and "the handsome, cheery and good-tempered" Rev. Wm. Weightman, the first of the Haworth curates.

Mr. Brontë's number in the list of members was 213. The latest number in 1841 was 362. When the Institute was founded in 1825 there were 71 members. As membership would be likely to increase rapidly at first and then thin down to a steady annual trickle of new members, it seems certain that Mr. Brontë was a fairly early member.

Unfortunately Mr Whone's calculations were quite inaccurate. For in 1965 Ian Dewhurst consulted the manuscript Minutes of the Mechanics' Institute in the Keighley Public Library and discovered that Patrick Brontë was the last of fifteen new members who joined in the year ending April 1833. This put to rest the suggestion that Patrick had been one of the Institute's founders.

In his paper *The Rev. Patrick Brontë and the Keighley Mechanics' Institute* which appeared in the Brontë Society Transactions in 1965 Dewhurst points out that Patrick's 5/- admission fee, plus a contribution of twopence per week, entitled him to the use of the reading room, library and apparatus, and attendance at lectures and classes. By this stage there were 98 members with 652 volume in the library.

Since he did not become a member until 1832-1833, when Charlotte was nearly seventeen, and since a member could be fined 5/- for "lending a book to any person out of his own family, and not of the Institution", it is unlikely that the Institute library contributed towards the earlier reading of the Brontë children. Nor, perhaps, should we accept too literally Clement Shorter's description of the road from Keighley to Haworth, wherein she recalls "the fact that these Brontë children toiled often on foot the self-same journey, bringing back books from the library at the old Mechanics' Institute.

Juliet Barker points out that in fact there's no proof that the girls used any of the volumes from the Institute library. That may be, but I believe that it's highly likely that they did indirectly benefit. While they couldn't have borrowed books in their own right, and Patrick

may not have borrowed books for them, it does seem likely that Patrick would not have prevented his girls from reading books that he'd brought back for his own use. After all, the 5/- fine didn't apply for lending to family members.

Returning to Mr Whone's paper:
Charlotte when she went to Roe Head in 1831, knew as much about literature, if not about grammar and geography, as her teachers. One of her school friends there said, "She was acquainted with most of the short pieces of poetry that we had to learn by heart; would tell us the authors, and the poems they were taken from." She cannot have learned all this at Cowan Bridge, and, unless she found the books on her father's own bookshelves, the source of much of her literary education must have been the Keighley Mechanics' Library.

There's a rather exaggerated story that has grown up concerning the influence of the Mechanics' Institute Library in the intellectual lives of the Brontë sisters. It is at its most extravagant in the account given by John Lock and W.T. Dixon in their 1965 biography of Patrick Brontë, *A Man of Sorrows*.

> *Regularly every week Patrick and his children would walk the eight miles to Keighley and back, returning with their arms full of books from the Institute's Lending Library.*

Well quite apart from the impracticality of walking miles with arms full of books, the Institute's rules only allowed two books to be borrowed at one time by members living more than a mile away (only one book for those living in the town). Moreover the rules allowed *sons* of members to accompany their fathers to the reading room, but no mention is made of daughters.

Not that all the members were men. According to Mr Whone the most distinguished member was Miss Frances Mary Richardson Currer of Eshton Hall. He said "she was certainly not a 'mechanic'. Doubtless she was there just to encourage the others".

Whone makes the plausible suggestion that Charlotte's pseudonym, Currer Bell, may have arisen from coming across the name "Currer" in the list of members of the Institute. Especially since the name of William Ellis and his sons was also on the list.

Mr Whone's paper concludes with the complete catalogue of the library's holdings in 1841. The collection included 23 books on mathematics, 64 on Moral, Natural and Experimental Philosophy and 75 on History and Biography. 57 books were classified under Arts, Sciences, Commerce etc and 48 titles were catalogued under Chemistry and Natural History.

There were 81 titles on Geography, Voyages, Travels etc including one on New South Wales. According to Whone, Charlotte knew as much geography when she went to Roe Head in 1831 as her teachers. Clearly, he said, she had acquired this with the help of the Mechanics' Institute Library. The only trouble was that her father didn't join until 1833 just after Charlotte had returned from Roe Head!

The library held 26 titles of poetry, including the complete works of Burns, Byron and Shakespeare, plus 21 titles of Reviews, Magazines etc. There were 216 books entered under General Literature and Miscellanies. These included the complete works of Sir Walter Scott (and we know that Charlotte was greatly influenced by his novels) and a set of novels by James Fenimore Cooper – *The Last of the Mohicans* and 10 others.

Now I wonder, did Charlotte ever read Fenimore Cooper? It's quite possible because in her novels she makes reference to the culture of the Red Indian. Can anyone tell me what they are?

In *Jane Eyre*, after the aborted wedding, as she's preparing to run away, Jane says:

> *The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe.*

Then in *Shirley* Charlotte writes:

> *Once, on a dark, wet Sunday, when there were few people at church, and when especially certain ladies were absent, of whose observant faculties and tomahawk*

tongues Caroline stood in awe, she had allowed her eye to seek Robert's pew, and to rest a while on its occupant.

Mr. Brontë didn't join the Mechanics' Institute until eight years after its establishment and seemed to play no active role until March 6th 1835, when the Minutes of the monthly Committee meeting record the setting up of a sub-Committee, which included Patrick, to coordinate a series of 4 lectures on acoustics by a certain Mr Addams.

The project was a financial failure since Mr Addams negotiated a fee of 20 guineas for the four lectures, while the amount collected from ticket sales was less than a third of that. It must have been assumed that the lectures would be enormously popular, because they charged 6/- for the course (3/- in the gallery). With members being admitted free, at those prices they would have needed over 120 non-members to attend in order to break even! At their next annual meeting they voted that in future they would only accept lecturing offers from their own members, or from those who were willing to lecture in an honorary capacity.

One of these honorary lecturers was Patrick Brontë. In 1841 he gave a lecture on the *Influence of Circumstances*. Charges for admission were 4d for front seats and 2d for back seats with members admitted free.

Another of these honorary lecturers was William Weightman, Patrick's first curate. He spoke on *The Advantages of a Classical Education*. Many years later, in 1871, Ellen Nussey recorded the following reminiscence.

'Cecelia Amelia', Mr Brontës curate, was a lively, handsome young man fresh from Durham University, an excellent classical scholar. He gave a very good lecture on the Classics at Keighley. The young ladies of the Parsonage must hear his lecture, so he went off to a married clergyman to get him to write to Mr Brontë and invite the young ladies to tea, and offer his escort to the lecture, and back again to the Parsonage. Great fears were entertained that permission would not be given – it was a walk of four miles each way. The Parsonage was not reached till 12 midnight. The two clergymen rushed in with their charges, deeply disturbing Miss Branwell who had prepared hot coffee for the home party, which of course was short when two more were to be supplied. Poor Miss Branwell lost her temper, Charlotte was troubled, and Mr Weightman, who enjoyed teazing the old lady, was very thirsty. The great spirits of the walking party had a trying suppression, but twinkling fun sustained some of them.

There was also a little episode as to valentines. Mr Weightman discovered that none of the party had ever received a valentine – a great discovery! Whereupon he indited verses to each one, and walked ten miles to post them in Bradford.

The married clergyman referred to was probably John Collins, the curate from Keighley. Charlotte became friends with his wife. Some years later, in 1847, Charlotte wrote a letter to Ellen with some juicy gossip about Mr Collins: "after running an infamous and career of vice both in England and France … abandoning his wife to disease and total destitution in Manchester with two young children and without a farthing in a strange lodging house". She goes on to relate how Mrs Collins appeared on her doorstep one evening and spent two hours pouring out her heart to Charlotte. It has been suggested that this incident might have influenced Anne to write *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, published 18 months later.

Mr Weightman made very good use of his connections with the Mechanics' Institute as we learn from Charlotte's letter to Ellen on 14th July 1840:

Mr Weightman – left Haworth this morning, we do not expect him back again for some weeks – I am fully convinced Ellen that he is a thorough male-flirt – his sighs are deeper than ever – and his treading on toes more assiduous – I find that he has scattered his impressions far and wide – Keighley has yielded him a fruitful field of conquest, Sarah Sudgen is quite smitten, so is Caroline Drury.

Both girls were daughters of Mechanics' Institute committee members.

Now while there can be some debate as to how much use, if any, the girls made of the

Mechanics' Institute Library there can be no doubt that they often attended lectures there. And it's highly likely that they attended the many concerts that took place in the main hall.

Patrick kept up his membership in the Keighley Institute till 1844 or 1845. It's been assumed that he resigned because his advancing years made the four mile journey from Haworth more difficult. This may well be the case, but it's interesting to note that at about this time, in 1844, a Mechanics' Institute was founded in Haworth. It's listed as one of the 538 Mechanics' Institutes that existed between 1823 and 1850. The only other information given is that is continued until 1904.

Nothing I've ever seen in the Brontë literature makes mention of the Haworth Mechanics' Institute. So we don't know if Patrick, or his daughters, had any involvement in it. But it would be quite surprising if something that was so close to their interests and so close to their home, would have been totally ignored by them. It may well be that the Haworth Institute had a much more narrowly technical focus than the Keighley one, and that it was of no interest to the Brontë's. But the fact that Patrick ceased his membership at Keighley just as the Haworth Institute was getting under way suggests that more investigation along these lines should be pursued.

TIMELINE: MARRIED WOMEN AND THE LAW

Prepared by Aimee Chan for her talk to the ABA on 10th May 2003.

1816 – Charlotte Brontë born.
1818 – Emily Brontë born.
1820 – Anne Brontë born.
1821 – Helen Lawrence marries Arthur Huntingdon.
1827 – Helen Huntingdon escapes Arthur Huntingdon and moves to Wildfell Hall, where she resides as Mrs Graham.
1839 – Laws changed from giving only the father full legal custody of children to allowing the mother to seek a petition in court for access to all infant children and custody of children under the age of 7.
1847 – *Jane Eyre* first published.
- *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* first published.
1848 – *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* first published.
- Emily Brontë dies.
1849 – Anne Brontë dies.
- *Shirley* first published.
1854 – First Matrimonial Causes Bill introduced.
- Charlotte Brontë marries.
1855 – Charlotte Brontë dies.
1856 – Series of petitions signed by between 24,000 – 26,000 people sent to Parliament petitioning to allow working married women to retain the property in their incomes.
1858 – First *Matrimonial Causes Act* passed and came into effect. Gave women easier access to judicial separation and divorce and allowed separated and divorced women rights over some forms of property.
1870 – *Married Women's Property Act* passed to allow married women to own their own earnings, specifically invested types of property and some property from deceased estates, separate from their husbands.
1883 – *Married Women's Property Act* passed allowing married women to retain ownership over all their property separate from their husbands. Married women given legal entity status separate from their husbands.
1891 – Court ruled that husband did not have legal right to force a wife to remain with him, or to subject her to physical violence.
1923 – *Matrimonial Causes Act* allowed men and women equal grounds on which to sue for divorce.
1925 – Laws changed allowing courts to grant mothers full legal custody over children.
1964 – Laws changed allowing a court to rule that a married woman had ownership over half of any household savings, regardless of whether it originated from husband or wife.

Why Anne Brontë?

The text of a talk given to the ABA by Aimee Chan on 10th May 2003

(Aimee is a PhD student, studying under Professor Christine Alexander, as well as a qualified lawyer.)

I am a student currently conducting research for my PhD in English literature at the University of NSW. When people ask me what I am conducting research on, I say to them "Anne Brontë". This invariably leads to the response "Who?".

In these situations it is pretty clear to me that the person has no idea what I am referring to, so I am always forced to resort to dropping names such as Emily Brontë, or Charlotte Brontë, or *Wuthering Heights*, or *Jane Eyre*. By then the person usually recognises at least one of those terms and has some minimal idea that I am writing on a canonised author who lived a long time ago.

What annoys me about this is that giving a description of Anne Brontë's sisters and their works doesn't really suffice to give any idea of what my research is about. Because Anne Brontë is only a canonised author in-so-far as she is considered "one of the three" Brontës. Her works differ in lots of ways from her sisters, and she is rarely recognised in an academic or a popular sense apart from her sisters.

In some ways, perhaps a worse response is one where the person I am speaking to has some knowledge of the period, may have read *Jane Eyre* or seen the movie, and is unclear as to why I should chose to write about Anne Brontë, "the other one", as Elizabeth Langland called her. Then I am forced to launch into a very long synopsis of the differences between the works of the Brontës, which is usually incomprehensible to someone who has never read Anne's works.

So today I wanted to speak to some people who may have read some of Anne Brontë's works, and will certainly know who she is, for the purpose of discussing a couple of different ways in which Anne Brontë's work is important in it's own right, and different from and worthy of consideration apart from the works of her sisters.

Hence the name of this talk is "Why Anne Brontë?".

How is Anne Brontë Different Generally?

Perhaps one of the major ways in which Anne Brontë's writing differs from her sisters is that she is consciously didactic. Anne sets out from the very beginning to teach a moral lesson with her fiction. In the Preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* she says:

My object in writing the following pages, was not simply to amuse the Reader, neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it. But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of a well, it needs some courage to dive for it...Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim, and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsence (sic).

As the story of 'Agnes Grey' was accused of extravagant over-colouring in those very parts that were carefully copied from the life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration, so, in the present work, I find myself censured for con amore, with 'a morbid love of the coarse, if not of the brutal,' those scenes which, I will venture to say, have not been more painful for the most fastidious of my critics to read, than they were for me to describe...but when we have to do with vice and vicious characters, I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear. To represent a bad thing in its least offensive light, is doubtless the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue; but is it the most honest, or the safest?...if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain...Such humble talents as God has given me I will endeavour to put to their greatest use; if I am able to amuse I will try to benefit too; and when I feel it my duty to

speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I will speak it, though it be to the prejudice of my name and to the detriment of my reader's own immediate pleasure. (3-4)

So from the very start of our reading, Anne Brontë wants us to know that her novels are intended to give us more than simple reading pleasure, we are to find a "jewel" of truth in both texts.

This imagery of the voice of truth, and a writer compelled to tell her story, is the persona that Anne Brontë also gives to the older Agnes Grey, as she writes her history and reflects back on her life:

All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity that the dry, shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut. Whether this can be the case with my history or not, I am hardly competent to judge; I sometimes think it might prove useful to some, and entertaining to others, but the world may judge for itself: shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend. (1)

The "instruction" that we are to receive, and the "truth" that we are to find, appear to be about ethical and moral attitudes and behaviour. The writers Anne Brontë and Agnes Grey are "compelled" to try to teach us these moral truths in the hope that they might influence the reader and change contemporary attitudes.

In this way Anne Brontë's writing is a lot more realistic than her sisters'. Certainly it is arguable that her writing lacks much of the imaginative flair of her sisters, and she does not convey the intense emotions of Emily's writing, or sustain the tensions of the plot as well as Charlotte, yet Anne's writing is more true to life. Her female characters do not fall in love with melancholy heroes such as Heathcliffe or Rochester, her narratives are not tightly packed with melodramatic events. Rather Anne takes us through the intimate details of life, some might argue the mundane details of life, but it is in this portrayal of daily life that the "kernel of truth" can be found.

So what are some of the attitudes that Anne Brontë may be trying to reveal, criticise, influence or change?

There are two main areas that I wish to focus on, each relating to the separate novels. These are:

- governesses in *Agnes Grey* and
- legal position of married women in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Governess

For this section, my main article of reference has been M Jeanne Peterson's "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society" from Martha Vicinus's (ed.) *Suffer and Be Still*.

The term "status incongruence" used in Peterson's article I find particularly helpful as it brings to the fore the issue of the status of the governess in the household. What is her position? How is she to be treated? Why is the particular position of the governess so ambiguous in the rigid hierarchy of the Victorian household?

Firstly, some definitions. What is a governess? The term "governess" could be used in the nineteenth century to refer to a woman who taught in a school, who lived at home and travelled to her employer's house to teach ("daily governess"), or to a woman who lived in an employer's home and taught the children and served as their companion ("private governess").

The private governess is what is more commonly known to people with an interest in the period and was the figure that was so written about at the time. The private governess is also the type of governess most relevant to us today, since all the Brontë sisters were private governesses at one time or another, and Anne and Charlotte's works had characters that were private governesses.

In 1851, two years after Anne Brontë died, there were between 21,000 and 25,000 governesses in England according to the population census. For comparison, there were over 750,000 female domestic servants in England at that time. This figure does not include women in industry. So governesses were perhaps no quite so a large proportion of working women as popular imagination would have us think.

Most governesses were women of the middle class, who had fallen upon hard times and were required to go to work as a result. There were several reasons why these women found themselves in unforeseen economic disaster. Some of these included:

- premature parental or spousal death (this is typical stereotype portrayed in novels);
- unstable economic conditions which meant that family businesses or investment ventures could collapse at any time leaving the family destitute (as in *Agnes Grey*);
- emigration of single men to the colonies leaving fewer marriage prospects for women;
- differing mortality rates in favour of women; and
- tendency within middle classes around this time for men to marry later, requiring single women to find some other means to support themselves until such time as a marriage proposal occurred.

In these circumstances of economic hardship, these women were usually supporting others back home as well, such as elderly parents, young children or siblings, or infirm relatives.

Many of these women chose governessing as an occupation rather than any other type of industry because it was the only occupation that they could perform and still be called a "lady". Being a governess did not have the coarseness that was usually perceived to accompany a waged income, as it was within the home. Peterson points out that "The governess was doing something she might have done as a wife under better circumstances. She avoided the immodest and unladylike position of public occupation." (6) Being a governess allowed a woman to maintain the illusion of belonging to the middle class as she lived with a middle class family and appeared to live in middle class circumstances. Still, going to work, even as a governess, was only for dire circumstances.

As an interesting aside, whilst women of the middle class chose to be governesses because they could maintain their rank and appearance of lifestyle, being a governess also allowed women from lower classes (with enough education) to access the ranks of society above them. An obvious example of this is the character of Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, whose mother is an opera-girl and father a poor artist. Although it appears that this type of social mobility was reasonably uncommon, there was a popular misconception amongst the commentary of the day that this was a way that the lower classes were using to usurp the upper classes position. Becky Sharp is a fine example of what can happen to respectable families if they did not ensure they employed a lady in the position of governess.

In the same way that some working class girls used the position of the governess to gain access to middle class families, middle class families also used the position of governess to distinguish themselves from other poorer families around them, and therefore gain access to upper class society. A governess could be used to show the economic wealth and therefore power of a middle class man who sought gentility. Peterson says that:

The governess was a testimony to the economic power of the Victorian middle-class father, as were servants, carriages, and other "paraphernalia of gentility." Although the governess was often behind the scenes and not as conspicuous as other items of genteel equipage, there were ways in which the family could indicate her presence in the home and display her as a symbol of economic power, breeding, and station. Drawing room conversations about the governess served to bring her into public "view." If she was foreign, her exotic history might be discussed. Even complaining about a governess was a way of "showing her off." (5)

Just as the more servants one owned, or the size of one's home, were indications of one's wealth and therefore status, so too, employment of a governess indicated not only a family's ability to afford a governess, but also that they were bringing up their daughters to be ladies.

This was particularly true in families that were on the upper cusp of the working class – families involved in trade and industry with enough money to aspire to social mobility. In these families the employment of a governess, sometimes of a higher class than themselves, could serve to further the appearance of middle class gentility, by making wives looked more like ladies of leisure, teaching daughters more genteel accomplishments, and having someone of the class existing in their household.

As an example of this, consider the way Blanche Ingram uses the presence of Jane Eyre at an evening of entertainment to show off both her superior class and education to Mr Rochester, with the intention of displaying herself as vivacious and clever. When discussing Adele she says to him:

"Why, I suppose you have a governess for her: I saw a person with her just now – is she gone? Oh, no! there she is still behind the window-curtain. You pay her, of course: I should think it quite as expensive, - even more so; for you have them both to keep in addition...you men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi – were they not, mama?"

"Did you speak, my own?"

The young lady thus claimed as the Dowager's special property, reiterated her question with an explanation.

"My dearest, don't mention governesses: the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice: I thank Heaven I have now done with them!"

Mrs. Dent here bent over the pious lady, and whispered something in her ear: I suppose from the answer elicited, it was a reminder that one of the anathematised race was present.

"Tant pis!" said her ladyship, "I hope it may do her good!" Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, "I noticed her: I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class."

"What are they, Madam?" inquired Mr. Rochester aloud.

"I will tell you in your private ear," replied she, wagging her turban three times with portentous significancy.

"But my curiosity will be past its appetite, it craves food now."

"Ask Blanche: she is nearer you than I."

"Oh, don't refer him to me, mama! I have just one word to say of the whole tribe: they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them: I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs. Greys, and Madame Jouberts! Mary was always too sleepy to join in a plot with spirit. The best fun was with Madame Joubert: Miss Wilson was a poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited: not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short; and Mrs. Grey was coarse and insensible: no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities – spilt our tea, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and fire-irons. Theodore, do you remember those merry days?" (176-7)

It seems that even as an adult, Blanche Ingram continues to torture those of lower stature than herself for her own amusement. In this quote, we can see that Blanche Ingram uses her past governesses to distinguish herself as a true lady, rather than a paid employee. And yet one cannot imagine the Ingrams would have employed anyone less than a lady as their governess. If someone like Becky Sharp was to find herself into the household of the Ingrams, she would have brought disgrace upon the family because of her lowly stature. So whilst families at once used the governess as a sign of upward mobility, to show they could afford to employ a lady to teach their daughters how to be ladies, at the same time, they also wanted to distinguish themselves from the governess, because she was a paid employee and therefore, paradoxically, not as genteel as themselves.

The income for a governess was surprisingly low. Although the governess was housed and fed, she had to pay for her own laundry, travel and medical care, and was expected to dress appropriately. The governess was usually also supporting families back home, therefore she was unlikely to have any savings. There was no superannuation and therefore once salary earning ceased, the governess was left without an income, except in the rare case of kind employer who might be willing to support her. Peterson says:

The aristocratic practice of continuing to support domestic servants who had outlived their usefulness after long service was not often extended to aged governesses in middle-class families. Long service was much less the rule, and paternalism was expensive. In the event of

illness or old age and inability to work, the governess faced the prospect of charity, such as that provided by the Governesses' Benevolent Institution in the form of small annuities for retired governesses. The number was limited, however, and reports of governesses in workhouses or asylums was not uncommon." (9)

Peterson estimates wage range for a governess to be somewhere between £15 to £100 per year, with to average salary between about £20 to £40. If we factor board into that at £30 per year, a governess was earning about £50 to £95 per year. Peterson quotes from an analogy that Mrs. Sewell used in 1865, where she "equated the salary of nursery governess with that of a lady's maid, that of an informed but not accomplished governess with that of footman, and that of a highly educated governess with that of a coachman or butler." (8)

Peterson estimates that the minimum income need to maintain a genteel style of life was £150-£200 at best. A governess was early at least £50 less than that, and therefore we can see that governesses were only living on the very margins of genteel life, whatever the appearances.

It is interesting to note that Agnes Grey reports to have received £50 for her position in the Murray Household. (52) She also reports that with this money she was required to provide for "the future support of my mother...decent clothes becoming my station, I must, it seemed, put out my own washing, and also pay for my four annual journeys between Horton Lodge and home". (54)

By comparison, Jane Eyre received £30 for her position teaching as a governess for Mr Rochester compared to the £15 she received for teaching at Lowood.

So far we know that the governess is in a precarious social position. She must be enough of a lady for families to want to hire her, and she must maintain this lady-like lifestyle on a minimal salary. Yet she must be submissive enough to cope with the type of abuse that I described in the scene from *Jane Eyre*, both from the adults in the family who will abuse her in front of their peers, and the children who will provoke her to extremes. She may be situated in a family where the women may be of a lower class than herself, and yet she is a paid employee to this family.

Peterson quotes that "the real discomfort of a governess's position in a private family arises from the fact that it is undefined. She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant – but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her." (9-10)

Later Peterson says "She was a lady, and therefore not a servant, but she was an employee, and therefore not of equal status with the wife and daughters of the house." (11)

The fact that Rochester orders Jane Eyre to attend evenings of entertainment with Blanche Ingram is the perfect example of this predicament. The governess could be ordered to attend social events, and at the same time, required to work and act as a servant. Whilst Jane is invited into the same space as the ladies and gentlemen, she is not one of them. She must sit in the corner unless invited to join in the festivities, and it seems that Rochester only choses to do this occasionally (182), at other times she is ignored (185), and expected to endure abuses directed at her, just as if she were a servant. At least servants had an unambiguous position. The governess was caught in-between.

The governess's relationship with servants was also ambiguous, because whilst she was a paid dependent like them, she was employed as a lady, and therefore required to distance herself from them. This could often be a source of resentment. Often the position of the governess was not only ambiguous, but lonely, as none of the other servants would associate with her.

The stress of the situation of social ambiguity accompanied with being often overworked, certainly underpaid and with no familial support or guarantee of future income was recognised by contemporary commentators. The *Quarterly Review* acknowledged this with its famous but exaggerated claim in 1848 that a "larger proportion" of inmates in lunatic asylums were former governesses than from any other industry.

Anne Brontë manages to capture the essential difficulties of being a governess in *Agnes Grey*, in a far more realistic way than Charlotte Brontë does in *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte glosses over this ambiguity in social position within the household, and only once highlights

it, in the scene where Jane is required to attend Rochester's entertaining of Blanche that I have just described. *Agnes Grey* deals with the monotony and mental strain of the life of a governess, and allows the reader an insight into why this occupation was so difficult.

Agnes Grey

Agnes is the daughter of a gentlewoman who has given up her fortune for the love of her husband, a clergyman. They live an isolated but happy and humble lifestyle until her father loses his small property in a speculative venture that renders the family destitute. It is in these circumstances that Agnes seeks a position as a governess, to help supplement the family's income.

At the Bloomfields's, Agnes's first situation, Agnes is required not only to teach the children, but also to have Mary Ann sleep in her room, where in the mornings she must "overlook her washing and dressing, and take charge of her clothes". (15) There is a complete disregard for any possible need Agnes may have for spare time or privacy. In the same way that Charlotte Brontë once complained that the Sidgwick family, to whom she was governess at the time, "overwhelmed" her with an "ocean of needlework" so that she had no personal time, it is made clear to Agnes from the her arrival that her labours are intended to extend beyond the schoolroom.

Although Agnes's primary role in her employment is as an eductor and guide for the children, her ability to influence them is minimal because she is treated as a servant. On her first morning the children take Agnes into the garden where "There we got along tolerably together, except that I found they had no notion of going with *me*; I must go with *them* wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand exactly as it suited their fancy. This, I thought, was reversing the order of things". (21)

But to the contrary, this is exactly how the Bloomfields's wish relations to be between Agnes and the children. Mr Bloomfield addresses the children as "Master and Miss Bloomfield" and treats Agnes with contempt in front of them, openly reprimanding her for their naughty behaviour. Agnes describes the use of these titles as symbolically undermining her ability to influence the children:

It seemed to me a chilling and unnatural piece of punctilio between the children of a family and their instructor and daily companion, especially where the former were in their early childhood, as at Wellwood House; but even there, my calling the little Bloomfields by their simple names had been regarded as an offensive liberty, as their parents had taken care to show me, by carefully designating them, Master and Miss Bloomfield, &c., in speaking to me. I had been very slow to take the hint, because the whole affair struck me as so very absurd; but now I determined to be wiser, and being at once with as much form and ceremony as any member of the family would be likely to require;...though the little words Miss and Master seemed to have a surprising effect in repressing all familiar, open-hearted kindness, and extinguishing every gleam of cordiality that might arise between us. (58-9)

What Agnes fails to recognise at first, is that "extinguishing any gleam of cordiality" is exactly what her employers wish to do. Both her employers throughout her time with them make it clear that they wish to distinguish themselves from Agnes as the employed help, rather than to consider her a kind friend or companion. Like Blanche Ingram, they consider the governess to be beneath them, and although Agnes might be lady enough to teach their children, she is not lady enough to be considered a friend of the family.

The distance between Agnes's initial dreams about her job and the reality is widened when it is made clear to Agnes in the Bloomfield household that she has no authority to punish or reprimand the children. Instead she is told to report all misdemeanours to Mr and Mrs Bloomfield, who will punish the children accordingly. However in reality, Agnes is unable to report any negative behaviour to Mr and Mrs Bloomfield as they either disbelieve it, or sanction it (as in the scene where Agnes catches Tom gleefully anticipating how he will torture a nest full of birds). This leaves Agnes with virtually no means by which to influence the children's behaviour and leaves the children with the impression that Agnes is not only mere paid help, but is ineffectual at what she is paid for.

Agnes describes the Bloomfields's response to Fanny's bad behaviour:

I found her [Fanny] a mischievous, intractable little creature, given up to falsehood and deception, young as she was, and alarmingly fond of exercising her two favourite weapons of offence and defence: that of spitting in the faces of those who incurred her displeasure, and bellowing like a bull when her unreasonable desires were not gratified. As she, generally, was pretty quiet in her parents' presence, and they were impressed with the notion of her being a remarkably gentle child, her falsehoods were readily believed, and her loud uproars led them to suspect harsh and injudicious treatment on my part; and when, at length, her bad disposition became manifest, even to their prejudiced eyes, I felt that the whole was attributed to me. (30)

Agnes mentions that all the visitors to the house ignore her (46) and it is interesting that the Bloomfields and their acquaintances openly acknowledge that they consider Agnes to be beneath them. Anne Brontë implies in the text that the Bloomfields have made their money from trade, and therefore their station is not above Agnes's at all. When Agnes is dismissed from her station there, her mother remarks with indignation "you shall try your fortune in a somewhat higher family – in that of some genuine, through-bred gentleman, for such are far more likely to treat you with proper respect and consideration, than those purse-proud trades-people, and arrogant upstarts." (52)

Whilst between jobs, Agnes fantasizes about the differences between the Murray household and the Bloomfield household:

Mr. Murray's residence was near a large town, and not in a manufacturing district, where the people had nothing to do but to make money; his rank, from what I could gather, appeared to be higher than that of Mr. Bloomfield, and, doubtless, he was one of those genuine thorough-bred gentry my mother spoke of, who would treat his governess with due consideration as a respectable, well educated lady, the instructor and guide of his children, and not a mere upper servant. (53-4)

Agnes's perceptions of the Bloomfields in comparison to the Murrays captures the struggles of new industrial families to be accepted by the middle and upper classes. By distinguishing themselves from their governess, the Bloomfields are attempting to align themselves with the classes they aspire to. Agnes's own prejudiced statements about the Bloomfields show how keenly she, as the daughter of a lady, feels the need to be treated as a lady rather than a servant. Despite her lack of money, Agnes also wishes to align herself with her employers, and so distance herself from the servants of the working class. This shifting of class boundaries, and the way Agnes judges the Bloomfields for having "new money" implies that the position of the governess is used in the Boomfield household as Peterson suggests – as "a testimony to the economic power of the Victorian middle-class father" who is aspiring to the upper classes.

Unfortunately for Agnes, her position in the Murray household is even more ambiguous that it was in the Bloomfield household. The increased gap in social status between the servants and their masters ensures that the servants are set against her from the very beginning. Upon her arrival Agnes's luggage fails to appear, and when she seeks the assistance of the lady's maid, she is met with disdain. The following is her description of how she is met by her fellow employees on her first night:

With the air of one conferring an unusual favour, she vouchsafed to undertake the sending up of my things; and when I had re-entered my room, and waited and wondered a long time, greatly fearing that she had forgotten or neglected to perform her promise, and doubting whether to keep waiting, or go to bed, or go down again, my hopes at length were revived by the sound of voices and laughter, accompanied by a tramp of feet along the passage, and, presently, the luggage was brought in by a rough-looking maid and a man, neither of them very respectful in their demeanour to me. (57)

In the Murray household Agnes is neither one of the servants, nor one of the family. She is isolated and alone, and yet her own ambition prevents her from making more

friends among the servants. In the following quote Agnes demonstrates her own social snobberies, and her desire to distance herself from the other paid help, as I mentioned earlier:

The servants, seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children, regulated their behaviour by the same standard.
I frequently stood up for them, at the risk of some injury to myself, against the tyranny and injustice of their young masters and mistresses; and I always endeavoured to give them as little trouble as possible; but they entirely neglected my comfort, despised my requests, and slighted my directions. All servants, I am convinced, would not have done so; but domestics in general, being ignorant and little accustomed to reason and reflection, are too easily corrupted by the carelessness and bad example of those above them; and these, I think, were not of the best order to begin with. (69)

Compare this to Jane Eyre's entry into Thornfield, where Jane mistakes Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper, to be the mistress of the house:

A snug, small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an arm-chair high-backed and old-fashioned, wherein sat the neatest imaginable little elderly lady, in widow's cap, black silk gown and snowy muslin apron: exactly like what I had fancied Mrs. Fairfax, only less stately and milder looking. She was occupied with knitting; a large cat sat demurely at her feet; nothing in short was wanting to complete the beau ideal of domestic comfort. A more reassuring introduction for a new governess could scarcely be conceived: there was no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass; and then, as I entered, the old lady got up, and promptly and kindly came forward to meet me.
"How do you do, my dear? I am afraid you have had a tedious ride; John drives so slowly: you must be cold, come to the fire."
"Mrs. Fairfax, I suppose?" I said.
"Yes, you are right: do sit down."
She conducted me to her own chair, and then began to remove my shawl and untie my bonnet-strings: I begged she would not give herself so much trouble.
"Oh, it is no trouble; I dare say your own hands are almost numbed with cold. Leah, make a little hot negus and cut a sandwich or two; here are the keys of the store-room."
And she produced from her pocked a most housewifely bunch of keys, and delivered them to the servant.
"Now, then, draw nearer to the fire;" she continued. "You've brought your luggage with you, haven't you, my dear?"
"Yes, ma'am."
"I'll see it carried to your room," she said, and bustled out. (95-6)

Although this quote is written with irony (as we now know that Mrs Fairfax is another servant and not a mistress), and it is supposed to add to the mystery of the tale, the narrative still avoids the confronting issue of Jane Eyre's place in the household, in a way that *Agnes Grey* doesn't. Mrs Fairfax is conveniently friendly towards Jane throughout the story, and the other servants rarely demonstrate any particular inclinations, whether positive or negative, towards Jane.

Unlike Jane Eyre, Agnes's employers do not condescend to treat her with any kindness, they do not demonstrate any interest in her personal life, and the problems of her status within the household are not magically removed by her marriage to the master.

When Agnes first arrives at the Murray household, Mrs Murray makes it clear to her that she considers Agnes to be "just" a servant. Anne Brontë implies that Mrs Murray treats Agnes as even less than a servant, as she doesn't offer Agnes any kindly words or acknowledgement of the difficulty of being a new member of the household in the manner that Agnes's own mother would have done for a new servant girl.

In the Murray household Agnes is once again told that discipline is strictly to be administered only by the children's parents, and that Agnes is to have no authority to do so on her own. This, again, reinforces the children's disdain for Agnes's position, and makes it impossible for them to view her as a guide or a mentor. Agnes says of Rosalie Murray that "she seldom lost sight, for above half-an-hour at a time, of the fact of my being a hireling, and a poor curate's daughter". (61)

There are several examples of how the Murrays use her ambiguous position to their advantage. In front of their peers she is "a mere domestic", to be ignored or left behind. But out of sight of their peers, and discussion in which Agnes feels she is of high enough status that it is not beneath Rosalie to confide in her, but not of equal status that Rosalie is required to observe any niceties of decorum, such as having discussions when it is convenient to Agnes, or discussing topics that invariably makes her feel sick. (67) One wonders if Agnes would rather have given up the privilege of riding in the carriage with the family, than suffering with nausea throughout the church service.

On the way home from church, the situation becomes more complex. Agnes says:

Whether I walked with the young ladies or rode with their parents, depended entirely upon their own capricious will: if they chose to "take" me, I went; if, for reasons best known to themselves, they chose to go alone, I took my seat in the carriage: I liked walking better, but a sense of reluctance to obtrude my presence on any one who did not desire it, always kept me passive on these and similar occasions; and I never inquired into the causes of their varying whims. And indeed this was the best policy – for to submit and oblige was the governess's part, to consult their own pleasure was that of the pupils. But when I did walk, this first half of the journey was generally a great nuisance to me. As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy – as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so.

It was very disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, who knew her own place too well to walk beside such fine young ladies and gentlemen as they were...though her young ladies might choose to have her with them, and even condescend to converse with her, when no better company were at hand. (105-6)

In this scenario it becomes clear the ways in which the Murrays use Agnes's ambiguous position to their advantage. In front of their peers she is "a mere domestic", to be ignored or left behind. But out of sight of their peers, and Agnes becomes a source of amusement. She is a person to whom Rosalie can conveniently but Agnes's status

Here I will repeat Peterson's quote that I mentioned earlier about the status incongruence of the governess: "She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant – but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her." On the contrary, both the Murray and the Bloomfields know exactly how to treat Agnes; as it suits them.

Throughout the text *Agnes Grey* deliberately and in intense detail outlines the daily drudgery and humiliation of Agnes's life. The daily happenings of each household are portrayed with such intimacy that one is made to feel a part of her daily life. The reader is made to feel every slight, the testing of Agnes's patience, Agnes's struggle to maintain her resolution and her dignity, and her intense loneliness. Anne Brontë provides several examples of situations where Agnes is made to feel her ambiguous position, and perhaps the most painful of these is when Agnes must sit by and watch her student, Rosalie Murray, attempt to conquer the man she loves, Mr Weston.

To give some idea of how different *Agnes Grey* is to many governess novels of the time, let us briefly consider what is commonly thought the most famous contemporary governess novel, *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë glosses over the mundane details of Jane's teachings of Adele, making Adele a reasonable child, with a few foibles, but nothing too difficult to deal with. Adele is generally won over by Jane's patience and there are remarkably few descriptions of Jane's teaching of Adele, despite it being her main occupation. In fact, Jane's relationship with Adele is barely considered in the scope of the story. Jane is loved by Mrs Fairfax and so finds a kindred spirit in the household and they consider themselves to be of equal status, Mrs Fairfax conveniently also being a distant relation of the master. The monotony of life as a governess is not canvassed, but instead, the mysteries of the story are focused upon, such as

the mysterious laughing of Bertha Mason, and the increasingly complex character of Mr Rochester. Rochester thinks of Jane as his equal, as he says when he proposes, and the fact that Jane is his employee is surprisingly little mentioned. In fact, the major obstacle between Jane and Rochester is Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason, rather than Jane's status as a governess. And when they plan to marry, Rochester and Jane also plan to send Adele to school, thus conveniently removing the awkward obstacle of Jane moving from servant to mother figure.

Whilst *Jane Eyre* has a stronger and more romantic narrative than *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë's novel is perhaps a more realistic portrayal of the life of a governess in the nineteenth century. The complexities of being of "status incongruence" are aptly and compassionately revealed and gives one obtains a better understanding of the realities of the frustrations of being a governess through Agnes's experience, rather than through Jane's. These are certainly frustrations that all the three Brontë sisters experienced in their time as governesses, and of which Charlotte, in particular, so disliked that she described being a governess as "no existence".

I think at this point it is worth pointing out that of all of Charlotte Brontë's works, perhaps the one that best captures the humiliations of being status incongruence is not *Jane Eyre*, but *Shirley*. Through the figure of Mrs Pryor she summarises and canvasses issues similar I have already discussed, with less romance and more realism than Jane Eyre.

Whilst trying to discourage Caroline to become a governess Mrs Pryor describes her own experiences:

'You told me before you wished to be a governess; but, my dear, if you remember, I did not encourage the idea. I have been a governess myself [for a] great part of my life. In Miss Keeldar's acquaintance I esteem myself most fortunate. Her talents and her really sweet disposition have rendered my office easy to me; but when I was young, before I married, my trials were severe, poignant. I should not like a – I should not like you to endure similar ones. It was my lot to enter a family of considerable pretensions to good birth and mental superiority, and the members of which also believed that "on them was perceptible: an unusual endowment of the "Christian graces;" that all their hearts were regenerate, and their spirits in a peculiar state of discipline. I was early given to understand that "as I was not their equal," so I could not expect "To have their sympathy." It was in no sort concealed from me that I was held a "burden and a restraint in society." The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a "tabooed woman," to whom "they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex," and yet "who annoyed them by frequently crossing their path." The ladies too made it plain that they thought me "a bore." The servants, it was signified, "detested me;" *why*, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, "however much they might love me, and how deep soever the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends." It was intimated that I must "live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers." My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever-prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution. I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of "wounded vanity." She hinted that if I did not make an effort to quell my "ungodly discontent," to cease "murmuring against God's appointment," and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely "go to pieces" on the rock that wrecked most of my sister hood – morbid self-esteem – and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

'I said nothing to Mrs Hardman – it would have been useless; but to her eldest daughter I one day dropped a few observations, which were answered thus. There were hardships, she allowed, in the position of a governess. "Doubtless they had their trials; but," she averred, with a manner it makes me smile now to recall – "but it must be so. *She*" (Miss H.) "had neither view, hope, nor *wish* to see things remedied; for in the inherent constitution of English habits, feelings, and prejudices there was no possibility that they should be. Governesses," she observed, "must ever be kept

in a sort of isolation. It is the only means of maintaining that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact."

'I remember I sighed as Miss Hardman quitted my bedside. She caught the sound, and turning, said severely, "I fear, Miss Grey, you have inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature – the sin of pride. You are proud, and therefore you are ungrateful too. Mamma pays you a handsome salary, and if you had average sense you would thankfully put up with much that is fatiguing to do and irksome to bear, since it is so well made worth your while."

'Miss Hardman, my love, was a very strong-minded young lady, of most distinguished talents. The aristocracy are decidedly a very superior class, you know, both physically, and morally, and mentally; as a high Tory I acknowledge that. I could not describe the dignity of her voice and mien as she addressed me thus; still, I fear she was selfish, my dear. I would never wish to speak ill of my superiors in rank, but I think she was a little selfish.'

'I remember," continued Mrs Pryor, after a pause, 'another of Miss H.'s observations, which she would utter with quite a grand air. "WE," she would say – "WE need the imprudences, extravagances, mistakes, and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which WE reap the harvest of governesses. The daughters of tradespeople, however well educated, must necessarily be underbred, and as such unfit to be inmates of OUR dwellings, or guardians of OUR children's minds and persons. WE shall ever prefer to place those about OUR offspring who have been born and bred with somewhat of the same refinement as OURSELVES."' (281-3)

Married Women and the Law in England

The nineteenth century saw a great deal of change in the position of married women under the law, but at the time Anne Brontë was writing, and of the time she was writing, the law had severe effects on the way married women lived.

The law that most effected married women was the law of coverture. This meant that in the eyes of the common law women did not have a legal identity. The philosophy behind this was that a husband and wife were one person, joined in marriage. That person was the husband. The wife could not exist as a legal entity separate from her husband. This was a strange predicament for some women, as single women could exist as full legal entities before marriage, but lost all these rights after marriage. This had a number of effects.

Firstly, upon marriage all the wife's real property and income passed to the husband and became his to control, although he could not dispose of it without her consent. A brief description of real property would include things such as land, houses, rental income or any income that the wife obtained from any work she generated whether before or during the marriage. A wife could not divest her real property in a will because if she died, the property automatically went to her children with her husband retaining a life interest in the real property. The wife only ever regained control over her real property if her husband predeceased her.

Conversely, a wife might have a one-third life interest in her husband's real property at his death, but he could set aside this right if he chose and therefore leave her no access to his real property.

Upon marriage all the wife's personal property (which includes everything that is not real property, such as jewellery, stocks, personal items etc.) became the absolute property of her husband. A wife could not make a will divesting what had formerly been her personal property unless her husband gave consent, and he could withdraw this consent at any time before probate was granted. The husband automatically inherited all the wife's personal property if she died without a will.

In the reverse situation, a husband could divest all his personal property (including that over which he had gained ownership from his wife after marriage) by will to whomever he chose, and this included not leaving a share to his wife. If he died intestate (without a will) then the wife was never entitled to more than half.

As wives and husbands were one person, a wife could not sue her husband, since this would be like suing herself. In fact, because the legal entity of husband and wife was actually the husband, the wife became legally incompetent upon marriage. This meant that she could not

sue anyone, she could not be sued, and she could not incur debts. If a wife wanted to sue someone she had to seek her husband's permission and he had to do it on her behalf. If a wife incurred a debt she refused to pay, the creditor could only sue the husband for it. While this meant that wives were free from all liability, it also meant that they had no legal rights.

The law, under equity, did allow a wife to hold some property if there was a marriage settlement in place. This meant that the wife's family had placed money for the wife in trust, so that whilst the property might legally be in the husband's name, he actually held the property on trust for his wife. This means that the husband was required to deal with the property as stated in the terms of the marriage settlement, and the wife was still the beneficial owner. In reality, this only applied to 10% of women, generally the wealthiest, who could afford to pursue legal proceedings in a court of equity and whose families had enough money and knowledge of how to protect a wife's property from her husband.

It is interesting to note that a marriage settlement is exactly what Charlotte Brontë had drawn up in anticipation of her marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls. Charlotte's marriage settlement was unusual because most marriage settlements stated that if the wife predeceased the husband and was childless, only then would the money revert to the husband. In Charlotte Brontë's case, the intention of the marriage settlement was to exclude Arthur Bell Nicholls altogether, because if Charlotte died childless, the money would go to her father, Patrick Brontë. As it turned out, Charlotte later revoked this marriage settlement before her death by changing her will, and leaving everything to her husband.

In terms of child custody, a husband had full legal custody over all his children. This meant he could dispose of the children as he wished, no matter how disgraceful his conduct, and could even forbid the mother to see the children. This didn't change until 1839.

In the mid-nineteenth century there was a tremendous movement to change the laws that affected married women. This movement was lead mainly by women artists, but received enormous support from other areas, as these were the women earning their own income, yet forced by law to surrender it to their husbands. In 1856 a series of petitions signed by between 24,000 – 26,000 people was presented to Parliament. Although the Brontës themselves were not active in the women's movement, Brontë connections to this petition include Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell, who were both intimate with Charlotte and both of whom signed the petition.

Prior to 1857, divorce could only be sought on certain limited grounds. Most people opted for legal separation, but again these were rare. Briefly, a wife seeking legal separation had to prove that her husband was adulterous, committed sodomy or physical cruelty. In terms of adultery, this adultery usually had to be aggravated and involve some form of incest. For a husband seeking legal separation, all he had to prove was the wife's infidelity. If separation was granted that the parties were not required to cohabit together, but the husband retained legal ownership over all the wife's property as well as the duty to maintain her. Neither party could remarry.

A complete severance of relations between parties which would allow parties to remarry could be sought, but this involved a complex procedure of applications and trials and a private act of Parliament. Again if the husband was the applicant he was only required to prove adultery whilst a wife applicant had to prove adultery plus aggravated physical cruelty for the divorce to be granted. When divorce was granted, all legal relations between the parties ceased, and the husband was no longer legally responsible for his wife. This procedure was generally only available to the wealthiest men. For instance, until 1857 only 4 women had successfully been granted a full divorce.

In 1857 the *Matrimonial Causes Act* was passed in Parliament, giving married women rights over some property if they had managed to obtain a judicial separation or divorce, or they were deserted by their husbands. This act made access to divorce proceedings cheaper and simpler by placing the jurisdiction for divorce in the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. Whilst this went some way towards granting rights to married women, it did not assist women who deserted their husbands, rather than the other way round. However if the woman

reunited with the husband, all the marriage laws were reinstated and the woman once again lost her legal position.

In 1868-1870 a bill was introduced to Parliament that received full Parliamentary debate, suggesting that married women should be given the same legal rights over property as non-married women. This bill was not passed until 1870, and in very amended form from that by which it was introduced. The *Married Women's Property Act* of 1870 effectively allowed married women to keep their own earnings, to keep property invested in specific ways such as stocks and building society accounts, and to keep some property from deceased estates. This still did not give married women full legal entitlements to all forms of property.

Under the law of coverture, as husband and wife were one entity, therefore the husband also legally owned the body of his wife. He could incarcerate her against her will to force her to remain with him and receive the law's complete backing. He was also able to bring an action of habeas corpus (or false imprisonment) against any man to whom his wife might run away to live without his consent. It wasn't until 1891 that a court finally settled that a husband did not have a right to keep a wife at home by force or to beat her.

In 1882, some 26 years after the petition signed by Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau had been presented to Parliament, the *Married Women's Property Act* was passed which allowed a married woman's property to remain her own property, separate from her husband, regardless of where she got the property from or what type of property it was. This law came into effect in 1883. The act also affected women married before 1883, to give them ownership over all property they acquired separate from their husbands after the passing of the act. Women were therefore able to sue, be sued, and dispose of their property as they wished. They were finally separate legal entities.

For those interested in a more detailed account of the passage of the *Married Women's Property Acts* through Parliament, a useful starting point is Lee Holcombe's article "Victorian Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law, 1857-1882" in Vicinus *A Widening Sphere*.

Holcombe argues that it is due to the fact that women did not have the vote, and therefore found it difficult to influence Parliamentary opinion, that married women's property laws took so long to pass. But the effects are not to be underestimated. Holcombe argues:

What, then, were the practical effects of the Married Women's Property Acts? They were sweeping measures, for they affected every married person in the country and, it might be said, touched them in a very sensitive spot, namely, their pocketbooks. An interesting speculation in this connection is suggested by a comment made during the debates of 1870 by Lord Shaftesbury. He estimated that if roughly 800,000 wives were employed at wages of, say, £20 a year, then it was a matter of £16 million annually that needed to be protected from these women's husbands. If we could know and add to this £16 million the value of property other than their earnings which belonged to women of the middle and upper classes and which also would have passed to their husbands but for the Married Women's Property Acts, we should come up with a very large sum indeed. Is it too much to suggest that these Acts carried through one of the greatest expropriations and reallocations of property in English history? (27)

One of the philosophies behind the laws that had restricted women's access to legal remedies for so long, was the concept that men and women had separate and distinct roles within the family. The mother was to be the carer and nurturer, the father to be the breadwinner and provider. It was on this basis that women's legal rights were amalgamated with those of her husband, since a wife should never need to sue, or be sued, or have any legal rights, because her husband should look after her. It is interesting then, that in these circumstances, although the mother was the acknowledged carer, the father was the sole guardian over the children. Throughout the period mothers became increasingly burdened by legal responsibilities almost equal to those of the father, but without corresponding legal rights to custody of the children. Until 1886 a father was able to exclude a mother from guardianship

of her children in favour of a complete stranger if he chose. (28-9)

From 1839 mothers could go to court to seek an order granting access to their infant children and even custody of those under children the age of 7. But as we have already seen, such court orders were expensive to pursue and almost impossible to bring if one did not have the support of one's husband. Mothers could not be granted full legal guardianship of their children until 1925.

And it was not until 1923 that the new *Matrimonial Causes Act* allowed men and women equal grounds on which to sue for divorce. Instead of being required to bear double the burden of proof when seeking a divorce, wives could finally apply on the grounds of their husband's infidelity only.

Whilst it may seem that the changes to the law in the nineteenth century finally brought married women into equal legal positions to men, it is interesting to note what the legal position was in the twentieth century. Married women who did not have their own separate property or earn their own separate income were still in an anomalous position. This quote from Joan Perkin's *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* forces us to consider whether the law really had changed very much, and why it took the law so long to change:

What in 1914 and beyond was the situation of the wife with no property or private income who did not work outside the home or earn any money by her exertions? She remained totally dependent on the moods, humours and antipathies of her husband, however generous he may have been in practice. Until 1964, any money a wife saved from her housekeeping allowance was not hers to dispose of legally, since it belonged still to her husband; thereafter she was entitled to half the savings.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

When we consider *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the context of what we now know about the law and how it affected married women, it becomes a far more revolutionary text than it initially appears.

Helen Lawrence (as she is at that time) marries Arthur Huntingdon in 1821. At first she is happy, and although sometimes her husband displays strange behaviour she cannot account for, she make excuses for him and makes real efforts to remain positive and happy in the relationship.

However it soon becomes clear that Helen has made an unhappy choice in her marriage. Her husband is a drunk, a gambler and a womaniser. He tyrannises over her by encouraging their son to follow his bad habits and he flaunts his mistress in Helen's own home.

Even before he reveals his most disgraceful behaviour, Huntingdon maintains rigid control over Helen's actions. He refuses not only to allow her to accompany him to London, but forces her to remain at home alone, without many neighbours or friends. She is not allowed to attend her father's funeral, or to console her brother when their father has died. (256-7)

When Helen discovers Huntingdon's relationship with Annabella Lowbrough she asks Arthur to grant her a divorce, or at least allow her to live separately from him, but he refuses. (294)

Eventually Helen concocts a plan to run way from her husband and to sustain her living by selling her paintings. When Huntingdon discovers this he takes possession of her diary, keys to her personal items, money, jewellery and anything else pawnable. From then on he gives her a monthly allowance on condition that Helen provides a justification at the end of the month of how the money's been spent. (351)

Helen is only able to eventually escape by borrowing money from her brother, and by tenanting Wildfell Hall, an old family abode. She escapes there with her son and her faithful servant, and there they live off the kindness of her brother and the small income she can maintain from selling her paintings.

But even when she left, Huntingdon still seeks her out in order to bring her back into his custody. He attends her aunt and uncle's home at Staningley and writes letters to her brother in an attempt to find her whereabouts, but he is unable to do so. He even offers to allow Helen to live apart from him with an allowance, provided she gives up her son. (378)

Half the narrative is told through Helen's voice by a presentation of her diary, and the

other half through the voice of Gilbert Markham, the farmer with whom Helen falls in love, but cannot acknowledge because of her concealed marriage to Huntingdon.

Eventually Helen returns to nurse Huntingdon after he has had an accident, and all his servants and friends have deserted him. He dies and she is then able to renew her acquaintances with Markham and express her love for him and the narrative ends with them happily married.

At this point I would like to show you a timeline of all the dates and events that we have been discussing.

As you can see, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is set between the years 1821-1827, a full 12 years before any of the legal changes that I discussed earlier had occurred. In fact, many of those legal changes did not occur until at least 5 years after Anne Brontë had passed away, so they were changes she could not have anticipated.

At the time the Huntingdons were married, Arthur Huntingdon was within his full legal rights to do everything he did to Helen. He was legally able to control her movements much more than he actually did, because until 1891 it was not clear that he did not have that right. Therefore when Helen deserted him, he was within his full legal rights to seek her out and bring her by force back under his roof.

Huntingdon also had the legal right to take possession of all Helen's personal belongings, as she would not have legal rights over those until 1883. This would also have included all the income that Helen had made since her separation through the sale of her paintings. So even if Huntingdon had consented to allow Helen to live apart from him, at any time he could have compelled her to hand over the income she was generating and any of her personal possessions even though they were legally separated.

If Helen had agreed to Huntingdon's proposal that she live separately on an allowance, there was nothing to legally compel Huntingdon to honour that promise. Although at law a husband was supposed to support his wife, she could not bind him to the promise he had made, since under the law of coverture they were one legal entity, and a husband could therefore not contract with himself. This means that there was no promise to honour.

Huntingdon also had full legal custody of their son, and could have taken his son at any time, even if he had allowed Helen to live apart from him. He could have prevented Helen from even seeing her son, and could have decided to put their son under the guardianship of a complete stranger under the law. Helen could not seek legal redress to this situation until 1839, and she could only do so if she had access to money to pay for the costs of the legal proceedings.

When Helen returns to Huntingdon, she takes perhaps the greatest risk of all. Huntingdon is not dying at the time she returns. It is purely by chance that Huntingdon does die so soon after Helen's return. If Huntingdon had fully recovered, he would now be aware of her ability to run away, and could have taken extra measures to prevent it that he had not taken the first time. He could have prevented her correspondence with her brother, reclaimed all her earnings she had saved, and kept her completely incarcerated within his home, and still be within the bounds of the law.

Further, if Huntingdon had discovered Helen's relationship with Markham, the local gossip would have been enough evidence with which he could have brought an action of criminal conversation against Markham for the spoiling of his sexual property. At that time the law allowed a husband to bring actions of criminal conversation against any man who was cohabiting with his wife without the husband's consent. It is arguable that Huntingdon could have tried to sustain such a case against Markham, and if he had gone to trial, Helen (as she had no legal persona) would not have been allowed to appear at the trial to defend her honour.

At no time would Helen have been able to obtain a divorce. Quite apart from the fact that Helen would have had to prove adultery and aggravating circumstances (which usually had to be extreme), Helen had few friends around her and no access to money with which to bring the proceedings. Remember that until 1857 only 4 women had been granted divorces.

Helen Huntingdon's decision to run away from her husband is therefore incredibly brave, as everything she was doing was illegal.

Her husband had the full weight of the law to support him. The terrible predicament Helen in placed in – break the law and risk social ostracism or remain with a tyrant for a husband – shows the inadequacy of the law at the time to protect married women. The very philosophy of the law of coverture – that a married woman did not need legal rights because her husband would protect her – is the very thing that allows Helen's husband to treat her so badly.

Anne Brontë's two novels bring to the fore the very real and onerous difficulties two different types of women had to deal with in the nineteenth century – governesses and married women. Anne hopes with her "kernel of truth" to show us the realities of these situations for these women through the lives of two characters. By seeing the subjective impact that social conventions and the law have on Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon, the nineteenth century reader was forced to acknowledge the real lived experience of women in the nineteenth century.

CLASSICS POLL

Results of The Times Online Classics Poll by erica wagner

YOU COULD, of course, make the cynic's argument that Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice topping the Times Online Classics Poll is really a vote for Colin Firth in a wet shirt — but that's unfair.

For, surely, the true source of the delight to be had in Andrew Davies's adaptation is the words of Austen herself.

Similarly, in the past few years Ethan Hawke made a dishy Hamlet and John Simm an appealing Raskolnikov: but at neither production could you level a charge of dumbing-down. And if adaptations for film and TV bring readers back to books, who could complain? It would be hard to say that our poll sprung any big surprises: but, if you look past the winner, Ms Austen, I think it is an interesting list.

It would be unfair to call P&P light reading; still, there is a breeziness about it absent from the tales of the Danish prince and the Petersburg villain. Neither is an easy work, and nor is, morally, Great Expectations, though it comes in the guise of a ripping yarn. Our own Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre comes in at ten.

As an American, I am pleased to see Huckleberry Finn so prominent, as this hilarious, serious book is still under threat in the US over allegations of racism.

Don Quixote makes it only to No 16 with Times readers. Moby-Dick, at 15, is a book you could read for the rest of your life and never get to the bottom of it. But that could be said for many books here: Odysseus forever on his journey, Cathy forever yearning for Heathcliff.

Need to treat yourself? Buy them all — or, better, get them from your library.

1 Pride and Prejudice Jane Austen
2 Hamlet William Shakespeare
3 Crime and Punishment Fyodor Dostoevsky
4 Great Expectations Charles Dickens
5 War and Peace Leo Tolstoy
6 The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain
7 Wuthering Heights Emily Brontë
8 The Odyssey Homer
9 The Iliad Homer
10 Jane Eyre Charlotte Brontë

Stancliffe's Hotel

A ‘racy’ novelette by Charlotte Brontë.

Recently the Times of London published the full text of a little-known novelette by Charlotte Brontë. The following is an introduction.

Until now only a few scholars have read this intriguing tale. Racier than anything the author published in her lifetime, full of comic and haunting vignettes, Stancliffe's Hotel, a novella written by Charlotte Brontë in 1838, has lain unpublished at the Brontë Museum. Heather Glen describes its discovery

CHARLOTTE BRONTË IS KNOWN TODAY as the author of Jane Eyre, one of the most popular novels in the English literary canon. More than 150 years after its first publication, it is still the third most borrowed volume in English public libraries. The story of the Brontë sisters' brief lives is almost as well known. Indeed, their home, Haworth Parsonage, has become one of the most visited of England's literary shrines.

It may therefore seem surprising that the novelette which follows has never before been published; that until now, its material existence has consisted of 34 pages in the Parsonage Museum, 11.5cm x 19cm in size, crammed with a fading, handwritten "print" so tiny that it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass. But if only a handful of scholars has hitherto read this story, the reason lies less, perhaps, in the difficulties presented by the manuscript than in the strangeness of the world of which it speaks.

Stancliffe's Hotel was written in 1838, when Charlotte Brontë was 23. It is not, like Jane Eyre, a suspenseful story of passionate private feeling, but a series of ironic vignettes within which the manners and the fashions of the England of the 1830s appear from an unexpected point of view. For the story of the Brontë family was not simply one of tragedy and isolation. For nearly 20 years before the appearance of Jane Eyre in 1847, the parsonage at Haworth was a place of lively creative activity. The children were avid readers, not merely of poetry and fiction but of newspapers and journals, extraordinarily alert to the literary, linguistic and cultural life of their time. And from childhood, they had been not just readers but also writers, on an extraordinary scale.

When Elizabeth Gaskell was beginning work on The Life of Charlotte Brontë, she came upon "a curious packet . . . containing an immense amount of manuscript in an inconceivably small space" - the equivalent, her husband suggested, of "50 volumes of print". She had stumbled upon the records of the kingdom of Glass Town, first created by the four young Brontës when Charlotte, the eldest, was 13. Together, these gifted children had constructed an imaginary world with its own geography, politics and dramatis personae - the last modelled at first on real-life public figures (writers, artists, statesmen, explorers) but gradually evolving into fictional characters.

Emily and Anne had soon broken off to create their own country of Gondal, but Branwell and Charlotte went on with the Glass Town saga, producing dozens of miniature novels, poems and imitation journals purporting to be written by their protagonists. Gaskell was baffled by this "wild weird writing" and dismissed it as intelligible only to "the bright little minds for whom it was intended", a "curious" phenomenon of childhood, hardly to be taken seriously. But the Brontës had in fact continued their "plays" (as they called them) throughout adolescence and beyond. Emily and Anne were writing books about Gondal at 27 and 25. Charlotte and Branwell transferred their interest (and many of their characters) to the new kingdom of Angria, and were still, in their early twenties, adding to it both in poetry and in prose. Their narrators and protagonists are, as Charlotte put it in a journal fragment, those "many well-known forms . . . faces looking up, eyes smiling and lips moving in audible speech, that I knew better almost than my brother and sisters, yet whose voices had never woke an echo in this world".

Yet, as I realised quickly when I began to read them - in the course of writing a critical study of Charlotte Brontë - they are not just juvenilia, accessible only to those who want to follow all the convolutions of the complicated Angrian saga. With their debunking, sardonic humour, their alertness to contemporary mores, their play with different voices and narrative points of view, they are very much more sophisticated and more enjoyable than this. Hence this transcription of Stancliffe's Hotel, one of the last of the Angrian novelettes. Like the others, this was written for an audience familiar with the "plays". Present-day readers, however, will need an outline understanding of the landscape, the politics and history of the world that it depicts. Angria lay to the east of the Glass Town Federation. It was divided into seven provinces, each with a capital city and a Lord Lieutenant; its king was the Duke of Zamorna, who had evolved out of Arthur Wellesley, the eldest son of the Duke of Wellington, the increasingly prominent hero of Charlotte's earlier Glass Town "plays". The landscape of Angria is recognisably English.

It has moors and forests and great country houses; the city of Zamorna, with its "Piece-hall" and its mills and its Stancliffe's Hotel bustling with commercial travellers, is like a thriving early industrial Yorkshire town. To the west lies "Senegambia", a country rather like Ireland, original homeland both of Zamorna and of Mary Percy, his second wife. At the centre of the Angrian drama, as Charlotte Brontë conceives it (and in the background of Stancliffe's Hotel, prompting the street-riot in Zamorna), is the love/hate relationship between two men.

The younger of these is Zamorna, a darkly handsome Byronic figure, charismatic, ruthless, unfaithful to a series of mistresses and wives. The other is the Duke of Northangerland, father of Mary Percy, once Zamorna's ally, and subsequently leader of a rebellion against him. In the course of that rebellion, Angria was devastated by war, and Zamorna driven into exile. By the time of Stancliffe's Hotel he has been re-established in power, and the ill and ageing Northangerland is confined to his country estate.

Stancliffe's Hotel will come as a surprise to readers who know Charlotte Brontë only as the author of Jane Eyre. The narrator is not a central, passionately involved protagonist, but a detached, debunking observer of Angrian life and manners, Charles Townshend, a dandy who takes "a full half hour to dress, and another half hour to view myself over from head to foot". He tells his story to the reader as a series of disconnected episodes. There are sudden changes of scene, marked by gaps in the manuscript; shifts of tone and atmosphere; tensions are left unresolved. Yet the feeling is not of fragmentariness, but of telling juxtaposition: flexible, witty, assured.

Stancliffe's Hotel is one of a number of later Angrian novelettes which I am editing for Penguin Classics. They have hitherto been published piecemeal, obtainable, if at all, only in expensive scholarly editions: Stancliffe's Hotel has never been published. Racier than anything their author published in her lifetime, full of comic and haunting vignettes, experimental in form, they offer a suggestive challenge to the popular sense of Charlotte Brontë as an artless transcriber of her own experience into fiction, and afford an indispensable insight into this extraordinary writer's work.

Note on the text: The manuscript of Stancliffe's Hotel, which is in the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, is erratically punctuated, mainly with dashes, and has very little paragraphing, though there are gaps in the manuscript to mark changes of scene. For the convenience of the present-day reader, I have modernised punctuation, capitalisation and hyphenation, and introduced paragraphs.

In several cases, where a word or part of a word seems to have been left out of the manuscript, it has been added in square brackets. Obvious spelling mistakes have been silently corrected, but archaic spellings have been preserved. Heather Glen is the author of Charlotte Brontë: the Imagination in History (£50, Oxford University Press, 2002) and editor of The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës (£15.95, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Christine Alexander Visited Stancliffe's Hotel As Long Ago As 1970

On 14 March this year, *The Times*, London, published Charlotte Brontë's early novelette *Stancliffe's Hotel* in one of their supplements, announcing the 'discovery' of a new 'unknown' story. They claimed that it "will be published for the first time, shedding new light on one of Britain's most famous writers". They also included interviews with Dr Heather Glen, who will be publishing the story with 3 others for Penguin later this year. As reported in *The Times*, "Glen said *Stancliffe's Hotel* had not been published before 'because there's been a mystique about it because it alludes to this fictional country. So there was a feeling that it was inaccessible and many people regarded it as juvenilia.'" This is simply not so.

When *The Times* statements came out, I received at least 20 emails from Brontë scholars around the world, including Italy, Japan, Canada, UK and USA, asking me what was going on. They all knew that I had published *Stancliffe's Hotel* as part of Cambridge PhD as long ago as 1970 and that it is on public access in the Cambridge University Library. It is also due to appear in my final volume of *An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* which will be published by Blackwell's, Oxford next year.

Stancliffe's Hotel is also discussed in detail in my British Academy prize-winning book *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983), pp. 171-8, with a photograph of the first page of this manuscript, to which I gave the title 'Stancliffe's Hotel'. *The Times* made no acknowledgement of my work on this story, which is certainly not 'unknown' to any Brontë scholar or enthusiast, nor did they mention that the title they were using was the one I had given Charlotte's untitled story. Far from being newly discovered, *Stancliffe's Hotel* also has an entry in the *Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, which will be published by OUP this year and is co-authored by Margaret Smith and myself. The *Oxford Companion to the Brontës* will also include major critical essays on all the Brontë juvenilia.

I wrote to *The Times* explaining the situation and they finally agreed to publish my letter on condition I would remove any suggestion that they may have made a mistake or been somehow dishonest. It is sad that this is now the situation in the world of Brontë scholarship, illustrating perhaps how academics in the arts, working in Australia, can be sidelined.

Professor Christine Alexander
School of English UNSW

SYDNEY MECHANICS' SCHOOL OF ARTS 1833

An abridged version of an article by Ellen Elzey, Executive Officer SMSA

CONTEXT

The early Mechanics Institutes or Schools of Arts were part of a broad adult education movement in the English speaking countries throughout the last years of the 18th century and continuing up through the middle of the 19th century. The impetus for the movement came about from above, with employers, social reformers and educators trying to better the lot of the lower classes, and from among the working classes themselves. The assumption in society was that the diffusion of knowledge amongst the working classes would bring moral and social benefits in their class and to the whole of society as a result. In Australia the honour of being the first School of Arts goes to the Van Dieman's Land Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1827 (unfortunately, no longer in existence). Next was the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts founded in March 1833.

SETTING UP

In the 1830s there was very little higher education in Sydney and no provider of adult education whatsoever. Some efforts had been made, however, to try to satisfy the thirst for

knowledge. For instance, the Australian Subscription Library had been set up in 1826 (though it later went bankrupt, its stock helped to form the basis of the NSW State Library). And there were occasional lectures given in churches and theatres.

In the early 1830s, the reverend Dr John Dunmore Lang decided to establish an institute of higher learning, the Australian College. Skilled tradesmen being scarce and expensive in the colony, he managed to convince the government of the day to help subsidise the importation of the artisans needed to build the school.

These artisans, mainly masons and carpenters, sailed from Britain in October 1831 on the *Stirling Castle*. Also on board was the reverend Henry Carmichael who was coming out to teach classics in Lang's new school. The trip being long and diversions few, Carmichael soon began to give lessons in geometry and political economy. These classes were held twice a week, but must have proved popular as four full days were given over to finishing the mathematics class before the ship docked in Sydney. Over the next few months there was much talk about continuing the lessons in a much more formal setting.

Finally on 1 March 1833 a meeting was held at Dr Lang's school in Jamison Street to discuss establishing an educational association. Among those present were Lang, Carmichael and several of the *Stirling Castle* passengers. A provisional committee was appointed and met every day for the next three weeks.

Advertisements were placed in the papers and on 22 March 1833 a public meeting was held at the Courthouse to set up the School of arts. Major Thomas Mitchell, the Suveyor-General, took the chair and was elected the first President of the Institution. Carmichael was named Vice-President. Peter Gardner, teller at the Bank of Australia, Treasurer, and G T Graham, Secretary.

The aim of the new School of Arts was to promote the dissemination of scientific and other useful knowledge through the establishment of a library and reading room, and the provision of public lectures and classes. Throughout the next few months, by-laws were published and memberships solicited.

One of the biggest problems at this time was the matter of a home for the School of arts. Early meetings continued to be held at the Australian College. Eventually, a subsidy was forthcoming from the government and a lot in Pitt Street was leased and a building erected. In the 1840s the School bought the Independent Chapel which was situated next door. This formed the nucleus of the lecture hall. Over the years additions were made and a new façade was added in the 1860s.

SMSA TODAY

The SMSA's main function is the operation of the oldest lending library in Australia. It has been lending books since its foundation. Nowadays it specialises in popular fiction and magazines, although it does carry a small range of non-fiction, such as biography, travel and history.

Its fiction collection is larger than the fiction section of the Sydney Municipal Library. The SMSA provides accommodation to other public organizations at a reasonable rental. Currently its tenants include the English Speaking Union, the Women's Pioneer Society, the National Parks Association and Gallery First Nighters, a theatrical interest group.

The SMSA funds a number of scholarships for the children and grandchildren of members. These scholarship pay the fees and other costs such as book purchases, and generally amount to about $2000 per year per student.

The SMSA makes an annual award of $1000 to an outstanding graduate in the School of Adult Education at UTS. It also makes two annual awards to outstanding graduates at each of the three campuses of the University of Western Sydney. It also makes grants to other cultural and educational organizations.

WHY NOT JOIN THE SYDNEY MECHANICS' SCHOOL OF ARTS?

For $6.60 per year you get:

- borrowing rights to the library
- opportunity to attend SMSA lectures and other special events
- voting rights
- access to scholarships for children and grandchildren

THE MOVIE VERSIONS OF JANE EYRE

1934 ** Dir: Christy Cabanna Cast: Virginia Bruce, Colin Clive B&W 70min.
A willing second tier cast and the passage of time make something of a curiosity of this classic story of a young orphan who grows up to become a governess. Stiff, but notable as the first talkie version. Tolerable.

1944 ** Dir: Robert Stevenson; Cast: Orson Welles, Joan Fontaine, Elizabeth Taylor. B&W 96min**

Devotee's of Charlotte Brontë's romantic novel about a young woman leaving an orphan's home and being placed as a governess may be disappointed. But for others the movie really starts with the appearance of Orson Welles ad his interpretation of the moody and mysterious Edward Rochester.

Fontaine has the proper backbone and yearning in the title role but to accommodate Welles' emerging popularity the role of Rochester was enlarged. Excellent bleak romantic-Gothic look. Elizabeth Taylor appears here in her third role. Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles are excellent, though the latter is frequently inaudible in the slur of his lines.

Spends much more time on Jane's childhood years (23%) than the later versions. It makes up time by omitting the entire St John Rivers episode. After running away Jane finds herself at Aunt Reed's house rather than, as in the book, she is summoned from Thornfield much earlier. This is the only version to have the tree struck by lightning after Rochester's proposal.

1971 ** Dir: Delbert Mann; Cast: Susannah York, George C. Scott, Ian Bannen, Jack Hawkins, Nyree Dawn Porter, Rachel Kempson; Colour 110 mins

Charlotte Brontë's tearjerker is put over stolidly and fails to touch and move the emotions as fluently as the 1944 version. Delbert Mann's direction and Jack Pulman's screenplay tend to play up incident rather than characters underlining that, despite its fame, Brontë's story is pretty much a novellish theme. Casting is by no means right. George C. Scott as Rochester tends to play the role rather like Patton on a well-deserved leave, and fails to bring out the smouldering romanticism, mixed with tyranny, and selfishness, which characterized Rochester, though his first scene with Jane has a sharp sardonic tang. Since Jane Eyre is constantly described s pain, and as Susannah York isn't, credibility is strained. York gives a pleasant but not wholly convincing portrayal.

1983 ** Dir: Julian Amyes; Cast: Zelah Clarke, Timothy Dalton. Colour 239min**

This marvellous BBC production honours Charlotte Brontë's classic tale of courage and romance. A thrilling and thorough adaptation. Zelah Clarke plays the orphaned, mistreated, and unloved Jane who falls for the darkly mysterious Mr Rochester.

This is the only version to include the fortune-teller scene. It spends more time (10%) on the St John Rivers episode than the other versions.

1996 ** Dir: Franco Zeffirelli; Cast: Charlotte Gainsbourg, William Hurt, Joan Plowright, Anna Paquin, Geraldine Chaplin, Billie Whitelaw, Maria Schneider, Fiona Shaw, Elle Macpherson, John Wood. Colour 112min.**

The only drawback in this adaptation is its brevity. Anna Paquin is properly spirited as the young orphan abandoned in a sepulchral girls' school by distant relatives; she matures into the equally vigorous Charlotte Gainsbourg, who accepts a position as governess for the ward of brooding Rochester. Amid secrets involving an insolent maid and long unglimpsed rooms, Jane unwisely falls in love with Rochester.

Although faithfully capturing the massive book's middle section, this film concludes with dissatisfying abruptness. Zeffirelli creates an elegant yet sparse interpretation. Everything about it, from the lighting to the score, is muted and sombre. Still a beautiful film it seems to lack a certain passion that earlier versions (especially the 1944 classic) brought to the screen. It boasts solid craftsmanship and smart thesping from the stellar cast ably led by the vibrant Charlotte Gainsbourg. What's lacking is the spark of inspiration needed to set this costumer, recalling a high-end telefilm, ahead of the pack.

Physically and vocally just right, Gainsbourg suggests the gawky, awkward duckling teetering on the edge of charm and self-confidence. It's her finely shaded delineation of Jane's doubts and vacillations that give the film its most involving passages.

As Rochester, Hurt contributes another of his quirky, idiosyncratic performances, but one that, in addition to involving a capable Brit accent, productively accents the character's inner damage and heritage of trauma. The pic's visual approach is somewhat staid and conventional, oriented towards the actors rather than aimed at conjuring the inner fires of Brontë's tale.

Apart from the 1944 version, which omits the Rivers family entirely, this version devotes the least amount of time to this part of the story (3%). Here Jane, alighting from the coach after running away, bumps into her cousins, the Rivers. There is no hint of any time in the wilderness. And with the time spent in acquainting Jane with the news of her inheritance, Rivers doesn't have time to propose.

1997 ** Dir: Robert Young; Cast: Samantha Morton, Ciaran Hinds, Gemma Jones, Abigail Cruttenden, Richard Hawley; Colour 108min.

Charlotte Brontë's dark romance between meek-yet-strong-willed governess Jane and her tormented-yet-dashing employer, Mr Rochester. This version dispenses quickly with many of the subplots to concentrate on the main duo. For example it spends only 11% of the time on her childhood years. But there is much more dialogue between Jane and Rochester than in the other versions.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

	1934	1944	1971	1983	1996	1997
Jane Eyre	Virginia Bruce	Joan Fontaine	Susannah York	Zelah Clarke	Charlotte Gainsbourg	Samantha Morton
Rochester	Colin Clive	Orson Welles	George C. Scott	Timothy Dalton	William Hurt	Ciaran Hinds

MINOR CHARACTERS

	1983	1996	1997
Young Jane	Sian Pattenden	Anna Paquin	Laura Findlay
Mrs Reed	Judy Cornwell	Fiona Shaw	Deborah Findlay
Mr Brocklehurst	Robert James	John Wood	David Grant
Miss Scatcherd	Avril Clark	Geraldine Chaplin	Ruth Mitchell
Miss Temple	Sally Osborn	Amanda Root	Emily Joyce
Helen Burns	Colette Backer	Leanne Rowe	Gemma Egglington
Mrs Fairfax	Jean Harvey	Joan Plowright	Gemma Jones
Adele	Blanche Youinou	Josephine Serre	Timia Berthomé
Grace Poole	Carol Gillies	Billie Whitelaw	Val McLane
Blanche Ingram	Mary Tamm	Elle Macpherson	Abigail Cruttenden
Colonel Dent	David Dodimead	Julian Fellowes	
Mason	Damien Thomas	Edward de Souza	Richard Hawley
Dr Carter	Christopher Burgess	John Tranter	
St John Rivers	Andrew Bicknell	Samuel West	Rupert Penry-Jones
Mary Rivers	Morag Hood	Charlotte Attenborough	
Diana Rivers	Elaine Donnelly		Elizabeth Garvie
Rev Wood	Lockwood West	Ralph Nossek	Peter Wight
Briggs	Colin Jeavons	Peter Woodthorpe	
Bertha	Joolia Cappleman	Maria Schneider	Sophie Reissner

"I see no reason to suppose steam locomotives will ever force themselves into general use."
Arthur Wellesley*, first Duke of Wellington (1769-1852).
* Charlotte's hero whom she featured in her Juvenilia.

BY THE BOOK

(An excerpt from an article by Joy McCrane in the "First Person" series, published in the Sydney Morning Herald 27th March 2003. The writer encounters a medical problem while living in Indonesia.)

It was about seven or eight hours later when I came round and found myself sitting in a hospital bed with a nurse sitting beside me. I felt so weak. Would I last till the morning? The thought didn't take full shape. I never said to myself, "I am dying". I just knew.

I lay there waiting for the morning. Surely my husband would come before work. He arrived. No time for trivialities. No time to answer his questions on my wellbeing.

"Bring me my library book," I told him desperately. I hadn't finished reading the last chapter.

Of course, I recovered. I'm here to write the tale. Other people in such situations report seeing tunnels with bright lights or angels hovering around them.

I saw only my unfinished library book. And it was my second reading, anyway. Not a thought did I give to my poor, possibly motherless, daughter.

All food tasted like cardboard until the girl in the next bed gave me some home-cooked rending kering. My favourite dish to this day. Chopped meat and chillies cooked slowly in coconut milk until it is dry. Delicious!

I read the last chapter of *Wuthering Heights*. I still have it as it couldn't be returned. That very week students burnt down the British Council Library.

SIGNPOSTS

from the Sydney Morning Herald on 31st March 2003.

On this day …

1596 Rene Descartes born.

1732 Josef Haydn born. He said "I was born on 1 April, and that is the date found in my father's Hausbuch – but my brother Michael maintains I was born on the 31st of March because he doesn't want it said that I came into the world as an April fool".

1855 Charlotte Brontë died, officially of the wasting disease phthisis, but more likely of dehydration caused by morning sickness.

1889 Eiffel tower completed.

BRONTË FINDS A NEW AUDIENCE

From the Sun Herald 16th March 2003.

Charlotte Brontë, author of 19th-century romance *Jane Eyre*, has just had a new work published. *Stancliffe's Hotel*, a 34-page novella written by Brontë in 1838 and until now read only by a handful of scholars, was printed in London's *The Times* newspaper yesterday.

The original manuscript of the book, kept in the Brontë museum in northern England, is a series of vignettes that mock romantic sentiment and masculine vanity.

"There are other stories out there and a volume of five will be published later this year," Heather Glen, editor of the new edition of the novella, told BBC radio yesterday.

The Milky Way

An edited extract from an article in the Sydney Morning Herald (Good Weekend) on March 15th 2003 by Janet Hawley. I apologise if this offends any of our members, but you should see what I left out! – ed

Fiona Giles makes a deceptively genteel first impression. With her china-doll skin, fine-boned body and soft precise voice, she's like one of the Brontës, with a PhD from Oxford. But don't let that fool you. It's hard to imagine the Brontë sisters giving much thought to the sexuality of breastfeeding, the subject of her new book The Secret Life of Breasts. The Perth-born Giles said that when she first proposed the breastfeeding book everyone groaned. Perhaps they feared another holier-than-thou, worthy clinical tome written by an obsessed Madonna-eyed nursing mother. "It was only when I started talking about lactation porn and recipes for cooking with breastmilk that her publisher went 'Wow!' "

Giles was at a pivotal stage in her life when she conceived the idea of Fresh Milk, her sixth book.

She'd taken leave from her position as lecturer in English at the University of NSW to go to New York in 1992 on a Harkness Felowship, and ended up staying five years. She decided to step sideways from the academic world and "have some fun in my writing".

"Wuthering Heights is a soap-opera from beginning to end"

Searching the web for links between Fiona Giles and the Brontës took me to many feminist sites. I was intrigued by the following review of Wuthering Heights by Andrea Wilkinson, a feminist writer whose work is referred to by Fiona Giles. (CDHC)

This is a soap-opera from beginning to end. It's about two farms less than 10 miles apart that are entwined at the root but bitter at the bud. (Nice use of language, eh?) It's one of the best "tellings" of a story because you don't hear the story from the characters themselves, but from one of their maids.

But the passions involved? They are extraordinary. Extraordinary to the point of exhaustion. Yes of course, it is a story of love. Of whose, I'm still not sure. Is it a good read? Absolutely...but only you can get through the characters and their fits.

Queen Victoria on *Jane Eyre*

From Queen Victoria's Letters and Journals edited by Christopher Hibbert. Contributed by Patricia Stebbings-Moore.

Finished Jane Eyre which is really a wonderful book very peculiar in parts, but so powerfully and admirably written, such a fine tone in it, such fine religious feeling, and such beautiful writing. The description of the mysterious maniac's nightly appearances awfully thrilling. Mr Rochester's character a very remarkable one, and Jane Eyre's herself a beautiful one. The end is very touching, when Jane Eyre returns to him and finds him blind, with one hand gone from injuries during the fire in his house, which was caused by his mad wife.