The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter
Issue No 20 December 2007

HIGHLAND WEEKEND 2007

Report by Catherine Barker, photographs by Michael Links

From Friday 21st until Sunday 23rd September eighteen ABA members enjoyed a country weekend away at Robertson in the Southern Highlands. We stayed at Ranelagh House, a lovely old guest house that at one time accommodated a Franciscan Friary and Seminary, the evidence of which we found in the beautiful stained glass windows there. We were allocated two large tables in the dining room exclusively for our group and it was unanimously agreed that both the service and the meals were excellent.

As we were in the Highlands the focus for our weekend was of course on Scotland and the Brontë connection. Christopher explained the affection which Charlotte Bronte had for Scotland, and reading from some of her letters he described her brief visits to

that country. He also referred to the high esteem in which all the Brontës held the works of Scotland's most famous author Sir Walter Scott, whose life was the subject of a most informative video which we enjoyed viewing.

Further South, back in Yorkshire, we were treated to talks on both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, together with the latest TV adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, our weekend encompassed the work of all three Brontë sisters. Annette Harman organized a most interesting session on *Wuthering Heights*, giving us food for thought with her explanation of the often overlooked second generation in that novel. On Sunday Annette then had us examining the reasons why *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was considered such a shocking book when it was first published.

A walk around the extensive grounds of Ranelagh House on Saturday afternoon was accompanied by readings from the poetry of Robert Burns at selected picturesque locations. The resident peacocks and peahens obviously appreciated literature as they followed us around the beautiful gardens to hear the recitations of Scottish verse. A list of Scottish dialect words for us to interpret (or guess at) provided us with a bit of a challenge the following morning and there was much fun in discovering the eventual translations.

In the evenings after dinner, which was accompanied by liquid refreshments provided by members, we adjourned to our private lounge room to view a DVD of the latest BBC adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. It was generally agreed that this is one of the best versions and we look forward to its being shown on television here.

We then returned to Sir Walter Scott for our final session of the weekend with Christopher highlighting for us some of the most popular poetry and novels of "The Wizard of the North".

(Continued on page 12)

GREENLAND – THAT RESERVOIR OF ICE AND SNOW

From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand.

This hymn, by Reginald Heber and probably well-known to Charlotte Brontë, is typical of many literary references to Greenland where it is contrasted with Africa. Greenland is as cold as Africa is hot – they are extreme regions of temperature. Robbie Burns made a similar comparison in one of his poems:

O had my fate been Greenland snows,
Or Afric's burning zone …

as did Charles Dickens in *An Uncommercial Traveller*:

Broiling on the coast of Africa, or congealing on the shores of Greenland, I am far far better there than here.

Charlotte herself made this comparison in *Villette* when she described the attic in which Lucy Snowe (an arctic name if ever there was one) was locked up by Monsieur Emmanuel:

The attic was no pleasant place: I believe he did not know how unpleasant it was, or he never would have locked me in with so little ceremony. In this summer weather, it was hot as Africa; as in winter, it was always cold as Greenland.

Most people today know little more about Greenland other than the fact that it is a very cold place, almost as if it was a mythical land and not a place you could actually visit. But to Charlotte and her sisters it was a very real place. Not that they ever travelled there in person. But, as they pored over their school atlas, as they read reports of the polar expeditions of Sir Edward Parry and Sir James Clark Ross in the newspapers and as they looked at engravings of polar scenes in books, they developed a real love for all things arctic. Emily and Anne chose the explorers Parry and Ross as their heroes in their juvenilia.

In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte shows a detailed knowledge of the geography of the arctic in the scene where young Jane is poring over a copy of Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Many of the birds that can be found in Britain at certain times of the year spend other periods in the arctic and Bewick's work includes many engravings of polar landscapes.

I returned to my book – Bewick's History of British Birds: the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape –

Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides.

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with "the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space, – that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentre the multiplied rigours of extreme cold." Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory

pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

There is great significance in this arctic imagery. The arctic is a lonely, desolate place and that reflects the loneliness that Jane felt in her aunt's house. But it is a cold loneliness. Aunt Reed and her children were cold towards Jane and as a consequence Jane's personality became one of great coldness. She developed the philosophy that by not allowing oneself to love one can never suffer heartache. By learning not to expect happiness you are protected against disappointment. On the other hand, to be passionate is to expose oneself to the slings and arrows of misfortune.

This was the same philosophy that Charlotte describes for herself in her letters. She felt the loss of her brother and sisters deeply and resolved not to get too emotionally attached to anybody lest she should suffer even more. Jane, like Charlotte herself, was a very hot and passionate person locked behind a cold and reserved exterior.

Rochester quickly discovered the contradictory personalities in Jane. He was instinctively aware of her passionate nature and was perplexed that she thought of herself as cold. He was interested in her paintings, not because of her artistic talent but because the subjects that she chose told something about herself. As Charlotte describes these paintings in great detail we are once again brought back to the arctic:

The third showed the pinnacle of an iceberg piercing a polar winter sky; a muster of northern lights reared their dim lances, close serried, along the horizon. Throwing these into distance, rose, in the foreground, a head, – a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and resting against it.

It is interesting to read *Jane Eyre* with a thermometer. Most of the characters are either cold or hot, reserved or passionate. Rochester is passionate and he unlocks Jane's hidden passionate nature. St John, like Jane, is hot on the inside but cold on the outside. He has a passionate nature which he represses by supreme will power. Throughout the novel there are images and references to cold and heat, ice or fire. Bertha expresses her hot passionate nature by setting fire, first to Rochester's bed and then to the whole house.

When the wedding is aborted and the discovery that Rochester has a wife still living, the weather changes abruptly from hot to cold. The day of the wedding was a typical midsummer's day. The following day brought Greenland weather to Thornfield Hall.

A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on the hay-field and corn-field lay a frozen shroud; lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, today were pathless with untrodden snow; and the woods which, twelve hours since waved leafy and fragrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild and white as pine-forests in wintry Norway.

In her letters Charlotte makes arctic references. In a letter to Ellen Nussey in 1846 she wrote:

I hope you are not frozen up in Northamptonshire – the cold here is dreadful. I do not remember such a series of North-Pole days – England might really have taken a slide up into the Arctic Zone – the sky looks like ice.

RANELAGH GARDENS

Ranelagh Gardens were public pleasure gardens located in Chelsea, then just outside London in the eighteenth century. The Ranelagh Gardens were so called because they occupied the site of Ranelagh House, built in 1688-89 by the first Earl of Ranelagh, Treasurer of Chelsea Hospital

An 18th century print showing the exterior of the Rotunda at Ranelagh Gardens, the "Chinese House", and part of the grounds.

which adjoins the gardens. Ranelagh House was demolished in 1805.

In 1741, the house and grounds were purchased by a syndicate led by the proprietor of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and Sir Thomas Robinson MP, and the Gardens were opened to the public the following year. Ranelagh was considered more fashionable than its older rival Vauxhall Gardens. The entrance charge was two shillings and sixpence, compared to a shilling at Vauxhall. Horace Walpole wrote soon after the gardens opened, “It has totally beat Vauxhall... You can't set your foot without treading on a Prince, or Duke of Cumberland.” Ranelagh Gardens introduced the masquerade, formerly a private, aristocratic entertainment, to a wider, middle-class English public, where it was open to commentary by essayists and writers of moral fiction.

The centrepiece of Ranelagh was a rococo rotunda with a diameter of 120 feet (37 metres) which was designed by William Jones, a surveyor to the East India Company. The central support housed a chimney and fireplaces for use in winter. In 1765, the nine year old Mozart performed in this showpiece, which figured prominently in views of Ranelagh Gardens taken from the river.

There was also a Chinese pavilion, which was added in 1750, as well as an ornamental lake and several walks.

(Continued on page 11)

THE ABA GOES TO AIR ON THE ABC

by Christopher Cooper

With the new BBC Jane Eyre being broadcast nationally I was contacted by the ABC and asked if I would be prepared to do some interviews. Great I thought, the publicity might give us an extra member or two. No such luck – the interviews were to be with local radio stations in Perth, Hobart and Adelaide. Still, I thought it would be an interesting experience. No, I wouldn't be flown around Australia to do the interviews. Thanks to modern technology two of them would be conducted by phone. For the third I had to go into the Ultimo studios and use what they call a Tardis Booth. The name obviously has something to do with Dr Who. I was imagining a tiny sound-proof booth into which I would have to squeeze myself. However it was just a small studio, with microphones and headphones on either side of a large desk. I was told I would be on in ten minutes and someone would be back to set it up for me. Ten minutes came and went and nobody appeared. Then I heard a voice coming from one of the headphones. I put them on and could hear the announcer on air saying, "shortly we'll be hearing what Dr Christopher Cooper, president of the Australian Brontë Association, thinks of this new production". Then a voice cut in, "Christopher, are you there?". "Yes, I'm ready." "Christopher, are you there?" "Yes, I'm here!" It became obvious to me that the microphone was dead. It was too late to go out to get help. In desperation I fumbled around on the desk for something that might be a switch. Luckily I found the right one. "Yes, I'm here". "Oh, good, he's going to play some music first and then cross to you."

The musical introduction to my interview was Kate Bush's "Wuthering Heights", not sung by Kate but by some Australian male singer. I thought, this is odd. Apart from the incongruity of a man singing "I'm Cathy, I've come home" I wondered for a split second whether I'd watched the wrong DVD. The interview began and it appeared that the presenter had thought that Charlotte had written *Wuthering Heights* as well. I thought this had all been sorted out a long time ago when Charlotte and Anne went to the publishers in London and explained who wrote what. "Perhaps you could sort out for our listeners who wrote what", I was asked.

I had swotted up on the details of this new version. I could recite the names of the screenwriter, the director and many of the actors. I had prepared things to say about the way the film differed from the novel, and which things worked and which didn't. But what was wanted was some general chit-chat about who the Brontës were, and why they are so famous.

I had hoped to be able to say one or two things about the ABA itself, even though the listeners were too far away to make it worthwhile them joining. But all I got to do was to answer a comment, "I didn't know there was a Brontë society in Australia" with, "Oh yes, we've been going ten years".

I'm not being critical of the ABC – not that it would matter as none of them will ever get to read this newsletter. I guess my expectations of what I'd be able to say were too high. After all, these were just five minute sound bites to promote their miniseries. It wasn't as if I was being interviewed in depth by Margaret Throsby. My hours of watching the DVD and taking notes, and lying awake thinking about it, weren't wasted. Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll find all the things I would have like to have said but didn't get the chance. And besides, I did get a free copy of the DVD for my trouble!

THE NEW BBC PRODUCTION OF JANE EYRE

By now you will all have seen the 2006 BBC production of *Jane Eyre*, broadcast on ABC TV on 24th November and 1st December. Here are all the things I would have liked to have been able to say about it when I was interviewed on ABC local radio, but didn't get the chance.

There are many versions of *Jane Eyre* that have appeared over the years, and this is certainly one of the better ones. I think the test of a good *Jane Eyre* is the chemistry between Jane and Rochester. It wouldn't matter if actors playing Cathy and Heathcliff are on different wave-lengths (the originals probably were, despite Cathy's claim "I am Heathcliff") so long as the actors themselves were talented. But with *Jane Eyre* the subtly complex interaction between Jane and Rochester require not just individual talent but also sympathy between the two. Ideally they should have known each other for years, or appear to have done so. So it is all the more surprising that the director Susanna White auditioned Ruth Wilson and Toby Stephens separately and did not put them together until the filming was about to start on location. It could have gone horribly wrong. Yet it went superbly right.

The second test of a good Jane Eyre is how the film deals with the St John Rivers episodes. Some versions treat this as merely an interlude – something to fill in time while Bertha gets around to burning down Thornfield Hall to be glossed over very briefly. One version even leaves St John out altogether! But for Charlotte St John is almost as important as Rochester. She wants us to compare the two. Rochester is passionate but admires Jane's self-control and feels that she could do him much good. St John is rigid and highly disciplined. Rochester is like fire while St John is like ice. But while Rochester is convincing here, St John is portrayed as being almost like an automaton. So Jane wants to speak to him. Yes, he can spare fifteen minutes and he puts his pocket watch on the table so that he doesn't go overtime. He is so disciplined that he is positively rude to Rosamond.

We learn that he loves Rosamond desperately, yet suppresses these feelings by a supreme act of will. He is only ice on the outside. Inside is a roaring fire. In a way he's a little bit like Jane herself. On the inside she is a very passionate woman but, because of the circumstances of her formative years, none of this passion is visible. She has had to learn to lock it away. But then she meets Rochester and begins to unlock this passion. This aspect of Jane has autobiographical overtones because Charlotte herself was a passionate woman who was very disciplined and ordered on the outside.

The fact that Charlotte wants us to treat St John as a viable alternative to Rochester in Jane's affections is brought out by the fact that the last page of the novel is devoted to him, as Jane reflects on his goodness and devotion to God and mankind. She might not love him, but she thought very highly of him. And who knows, had she not met Rochester first, and had St John not made it quite so clear that he did not love her but proposed to the glory of God, she might have become Jane St John.

Toby Stephens was an excellent Rochester. Often he is portrayed as a Heathcliff type character – brooding and dark. Stephens' Rochester comes across as being a somewhat prickly individual, not always bothered with good manners, but having a delightfully malicious sense of humour that meshed wonderfully with Jane's.

Ruth Wilson is by no means a plain Jane, but her delightfully full upper lip gives her an individuality that would prevent her being classified a beauty in the Barbie doll sense. She comes across as a deeply genuine person that one would like to get to know, and it is not hard to see why Rochester, who had outgrown the superficial beauties he had encountered in his youth, would find himself drawn to her.

On the whole the TV adaptation keeps faith with the book though the director made

many small changes. Some of these added a fresh something extra to Charlotte's story. The painting of a crowd of mad figures that hung in the corridor added to the build up of Gothic tension. I liked the identical twins and the way one of Jane's comments in the novel, on the best way to bring up of children, was expanded into a full-blown discussion of the nurture-nature debate. Admittedly such debate is mildly anachronistic but that didn't seem to worry me. I'm sure that if Charlotte had been writing fifty years later she would have had something to say on the subject.

The director picks up on Charlotte's imagery of heat and fire to symbolise passion and takes it even further. Jane's first sight of Thornfield Hall includes a red scarf fluttering out of an upstairs window. Jane has no idea what it means – it is the first mystery she encounters at the Hall. We who know the story well instantly recognise that this is where Bertha Mason is confined, though the mystery for us is why the window has not been fastened shut.

But the director appears to overlook the fact that Charlotte also uses cold as an image. The book whose woodcuts Jane is enjoying in the window seat is Bewick's *History of British Birds*. Many of these birds migrate between Britain and the Arctic and Bewick includes many woodcuts of Arctic regions. This "reservoir of ice and snow" capture Jane's imagination to such an extent that she goes into great detail and mentions a great many obscure Arctic place names. Charlotte must have studied her school atlas in great detail to have known about places such as Thule and Spitzbergen, and so must Jane.

Yet, in the film, the book becomes a book of travels in the tropics and the images we glimpse are those of steamy jungles. In fact the introductory scene made me wonder whether the ABC has made a mistake and had begun to screen *Laurence of Arabia* by mistake, for we see a young girl in eastern costume in the sand dunes of the Sahara. That's not in the book! After a minute or so we discover that this is Jane transported to Africa in her imagination through looking at the pictures in this travel book. The director has correctly followed Charlotte's meaning in one respect. Jane has a vivid imagination and is drawn to lonely desolate places. But she doesn't seem to understand why Charlotte went to a great deal of trouble to locate that lonely desolate place in the Arctic.

We all know that Jane, like Charlotte herself, was a very passionate person on the inside but kept this passion securely locked away. Jane thought of herself as a cold person until Rochester was able to thaw her and reveal the fire within. So as a girl she identified with cold places. When she meets Rochester and he looks through her portfolio of drawings three of them are described in great detail and all three deal with cold landscapes. To her credit the director did not change these to desert or jungle scenes. The glimpses we get of the drawings match exactly Charlotte's descriptions in the novel. Rochester is intrigued by her choice of subject and reads into it the way Jane thinks of herself – a cold person incapable of love. Yet he quickly sees that on the inside she is not like that at all.

The contrast between heat and cold provides a backdrop to the contrast between Rochester and St John Rivers. It is easy, when we think of *Jane Eyre* to think of it as a great love story between Jane and Rochester. St John is just a minor distraction. We think of him as a very cold person whose life runs purely on the basis of logic and reason. When she wants to talk to him he takes out his pocket watch and tells her that he can spare fifteen minutes! But St John is a very passionate person, and in this version we are allowed to glimpse that fact. But he thinks of his passion as a weakness and through superhuman effort locks it away. Jane thought very highly of St John, even though she did not love him, so much so that in the final page of the novel she is thinking of him in far-off India (South Africa in the film for some reason).

Blanche Ingram is a real beauty, with blue eyes and golden ringlets. She is not as simpering and empty-headed as one imagines

from the novel and this is good. Rochester is no fool and would never allow himself to marry an empty-headed woman. Perhaps he did once, but he is now much older and wiser. Blanche here is a credible possible wife. But what I fail to understand is why in virtually all film versions Blanche is fair. True, the name Blanche suggests a blonde, but Charlotte makes it very clear in the novel that Blanche is "as dark as a Spaniard … with dark eyes and black ringlets". I am sure that Charlotte deliberately wanted Blanche to be dark.

Despite being a very credible version this one is not without its clumsiness. The use of a red filter to depict the red room does not work for me. And in order for us to understand that Helen Burns was not the only one to die at Lowood at that time we have the laughable image of a heap of coffins stacked on top of one another in the churchyard.

But casting these idiosyncrasies aside this version is one of the best of over 60 that have appeared since the early 20th century and it will become one of the yardsticks by which future versions are measured. My only disappointment is that with so many *Jane Eyre*'s the novel *Villette*, considered by many to be Charlotte's best, has yet to appear on the screen.

Christopher Cooper

I invite other members who have seen this latest version to send me their impressions of it for the next newsletter.

THE BRONTË MASS

On 24th November 2007 the world première took place in the Leeds Town Hall of Philip Wilby's *Brontë Mass* which incorporates poems by the Brontë family. It was performed by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Leeds Philharmonic Choir, conducted by David Hill. It was commissioned in memory of John Brodwell.

Here Philip Wilby describes his work:

John Brodwell was well known to many in West Yorkshire, both as a passionately engaged local musician, and as a long-term member of the Leeds legal community. His sudden death in 2003 came as a shock, and this composition has been made as a memorial and celebration of his life, which touched and enhanced so many others.

One of John's major connections was with Woodhouse Grove School, and through it with the work of the Brontë family, and the Yorkshire landscape that they did so much to project onto the national imagination. Thus, working in partnership with the Leeds Philharmonic Committee, I have written this Bronte Mass, combining texts from the Latin Mass Ordinary with four poems by the Bronte children.

The work is divided into two halves; the first is a Memorial, comprising three sections. Charlotte Brontë's poem 'The autumn day' sets a reflective tone at the outset, which is quickly dispelled by a stormy and bell-laden setting of the Sanctus.

Anne Brontë's 'A Prayer', with its linked themes of faith and doubt ends this part of the composition, here set for a cappella choir and solo trumpet. The second half is celebratory in tone, opening with Emily's 'No Coward Soul', setting Branwell's 'Memory', and concluding with the Latin Gloria.

My musical style has been clearly influenced by that great oratorio tradition which John loved, and did so much to promote. As a personality, John was both forthright and determined, and Emily Brontë's words, which open the second part of my piece, catch something of John's public persona.

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

Hercule Bronte 1819-1862

(from the Burlesque Brontë website: www.freespace.virgin.net/pr.org)

Hercule Bronte was born at Thornton in 1819, the very same year as the first fully automated fish filleter was introduced at Grimsby Docks. A sickly child, Hercule nevertheless had an enquiring mind, and from an early age showed an amazing propensity for solving puzzles and logic problems. Once he had been set a poser, he would worry away at it, in the way that a lobster savages a tarpaulin, until a successful conclusion was reached. One of the first recorded examples of this, later to become known as "The Case of the Clockwork Clown" (1826) was when one of his brothers mislaid a mechanical toy somewhere in the nursery at the Haworth Parsonage. Hercule gave the problem his best attention, and despite ridicule from his sisters, recovered the missing item some days later from under Emily's bed. In early November 1830, the Reverend Patrick Bronte, on entering the Parish Church one day, found to his horror that all one hundred and twenty heavy mahogany pews had disappeared overnight. Hercule's brother Chevin was immediately suspected, but repeated beatings were not able to elicit any information from him about the mystery, and in desperation the frantic Cleric turned to Hercule. The juvenile sleuth worked all day on the conundrum, and by tea time his enquiries had led him to a field above Haworth. There, in the shape of an enormous pyramid, were the missing pews. What could be the purpose? In the gathering gloom, Hercule hurried back across the fields to break the news to his father. The good man was overjoyed, and urged his son to lead him to the pile. As the duo approached, however, an orange glow lit up the night sky and a large crowd could be discerned through clouds of smoke. Suspecting arson, Patrick Bronte broke into a furious gallop, but as the bellowing Parson approached, the crowd rapidly dispersed, leaving only trays of toffee as clues to their identity. The Reverend and his son could only watch, helpless, as flames engulfed the massive pile of furniture. The culprit was never found, and "The Affair of the Plot Night Pews" as it became known, remains Hercule's only unsolved case.

During his late teens and early twenties, Hercule successfully cracked a string of cases, among which were "The Mystery of the Overdue Library Book", "The Bowditch Papers", "The Corn Doll Stabbings", "The Whitewashed Pig Affair", "The Quest for the Ladder Rung", "The Leap Year Calendar Challenge", "The Elslack Enigma" and "The Sealed Cipher Riddle".

In 1845, Hercule Bronte managed to enter full-time employment at last, gaining a position within Haworth Urban District Council as a driver for the night soil cart. This work brought him into contact with an enormous number of people, and his talents were often called upon to solve cases which were considered too delicate to take to the police, such as "The Conundrum of the Cracked Commode" and "The Curious Case of the Itchy Foundation Garment".

By 1862, Hercule Bronte had managed to save quite a considerable fortune, both from his Sanitation Department wage, and from the increasing number of commissions that he was given. He decided to take a holiday, and in June, during the Keighley Feast Weeks, travelled to Switzerland. He stayed at Meiringen in the Bernese Oberland. One day he decided to visit the Reichenbach Falls, a local beauty spot. Unfortunately whilst walking to the brink to look at the view, he slipped on a discarded toffee wrapper and plunged over the edge of the precipice to his death. He never married.

PROGRAM FOR THE FIRST HALF OF 2008

Meetings indicated by are held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney (just around the corner from Town Hall station), with a meeting charge of $4.

Sat 8th MARCH Anne Collett – READING INTELLIGENCE

Charlotte Bronte's first novel, *The Professor*, begins with a letter from the narrator, William Crimsworth, to his friend Charles, in which he describes his first sight of his brother's wife and, in contrast, a portrait of his mother. Of Mrs Crimsworth junior, he writes:

> "I sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which I could not discern in her face or in her conversation; it was merry, rather small; by turns I saw vivacity, vanity, coquetry, look out through its irid, but I watched in vain for a glimpse of soul."

and of Mrs Crimsworth senior:

> "The face, I remembered, had pleased me as a boy, but then I did not understand it; now I knew how rare that class of face is in the world, and I appreciated keenly its thoughtful, yet gentle expression. The serious grey eye possessed for me a strong charm, as did certain lines in the features indicative of most true and tender feeling."

The eye it would seem is the window of the soul. Much of Brontë's novel (and those that followed) is concerned with appearance: with looking and seeing, with revelation and concealment, truth and deception. *The Professor* is a book that is interested in the method and mystery of reading – for Bronte suggests that the ability to read with intelligence or indeed to read intelligence, determines the course of a life. This idea of reading, and the extent to which we are enabled or disabled by the measure of skill with which we employ the art and science of reading, is of interest to me because it reveals much about Charlotte Brontë, as a woman and a writer, and the kind of intelligence she expected of her reader.

A short AGM will take place at this meeting.

Sat 17th MAY Sarah Burns – BRANWELL BRONTË – A GIFTED BROTHER

2008 marks the 160th anniversary of the death of Patrick Branwell Brontë, the only son and fourth of Patrick and Maria Brontë's six children. Branwell was a promising writer and artist with a rich imagination. Although he was the first of the Brontë siblings to appear in print, he would never gain money or success and was destined to live in the shadow of his three sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne. After attempts at careers as a painter, railway clerk and tutor, Branwell ended his days depressed, ill and addicted to alcohol and opium. His death on 24 September 1848 at the age of 31, from chronic bronchitis and marasmus (wasting of the body), greatly affected his family. In a letter to WS Williams of Smith & Elder on 6 October 1948, Charlotte said: "I … asked myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course … He is at rest, and that comforts us all. Long before he quitted this world Life had no happiness for him …"

THE HIGHLAND WEEKEND

(continued from page 2)

So, a great location with comfortable accommodation, delicious food, fine wines, stimulating discussions about our favourite authors amongst good company all added up to a most memorable Highland weekend away in the country.

PROGRAM FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 2008

Meetings indicated by are held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney (just around the corner from Town Hall station), with a meeting charge of $4.

Sat 26th JULY Mandy Swann – THE DESTROYING ANGEL OF TEMPEST
The Sea, Imaginative Excess and Extremes of Passion in the Fiction and Poetry of Charlotte and Anne Brontë.

Sat 13th SEPTEMBER James Phillips – MARRIAGE IN *JANE EYRE*: FROM CONTRACT TO CONVERSATION
Charlotte Brontë's first novel contends that marriage is irreducible to a contract; it must be sustained by the conversation of equals. Yet equality cannot survive without legal recognition and, in early nineteenth-century Britain, this means legal reform: Jane cannot be Rochester's equal if she is simply his mistress and she also cannot be his equal if the laws concerning marriage are not reformed. Jane and Rochester come together in conversation, inventing each other for themselves, and reinventing marriage as the social form of such freedom.

Sat 8th NOVEMBER Annette Harman – TRADE AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: SPECULATIONS CONCERNINGMR EARNSHAW'S BUSINESS IN LIVERPOOL
In *Wuthering Heights*, why does Mr Earnshaw travel to Liverpool? What business does a farmer have there? What is he really trading?

Sat 6th DECEMBER JOINT CHRISTMAS LUNCH WITH THE NSW DICKENS SOCIETY
Details will be announced later.

RANELAGH GARDENS (continued from page 5)

Ranelagh was a popular venue for romantic assignations. Edward Gibbon wrote that it was, "the most convenient place for courtships of every kind — the best market we have in England". From its opening, the Rotunda at Ranelagh Gardens was an important venue for musical concerts.

Canaletto painted the gardens, and painted the interior of the Rotunda twice, for different patrons.

The rotunda was closed for good in 1803 and demolished two years later. Ranelagh Gardens were re-designed by John Gibson in the nineteenth century and is now a green pleasure ground with shaded walks, part of the grounds of Chelsea Hospital and the site of the annual Chelsea Flower Show.