The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

Issue No 24 Dec 2009

ROCHESTER THE MOST ROMANTIC HERO OF ALL TIMES – OFFICIAL

Mills and Boon recently conducted a poll of its readers as to who they thought was the most romantic literary hero. In number one position was Edward Rochester, the romantic hero of *Jane Eyre*.

In number two position was Richard Sharpe of Bernard Cornwell's *Sharpe* series. Only then comes Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*, in third position. (No Colin Firth doesn't qualify!) But if Darcy could be merged with Mark Darcy from *Bridget Jones Diary*, in sixth position, he might have come out on top.

Emily's Heathcliff makes it easily into fourth position. Number five is Rhett Butler from *Gone With The Wind*, number seven is Captain Corelli and his mandolin and in number nine position is Thomas Hardy's Gabriel Oak from *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Position number eight is interesting – it's Henry De Tamble from Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife*, appearing right now on the silver screens across Australia.

Not everyone was happy with this outcome. Susan Daly wrote in the *Irish Independent* that for her Rochester is anything but romantic.

"I take it quite personally that Mr Darcy (first name Fitzwilliam, but best not to dwell on that) has not topped a new list of the most romantic literary heroes as voted by Mills and Boon readers. That spot went to Mr Rochester, keeping wives in attics since 1847."

"I understand that taking umbrage over which 19th century figment of the imagination fills his fictional breeches better is a bit like debating whether Spandau Ballet or Duran Duran was the finer band of the '80s. They were both a bit ridiculous, if we're honest. Nonetheless, the first literary hero you take under the covers with you, reading by torch when your mother yells up the stairs to turn out the light, is special. Edward Rochester was not a man you would want to be alone with in a darkened room."

"In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, he was dismissive of his daughter, uncharitable towards his wife and menacing towards Jane. Reader, I despised him. At one point, when Jane refuses to become his mistress (because that's what she would be, what with the first Mrs R still wearing a hole in the floor upstairs) he threatens that he may not be able to control his passion. 'His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild licence,' wrote the breathless Brontë. An implicit threat of rape – hardly the stuff of fairytale romance, is it?"

"Mr Darcy was not without his faults but the whole attraction was that he repented and changed his ways through the love of a good woman. The words 'leopard' and 'spots'

had yet to become linked in my very limited lexicon of love. Rochester, I seem to remember, needed to be blinded and crippled before he came to his senses."

Emma Clayton in *The Telegraph and Argus* gives her reasons why Rochester won first place as the most romantic hero of all time.

"Taped to a filing cabinet in the reference library at Haworth's Brontë Parsonage is a faded newspaper cutting: 'In Austen, sex is just a kiss on the hand. In the Brontës, everything happens. While Jane Austen's men prance around ballrooms, cautiously courting giggling girls with ringlets, the Brontë heroes brood in dark corners, seething with rage and passion. When it comes to men, falling into the Austen or Brontë camp probably comes down to whether you'd prefer a pompous, emotionally-repressed army captain over a passionate Byronic soul riding with wild abandon across the Yorkshire moors. I'd rather endure the black moods, cruel humour and dark secrets of Edward Rochester, brooding hero of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, than the sanctimonious sarcasm and infuriating pride of Fitzwilliam Darcy in Austen's *Pride And Prejudice*. So I welcomed the news, reported by the T&A, that Mr Rochester has beaten Mr Darcy to the top of a Mills & Boon poll of romantic literary characters."

"Maybe it reflects the age-old North-South divide; Rochester versus Darcy is a bit like the Beatles vs the Stones, Oasis vs Blur, Corrie against EastEnders. But for me, it's less about geography and more about sex appeal. Mr Darcy is a smart Alec who lacks the enigmatic appeal of Rochester. I've never warmed to Jane Austen; finding her characters – with the exception of Elizabeth Bennet – tedious and irritating. Austen's women sit around drinking tea, twittering on about going to balls. They were the WAGS of their day, the kind of women Jane Eyre observed with scorn from a quiet corner of one of Rochester's parties. My mum was a fan of Austen's books – so much so that she named me after one – and encouraged me to give them a go, giving the impression that they were witty. When I struggled to plough through *Emma* as an A-level text, I found it anything but witty, and was mortified at being named after awful, meddling Emma Woodhouse. It could have been worse. If my mum had been a Thomas Hardy fan, I could've ended up as Bathsheba or Thomasin. Austen's heroes are as dull as her heroines because she based them on people she knew from the limited social circles she moved in. The Brontës, encouraged by their father to read poetry, novels and newspapers, were inspired by charismatic, romantic literary and real-life figures. Yes, Darcy knows how to work the wet shirt look – but Rochester would probably just rip his shirt off."

STAY IN THE BRONTË ROOM IN LEURA

There's a retreat in Leura, in the Blue Mountains of NSW, called The Greens. It has five rooms, each named after a famous writer – Austen, Browning, Brontë, Shakespeare and Shelley. There's a communal dining room, a sitting room, with a full-size billiard table and free internet access. How would the writers have enjoyed their respective rooms? Charlotte and Arthur may have been disappointed at having separate single beds but Jane would have enjoyed her king-size bed, even if she was unable to find somebody to share it. And William would have felt at home in an Elizabethan-style four poster (illustrated).

The 2009 ITV Production of *Wuthering Heights*

Reviewed by Annette Harman

Where is Lockwood? Where is Zillah? Where are Mr and Mrs Linton and Mrs Earnshaw? I miss them all. If we are going to be shown Catherine's grave could

the dates be correct on her headstone? Why the skeleton? What happened to peaty embalming of the moors?

The 1930s film adaptation of Emily's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, starring Merle Oberon and Lawrence Olivier, is the foundation for the most recent production of *Wuthering Heights*. Remember Heathcliff and Catherine, in the oft-parodied scene, hallooing to each other across a windswept and gloomy moor? Fast forward to a modern brooding rock-star, or a throwback to 1970s heavy metal – think Led Zepplin – and here comes Heathcliff! Then we have status-obsessed Catherine, preening in her silk dresses. We can then replay romantic intensity to our hearts' content.

Heathcliff, both the persecuted and the persecuting, runs the show. Catherine, wilful imperious and childish, is marginalized – I don't think that was Emily's intention. After all, it is Catherine as a ghostly presence who haunts Heathcliff for eighteen years. Her daughter, another Catherine, dilutes Heathcliff's evil power, by strength, education and redemptive love.

Since the 1930s, in the popular imagination, *Wuthering Heights* has been a purely romantic love story about Heathcliff and Cathy. Cathy's famous declaration "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff" drives this adaptation. In the rushing opening scenes we pass through wet vegetation to a gothic inspired crenulated pile, representing Wuthering Heights. This version is dominated by Heathcliff and Cathy's relationship, implicitly sexually based, their shared childhood experiences and their adult obsession with each other. Edgar Linton, more vindictive and less mature than in the novel, is convincingly portrayed. In my opinion the other characters are well cast, with the exception of Joseph. He lacks the malignancy of the original. Reducing the number of characters allows us to focus more

on Isabella and Hindley.

The Yorkshire accents are sometimes difficult to follow, just like Joseph's vinegary speech in the novel. I don't find it convincing. It has a narrow romantic interpretation. Many important characters are missing and it deviates markedly from the original storyline. But I will watch it again.

However, despite the above shortcomings, I do like this interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*. It is powerful and passionate. The cinematic quality of the filming is dramatic and beautifully dark. I hope the production team will win awards for their work. The costumes, though perhaps a little too Austenesque, are lovely and the interiors and exteriors are well crafted.

BRONTË BIOGRAPHIES FOR BUSY BEGINNERS: PATRICK

In the early 1980s I presented a four part series of radio broadcasts for station 2SER. There are plenty of extensive biographies of Charlotte, Emily, Ann, Branwell and their father Patrick, but these short radio scripts give the main facts for those newer ABA members who may not have had time to read any of the book length biographies. In this issue we meet Patrick, the Father of the Brontës. Christopher Cooper

MUSIC: Death of Nelson
MALE NARRATOR: It was a day early in the year 1820 when a trail of removal carts made its way slowly up the steep streets of Haworth, a small village in Yorkshire. Following behind was a gig, in which the Brontë family rode. There was the Reverend Patrick Brontë and his delicate wife Maria holding the baby Anne. Sitting between his parents was their only son Branwell and bundled in the back were the other four daughters, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily.
MUSIC
MALE NARRATOR: Patrick was then 43 and he was bringing his young family to live in Haworth where he had the incumbency. He was born in 1777 on St Patrick's Day, and possibly owes his name to that fact. He was one of ten children born to Hugh and Eleanor Brunty. They lived in a small white-washed cabin in Drumballeroney in County Down, Northern Ireland. It was in a remote valley where the Mountains of Mourne ran down to the sea.
MUSIC: The Mountains of Mourne
MALE NARRATOR: Patrick was a boy of commanding presence, tall with dark red hair and pale blue eyes, vigorous in body and decidedly strong in mind. He taught himself to read from the three or four books which his practically illiterate parents chanced to own. At first he was apprenticed to a blacksmith and then as a linen-weaver and draper, though by the time he was 16 he was already teaching in the neighbouring village.

Not much is known of Patrick's early days in Ireland, to a large extent because he himself felt that his humble beginnings were unimportant. The real Patrick Brontë was born when he went to Cambridge to study for a degree. In 1802, with the encouragement and possibly some financial help from the Reverend Thomas Tighe (whose sons he had been tutoring) Patrick enrolled himself at St John's College Cambridge.
MUSIC: A College Choir
MALE NARRATOR: The name recorded in the college books was Patrick Brunty. Various college records contained his name with several minor variations of spelling but it was as Patrick Brontë, with two dots over the "e", that he took out his degree in 1806. This brings us to an interesting point as to the origin of the name. His ancestors were known as O'Prunty. Patrick's birth and those of his brothers were registered as "Brunty". However in 1799 a couple of years before Patrick went to Cambridge, Lord Nelson was created Duke of Bronte by Ferdinand the First. Bronte (spelt without the dots over the "e") is a town in Sicily. Incidentally Bronte, the seaside suburb of Sydney, owes its name directly to Nelson's title.

It is known that Patrick admired Lord Nelson greatly so it seems likely that Nelson's title inspired him to modify the spelling of his name and call himself Bronte. The accent on the "e" seems to have been purely an invention of his own to add further distinction. Now Patrick never denied his Irish background but he quietly played it down and the change of name would have helped. It's interesting to reflect that the authoress of *Wuthering Heights* might have been known as Emily O'Prunty! So Lord Nelson, one of England's greatest heroes unwittingly gave his name to three of England's greatest heroines.
MUSIC: Death of Nelson

MALE NARRATOR: Patrick took out his degree in 1806 and was ordained. He moved to Weatherfield in Essex and from there to Wellington in Shropshire. Finally he came to the West Riding of Yorkshire on the recommendation of William Morgan who had been a fellow curate at Wellington. Now William Morgan was at the time engaged to Jane Fennell the daughter of the principal of a school for Wesleyan ministers. Morgan frequently took Patrick with him to visit the Fennels and it was there that he met Maria Branwell, cousin to Jane. Maria Branwell had lived in Penzance in Cornwall but having become an orphan she moved to live with her cousins. She was small, neat, well-educated and highly intelligent and she and Patrick fell in love. In December 1812 a double wedding took place – Fennell-Morgan and Branwell-Brontë. During their courtship Maria and Patrick exchanged a number of letters. Only Maria's have survived but we can get an idea of his by the manner in which she replied to them. These letters revealed Maria as a most charming sympathetic and affectionate woman with a gentle humour and well able to express herself in writing. They also show a brightness and sprightly wit in Patrick which the tragedy of later years removed. It wasn't until most of this tragedy had taken place, when in fact only Charlotte and her father remained of that once large and happy family (Anne having died the previous year) that Mr Brontë showed these letters to Charlotte. In a letter to her friend Charlotte described her feelings on reading them.

CHARLOTTE: A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers telling me that they were mama's and that I might read them. I did read them in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time all having been written before I was born. It was strange now to peruse for the first time the records of a mind whence my own sprang and most strange and at once sad and sweet to find that mind of a truly fine pure and elevated order. There is a rectitude, a refinement, a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wish she had lived and that I had known her.

MARIA: To Reverend Patrick Brontë,
August 20th 1812.
My dear friend,

I do indeed consider you as my friend yet when I consider how short a time I have had the pleasure of knowing you I start at my own rashness. I will frankly confess that your behaviour and what I have seen and heard of your character, has excited my warmest esteem and regard.

September 5th 1812
My dearest friend,

I have just received your affectionate and very welcome letter and although I shall not be able to send this until Monday, yet I cannot deny myself the pleasure of writing a few lines this evening, no longer considering it a task but a pleasure, next to that of reading yours. I pitied you in your solitude and felt sorry that it was not in my power to enliven it. Have you not been too hasty in informing your friends of a certain event? Why did you not leave them to guess a little longer? I shrink from the idea of its being known to everybody. I do indeed sometimes think of you but I will not say how often lest I raise your vanity. Your ludicrous account of the scene at the Hermitage was highly diverting. We laughed heartily at it.

September 18th 1812
My dearest friend,
How readily do I reply with my dear Mr B's request. You see you have only to express your wishes and as far as my power extends I hesitate not to fulfil them. I do not know whether you dare show your face here again. After the blunder you have committed, when we got to the house on Thursday evening we found that Mr and Mrs Bedford had been there and that they had requested you to mention their intention of coming, a single hint of which you never gave. Poor I, too, came in for a share in the hard words which were bestowed upon you for they all agreed that I was the cause of it. Mr Fennell said you were certainly mazed and talked of

sending you to York. However I shall suspend my judgment until I hear what excuse you can make for yourself.

October 3rd, 1812.
How could my dear friend so cruelly disappoint me. Had he known how much I had set my heart on having a letter this afternoon I'm sure he would not have permitted a little matter to hinder him. But whatever was the reason of your not writing I cannot believe it to have been neglect or unkindness. Therefore I do not in the least blame you. I only beg that in future you will judge of my feelings by your own and if possible never let me expect a letter without receiving one. Two months ago I could not possibly have believed that you would ever engross so much of my thoughts and affection and far less could I have thought that I should be so forward as to tell you so.

November 18th, 1812.
My dear saucy Pat,
Now don't you think you deserve this epithet far more than I do that which you have given me. I really know not what to make of the beginning of your last. The winds, waves and rocks almost stunned me. I thought you were giving me the account of some terrible dream having no idea that your lively imagination should make so much of the slight reproof. What will you say when you get a real downright scolding? I suppose you never expected to be any the richer for me but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes etc. On Saturday the evening about the time you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck I was reading of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed to pieces and my little property swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse I shall think little of it as it is the first disastrous circumstance which had occurred since I left my home.

MUSIC

MALE NARRATOR: Now that we know something of Patrick and his wife let us return to that straggling procession which by now has reached its destination – Haworth Parsonage, their home for the rest of their lives. Mrs Gaskell, Charlotte's biographer, gave this very vivid impression of the house.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Haworth Parsonage is an oblong stone house, facing down the hill on which the village stands, and with the front door right opposite to the western door of the church, distant about a hundred yards. Of this space twenty yards or so in depth are occupied by the grassy garden, which is scarcely wider than the house. The graveyard goes round house and garden, on all sides but one. The house consists of four rooms on each floor, and is two stories high. When the Brontës took possession, they made the larger parlour, to the left of the entrance, the family sitting room, while that on the right was appropriated to Mr Brontë as a study. Behind this was a kitchen; behind the former, a sort of flagged store room. Upstairs were four bed chambers of similar size, with the addition of a small apartment over the passage, or "lobby" as we call it in the North. This was to the front, the staircase going up right opposite the entrance. There is the pleasant old fashion of window seats all through the house; and one can see that the parsonage was built in the days when wood was plentiful, as the massive stair banisters, and the wainscots, and the heavy window frames testify.

This little extra upstairs room was appropriated to the children. Small as it was, it was not called a nursery; indeed, it had not the comfort of a fireplace in it; the servants – two rough, affectionate, warm hearted sisters who cannot now speak of the family without tears, called the room the children's study. The age of the eldest student was perhaps by this time seven.

MALE NARRATOR: "In Haworth," Patrick told Mrs Gaskell, "my family

afflictions began. After a happy union of nine years and only one year's residence in Haworth, my dear wife died – and left me with the care of six small children." In writing to his friend and former vicar at Dewsbury, the Reverend Mr Buckworth, he says:

PATRICK: My dear wife was taken dangerously ill on the 29th of January last; and in a little more than seven months afterward she died. During every week and almost every day of the long tedious interval, I expected her final removal. For the first three months I was left nearly quite alone, unless you suppose my six little children, and the nurse and servants to have been company.

MALE NARRATOR: Whether Patrick remained as aloof from his children as this suggests, or indeed as some of his critics claim, is a matter for discussion at another time. That he had good reason to withdraw into himself however, is undeniable. For he was to watch helplessly as his family withered and decayed. One by one, his children died, some like Charlotte, having achieved some literary fame while others, though showing as much early promise, died before they attained womanhood.

A year after Mrs Brontë died, Patrick began to look for a comforter and a new mother for his young family. His thoughts turned to Mary Burder to whom he had proposed many years earlier, before he had met Maria. He made discreet enquiries as to her still being single and then wrote to her asking if there was any spark left from her once warm feelings towards him. He exulted in the fact of her still being single after all those years, perhaps a little too strongly for a proud spinster of advancing years. Her reply was icy to say the least.

MARY BURDER: Reverend Sir, As you must reasonably suppose, a letter from you presented to me on the 4th inst. naturally produced sensations of surprise and agitation. You have thought proper after a lapse of fifteen years and after various changes in circumstances again to address me, with what motives I cannot well define.

The subject you have introduced, so long buried in silence and until now, almost forgotten, cannot, I should think, produce in your mind anything like satisfactory reflection … With my present feelings I cannot forbear in justice to myself making some observations which may possibly appear severe – of their justice I am convinced.

MALE NARRATOR: What actually happened those 15 years ago is not clear, though it seems that Mary's family took steps to end the relationship and that Patrick all too readily concurred. Certainly Mary seems to have placed the blame firmly on Patrick's shoulders. How far is this from Maria's gentle chiding!

MARY BURDER: This review, Sir, excites in my bosom increased gratitude and thankfulness to that wise, that indulgent, Providence which then watched over me for good and withheld me from forming in very early life an indissoluble engagement with one whom I cannot think was altogether clear of duplicity.

NARRATOR: And as to her still being single …

MARY BURDER: My present condition, upon which you are pleased to remark, has hitherto been the state of my choice and to me a state of much happiness and comfort.

MALE NARRATOR: So, Mary Burder wasn't willing. Soon afterwards Maria's sister Elizabeth Branwell came up from Cornwall to superintend the family.

The story of the years that followed is as much the story of the children as it is of Patrick and that will be told in good time. Let us therefore turn from Patrick the father to Patrick the poet. We have sampled Maria's lively prose in her letters – certainly not great literature but nevertheless entertaining. Patrick, though he published some of his poetry, is also quite undistinguished as an author. Yet a literary atmosphere pervaded the parsonage and the children were no strangers to printer's proofs. There is a story of one of the girls, at the age of 7, assisting her father in correcting proofs of a published sermon.

Patrick's first published work was a little book of poems, *Cottage Poems*, which he published in 1811, the year before he married. A recurring theme is that of the simple cottager and his family who, despite poverty, hardship and hunger maintains his steadfast faith and enjoys a peaceful happiness denied to the rich and mighty. The poem *The Irish Cabin*, describes a cot or simple cabin that can only have been the one in which be grew up. Yet he writes of it not as of one among them but as a gentleman traveller who chances to visit and who looks on them approvingly but perhaps a little condescendingly. He romanticizes their rusticity and poverty in a way that one would expect of a gentleman who has never known this poverty himself. Patrick never forgot his lowly Irish beginnings, but that was Patrick Brunty. The real Patrick Brontë, the one born at University in Cambridge, remained at a distance from them.

PATRICK:

One day, when December's keen breath
Arrested the sweet running rill,
And Nature seemed frozen in death,
I thoughtfully strolled o'er the hill:
The mustering clouds wore a frown,
The mountains were covered with snow,
And winter his mantle of brown
Had spread o'er the landscape below.

But now the keen north wind 'gan whistle,
And gusty swept over the sky;
Each hair, frozen stood like a bristle,
and night thickened fast on the eye.

In swift-wheeling eddies the snow
Fell, mingling and drifting amain,
And soon all distinction laid low,
As whitening it covered the plain.

A light its pale ray faintly shot
(The snowflakes its splendour had shorn),
It came from a neighbouring cot,
Some called it the Cabin of Mourne:
A neat Irish Cabin, snow-proof,
Well thatched, had a good earthen floor,
One chimney in midst of the roof,
One window, and one latched door.

Escaped from the pitiless storm,
I entered the humble retreat;
Compact was the building and warm,
Its furniture simple and neat.
And now, gentle reader, approve
The ardour that glowed in each breast,
As kindly our cottagers strove
To cherish and welcome their guest.

The dame nimbly rose from the wheel,
And brushed off the powdery snow:
Her daughter forsaking the reel,
Ran briskly the cinders to blow:
The children who, sat on the hearth,
Leaped up without murmur or frown,
An oaken stool quickly brought forth,
And smilingly bade me sit down.

"Tis true, I must toil all the day,
And oft suffer cold through the night,
Though silvered all over with grey,
And dimly declining my sight:
And sometimes our raiment and food
Ah scanty – ah scanty indeed:
But all work together for good,
So in my blest Bible I read,

"Yes, true as the snow blows without,
And winds whistle keen through the air,
His grace can remove every doubt,
And chase the black gloom of despair:
It often supports my weak mind,
And wipes the salt tear from my eye,
It tells me that Jesus is kind,
And died for such sinners as I.

Then know, gentle stranger, though poor,
We're cheerful, contented and blest;
Though princes should pass by our door
King Jesus is ever our guest;
We feel and we taste and we see
The pleasures which flow from our Lord,
And fearless, and wealthy and free,
We live on the joys of His Word,"

He ceased: and a big tear of joy
Rolled glittering down to the ground;
Whilst all having dropped their employ,
Were buried in silence profound;

A sweet solemn pause long ensued –
Each bosom o'erflowed with delight;
Then heavenly converse renewed,
Beguiled the dull season of night.

Now supper is o'er and we raise
Our prayers to the Father of light
And joyfully hymning His praise,
We lovingly bid a good night –
The ground's white, the sky's cloudless blue,
The breeze flutters keen through the air,
The stars twinkle bright on my view,
As I to my mansion repair.

All peace, my dear cottage, be thine
Nor think that I'll treat you with scorn;
Whoever reads verses of mine
Shall hear of the Cabin of Mourne;
And had I but musical strains,
Though humble and mean in your station
You should smile whilst the world remains,
The pride of the fair Irish Nation.

FEMALE NARRATOR: In the same little volume of poetry are some lines sent to a lady on her birthday. From Maria's letters we know that he made a practice of sending birthday poems to ladies of his acquaintance, But for whom were these lines written?

PATRICK:

In thoughtful mood your parents dear,
Whilst joy smiles through the starting tear,
Give approbation due.
As each drinks deep in mirthful wine
Your rosy health and looks benign
Are sent to heaven for you.
But let me whisper, lovely fair,
This joy may soon give place to care,
And sorrow cloud this day;
Full soon your eyes of sparkling blue,
And velvet lips of scarlet hue,
Discoloured, may decay.

FEMALE NARRATOR: What pretty young lady of 18 would not have thrilled to have received such sentiments on her birthday? How necessary on that of all days in the year to be reminded that ,.,

PATRICK:

… whate'er they say,
You're but a breathing mass of clay,
Fast ripening for the grave.

MALE NARRATOR: Could it have been Mary Burder for whom these lines were written? Certainly it was not for Maria, for apart from the fact that be had not yet met her, he reserved the less morbid end of his quill for her birthday. These lines were written for Maria's first birthday as his wife:

PATRICK:

Sweet is this April morn,
To every cheerful swain,
Throughout the smiling plain;
To me it glows with sweeter far and brighter charms,
And all my throbbing bosom warms,
Maria, let us walk, and breath the morning air,
And hear the cuckoo sing,
And every tuneful bird, that woos the gentle spring,
Throughout the budding grove,
Softly coos the turtle dove …

MUSIC

CRANFORD SAVED FROM DEMOLITION

The Manchester Historic Buildings Trust, of which Judy Dench is patron, has received a grant of £260,000 from English Heritage, to carry out essential repairs to Elizabeth Gaskell's home in Ardwick.

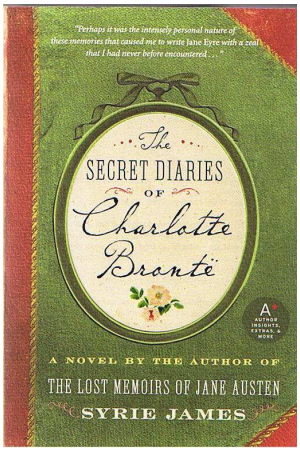
The house was built in 1838 as a fashionable villa, and Mrs Gaskell lived there with her husband and four children from 1850 until 1865, when she died. Many great writers visited her there, including Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens.

The building has fallen into disrepair in recent years and was in danger of being demolished, but thanks to the grant it will be preserved. Judy Dench said, "This is a major historical building and it will be wonderful to see it restored to its former glory."

THE SECRET DIARIES OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Gabrielle Pantera interviews the author, Syrie James, for *Hollywood Today*

I was astonished to discover that much of *Jane Eyre* was inspired by Charlotte's own experiences," says *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* author Syrie James. "Despite her difficult circumstances at home, including the fact that her brother became an alcoholic and a drug addict and her father nearly went blind, she and her sisters Anne and Emily (who wrote *Wuthering Heights*) all became published authors at the same time. I can't think of any other family in history who've achieved a similar literary feat. I knew it would make a fabulous story, and it had never been told."



The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë tells the story of Charlotte Brontë from her point of view. In her diaries, she's very honest about who she is. Brontë has travelled a bit and fallen in love, but that love was not to be. Brontë is secretive, as all the Brontë sisters are about their writing. When they admit what they're doing, they're there for each other. *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* was selected by the National Women's Book Association as a Great Group Read of 2009.

"While in Yorkshire, touring the former Roe Head School which Charlotte attended in her youth, the Director of the school took my husband and me up into the spooky, rambling attic and told us old legends of the Ghost of Roe Head," says James. "He and others have seen strange apparitions, including an inexplicable, icy presence which haunted the main hall. I feel certain that legends of the same mysterious, attic-dwelling ghost influenced Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*."

"Her father's curate, the tall, dark, and handsome Arthur Bell Nicholls, carried a silent torch for Charlotte for more than seven years before he had the nerve to propose," says James. "Charlotte greatly disliked him for many years, but her feelings eventually changed. She came to love him with all her heart."

For her research, James poured over countless Brontë biographies. She read all the poetry of the Brontës, their published novels, Charlotte's juvenilia, and her voluminous personal correspondence. More than 500 letters exist, preserved by Charlotte's publisher's literary adviser William Smith Williams and her friend Ellen Nussey. James studied the art of the Brontës which she found "quite remarkable". She also read everything she could find about the life of Arthur Bell Nicholls."

"I went to Haworth, England," says James. "I walked the village's steep, narrow main street, and made an extended visit to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, which has been preserved to reflect the way it looked when the Brontës lived there. I haunted the church and the rooms and lanes where Charlotte and Emily and Anne lived and walked, and strolled through that gloomy graveyard in the pouring rain. I visited the Brontë library, where I was allowed to hold and read a selection of original letters and manuscripts penned by Charlotte and other members of the Brontë family. What an unforgettable thrill!"

"It seemed to make sense to write my next novel from the perspective of another 19th century British writer," says James.

"This time focusing on the life and romance of Charlotte Brontë, the famed authoress of one of my all-time favourite books, *Jane Eyre*. I wanted to know and understand the woman who wrote this remarkable novel, which is still so popular today. As I did my research, I was quickly captivated by the true story of Charlotte's real-life romance."

Even thought James' book is called a dairy, it's not written in diary format. There are occasional references where Charlotte addresses her diary. The book is more conversational, as though Charlotte is telling you a story. James researched her subject thoroughly. Charlotte, her friends, and family come off as plausible. James adds details that are available. The drama isn't over done. James' characters are real people. As you read you can understand their feelings and why they do the things they do.

James makes Charlotte's relationship and subsequent marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls romantic, as Charlotte might have written herself. After reading this book you'll want to go back and read the Brontë's books. At the back of *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* there is an afterward, question-and-answer section for the author, and excerpts from some of Charlotte's letters, as well as some poems by the Brontë siblings.

GHOSTS OF HAWORTH

David Barnett in *The Telegraph and Argus* describes a ghost tour of Haworth.

Across the moors in Haworth, the rich history of the literary Brontë sisters is also entwined with that of the supernatural. The Brontës themselves were not averse to bringing the paranormal into their writing – witness Cathy's unquiet spirit at the start of *Wuthering Heights*, and the mention of the large, goat-dog hybrid of Yorkshire myth, the ghostly guytrash, in *Jane Eyre*.

But do the ghosts of the Brontës themselves walk the cool, shadowed corridors of the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth? There have been claims that shadowy outlines have been seen in the Parsonage windows, and that the sisters still haunt their old home. What we're to make of the claim that Charlotte Brontë's spirit materialised in a London cab is anyone's guess, though.

More definite sightings – if such a thing can exist – have been made at the Black Bull pub in Haworth, where the spirits do not appear to confine themselves to the optics behind the bar. Dark figures have been sighted from the corner of the eye, and a mysterious man in a beige suit has apparently been spotted drinking at the bar … the ghost of our man in Havana, perhaps.

Glasses and ashtrays have been flung to the floor in empty rooms, and one recurring vision is of a man in a top hat and smoking a cigar – some guests have even reported smelling the cigar smoke. Could this be Branwell Brontë's wayward male scion of the Bronte clan?

LIVING AND LOVING by Branwell Brontë (noticed by Patricia Stebbings-Moore)

Be not ever pondering
Over what the morn may bring;
Whether it be joy or pain
Wisely count it all as gain;
And, while age forbears to shed
Snows, or sorrows o'er thy head,
Do not scorn the dancers' feet,
Nor thy lover's dear retreat.

Steven Wood and Ian Palmer: Haworth Through Time

A review by Cristina on the Brontë Blog (www.bronteblog.blogspot.com)

The book is published by Amberley Publishing.

Elizabeth Gaskell described Haworth as a grim, remote place, something which Charlotte Brontë had also done before, perhaps trying to make physical the psychological alienation she and her siblings had mostly felt with the local folk. And yet, through other less subjective accounts, we know Haworth to have been a busy, bustling place, hardly a remote spot at all. All this is to say, that it's easy to travel with the imagination, but what about the real thing?

Haworth Through Time helps in that quest to see Haworth as the Brontës would have recognised it. It remains an intriguing question whether the Brontë family would recognise today's cheerful, colourful Haworth as the place they inhabited for so many years, a place to which Emily Brontë, whenever she went away, was longing to return to and a place where Charlotte, whenever she spent long, fruitless stretches of time in, was longing to leave.

Photography wasn't a widespread format until the latter half of the 19th century, which actually makes it hard for us to see Haworth through the Brontës' eyes. But it has the advantage of having remained mostly untouched for at least a couple of decades after the Brontës' deaths. The oldest pictures seen in *Haworth Through Time* date from the 1860s spanning until the 1960s-1970s, during which years there was, in the words of Steven Wood, a 'clearance mania' which affected many well-known spots around Haworth.

Steven Wood and Ian Palmer (photographer) document all these changes remarkably well, drawing attention to the tiniest details which are both curious – in that they are sometimes quirky and funny – and interesting – in that they serve to tell of Haworth's social history throughout the years. Who can resist finding out about people named Manasseh Hollindrake, Zachariah Booth or Zerubabbel Barraclough?

A sample page of the book would have the oldest picture on the top of the page, the brief explanation in the middle, and then the modern pictures at the bottom, taken from as similar an angle as the old one as possible. One of our favourite pages, for nothing in particular, is page 11, which is about Dean Street, with the oldest picture dating back to around 1970.

Here we see local builder Tom Laycock pushing his bicycle (his only form of transport) up Dean Street on the way to a job. The streets of the town climb steeply up the valley side. Many of them were never surfaced for cars and are now attractively grassed over. Other changes of the past forty years are visible (in the modern picture below the older one): cars for bicycles, wheelie bins for dustbins and satellite dishes instead of TV aerials. Washing lines survive unaffected.

The pictures – both old and new – are of good quality, making the endless process of gazing at them and inevitably looking for differences and similarities very easy on the eyes. Certainly, residents as well as visitors – both past and future – will find it a delightful, entertaining book. Residents will no doubt discover new things about the place and perhaps will even be tempted to take the book on a ramble or two in order to see Haworth with new eyes. Past and future visitors will discover the village of the Brontë sisters as they have never seen it before and will be very tempted to jump on the first train/bus/airplane in order to be able to explore it for themselves.

On this last note – visitors – we would have welcomed a map of Haworth. Returning visitors who have spent days roaming about the place will know the places mentioned for sure, but other visitors who have focused on the Brontë Parsonage, the moors, the Black Bull, the church, Main Street and such will find it hard to place Sun Street or Acton Street. A map would have been very helpful, both for navigating the book and – why not – for navigating

Haworth itself with the book in hand, which is no doubt what many will do.

When we first heard of *Haworth Through Time* – which is part of a series of similar books about different villages – we wondered whether it wouldn't cover the same ground as Ann Dinsdale's lovely *Old Haworth*. Our surprise, then, is that they are both capable of going over the same place and yet approach it from totally different points of view. While Dinsdale is concerned about the Brontë connection of the places, using mostly images – not always photographs – of places where we know for a fact that the Brontës went to, Wood and Palmer are more focused on depicting the life of the village as a whole, regardless of whether the place has any Brontë connection, which of course is not to say that the Brontës are ignored in this book. Only about four pictures are the same in both books: the rest, even if a given place is mentioned in both, are different.

Haworth Through Time is a wonderful opportunity to get to know the place that surrounded the Brontës during most of their lives and which certainly helped shaped their narratives in one way or another.

BRONTË (AND OTHERS) IN WA

A Letter from Kay Schneider in WA

The Victorian Literary Group of WA formed in July 2009 and have had three meetings to date. At our first meeting we decided to broaden our scope, and focus not just on the Brontës (as originally intended), but on Victorian authors in general. We will thus be including Trollope, Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thackeray and others. We plan to have five meetings a year, and intend to have a fairly focused study of each author before moving on to another one. In general our plan will be to read at least three novels by each author, with a meeting devoted to each novel, and then a meeting to discuss the biography of the author.

Our first series of meetings have been devoted to the Brontës, but in this case just one novel for each. We had really interesting discussions on *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, followed by a meeting to view the new *Wuthering Heights* movie. Our March meeting 2010 will focus on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Whilst our group is not very big, the attendance is regular, and the discussions are lively and thought-provoking, and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

TENANT IS BOOK OF THE YEAR 2009

As a result of a vote taken at the November meeting, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall will be the Book of the Year for 2009. Anne's novel won convincingly, with 9 votes. In second place was Villette with 5 votes. We will have a short reading from the Tenant at each meeting, and then at the November meeting we will study it in depth.

We are looking for five or six people to select a passage of one to two pages and, in about 10 minutes, remind us of how that passage fits into the story, and then read the passage as one might in a bible study, where explanations of obscure words, and comments on Anne's choice of words etc are given throughout the reading. Please contact Christopher Cooper (chris@maths.mq.edu.au or 9804-7473) if you are willing to take part.

[Interestingly, our friends in WA will also be studying *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the new year.]

A VICTORIAN DILEMMA
Where does a Queen wear her Garter?

By Sarah Burns

At a recent lecture presented by The Australian Heraldry Society, Professor Stephanie Trigg from the University of Melbourne gave an illustrated talk on the long, but discontinuous history of women's involvement in the Order of the Garter.

The Order of the Garter, awarded at the Monarch's pleasure, is the oldest and most prestigious British Order of Chivalry and was founded by Edward III in 1348.

Legend has it that the emblem of the Order, a blue garter, was inspired by an incident which took place whilst the King danced with Joan, Countess of Salisbury. The Countess' garter fell to the floor and after the King retrieved it he tied it to his own leg. Those watching this were apparently amused, but the King admonished them saying, *'Honi soit qui mal y pense'* (Shame on him who thinks this evil). This became the motto of the Order. Some say it is more likely that the Order was inspired by the strap used to attach pieces of armour.

Badge of the Order of the Garter c. 1640 (Victoria & Albert Museum)

The insignia of the Order have developed over the centuries, starting with a garter and badge depicting St George and the Dragon. A collar was added in the 16th century, and the star and broad riband in the 17th century. Although the collar could not be decorated with precious stones, the other insignia could be decorated according to taste and affordability. George IV left 55 different Garter badges of varying styles. The garter, a buckled velvet strap, was traditionally worn around the left calf.

Queen Victoria could not possibly be seen wearing a garter on her leg. Therefore, like Queen Anne before her, Victoria visited the tomb of one of the last medieval ladies to be honoured, Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII and grandmother of Henry VIII, whose effigy depicted this eminent lady wearing the garter on her arm. After Lady Margaret's death in 1509, the Order remained exclusively male, except for reigning queens, until 1901 when Edward VII made Queen Alexandra a Lady of the Order.

Queen Victoria wore her Order of the Garter armlet on her wedding day. She also wore the star of the Order.

Queen Victoria wearing the Garter around her arm

Queen Elizabeth II in Garter Robes

Today, the Knights of the Garter gather at Windsor Castle every June, wearing their blue velvet robes (with the badge of the Order - St George's Cross within the Garter surrounded by radiating silver beams - on the left shoulder) and black velvet hats with white plumes.

HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE

Moti Adds New Chapter For Brontë Sisters

Adapted from a piece by Brian Russell in *Racing and Sports* by Sandra Faulkner, who understands racing jargon better than I do - Ed

Tuesday 8 September 2009.

"Dashing displays in recent weeks by the Gai Waterhouse trained Gooree bred and raced five-year-old mare *Moti* adds another chapter in the tales emanating from the Brontë sisters, iconic literary figures of the 1800s. *Moti* is now the winner of seven of 12 starts following her success in the recent $100,000 Mona Lisa Stakes at Wyong.

One of the Brontë sisters, Emily Brontë, wrote but one book, *Wuthering Heights*, but it became a literary classic and had its name bestowed on broodmares in New Zealand. The English horse *Wuthering Heights*' dam was *Anne Brontë*, a mare out of *Charlotte Brontë*, the names of Emily's sisters. *Charlotte Brontë* was a half-sister to *Florence Dombey* who won major races in England." The branch of the family that produced *Moti* was established in Australia by the importation in the 1950s of a horse called *Churra* (GB), a daughter of *The Phoenix* and *Anne Brontë*."

THE ANN LOCK FUND

Ann Lock, our treasurer for a number of years before her death in 2008, left the society a large number of books and other items. These were auctioned and the Ann Lock Memorial Fund now stands at $500. It has been decided to use this money as a grant towards the publication of a Juvenilia Press edition of a Brontë manuscript.

Our Patron, Professor Christine Alexander, oversees the Juvenilia Press, located at the University of New South Wales where Christine has a chair in the School of English. Apart from making the early works of writers available to the world, these projects provide valuable editorial training for students who are involved in producing the various volumes. You can find out more about the Juvenilia Press, including Brontë volumes, from the website: http://www2.arts.unsw.edu.au/juvenilia/

Christine has suggested that the proceeds of the Ann Lock Memorial fund be used for the designing of a new edition of the *Diary Papers of Emily and Anne Brontë*. Christine will fund the balance of production from small savings from other volumes.

The edition will be dedicated to the memory of Ann, who was a strong supporter of the Juvenila Press and attended many of its book launches.

PROGRAM FOR 2010

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. We are currently meeting on the 1st floor. Just check with the sign near the lift on the ground floor. Meetings officially begin at 10:30am but we serve morning tea before the meeting as well as afterwards. Many of us continue our literary fellowship by having lunch together after the meeting.

🏠 Saturday 27th MARCH: Christine ALEXANDER
CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S CHRISTIANITY

Christine will focus on the narrative of pilgrimage as a clue to Charlotte Brontë's attitude to Christianity and her strong hold on life through adversity.

🏠 Saturday 8th MAY: Adrienne BRADNEY-SMITH
PORTRAITURE AND THE ART OF BRANWELL BRONTË

Adrienne will give a general background to portraiture in early 19th century England and then explore whether Branwell was simply a failure as an artist, or was perhaps a victim of his time.

🏠 Saturday 24th JULY: Michael LINKS
MUSIC AND THE BRONTËS

Michael will be looking at the music the Brontës listened to and played, as well as at the composers who were popular in the Brontë's era.

🏠 Saturday 18th SEPTEMBER: Graham HARMAN
SOMETHING REAL LIES BEFORE YOU

Charlotte Bronte introduces *Shirley* by promising the reader: "Something real lies before you". But what does "real" mean? The subject matter of "Shirley" is indeed more down-to-earth than that of more high-flown and romantic works. However, our normal expectations about "reality" are profoundly disoriented within the compass of this novel, as we rapidly find ourselves enmeshed in conversations between the characters, the author, and the reader, as well as in Charlotte's own conversations with herself. Using parallel illustrations from the world of art, this talk explores the slippery relationships between fiction; reality; fiction about reality; and fiction about fiction.

🏠 Saturday 13th NOVEMBER: DECODING *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*

A number of members will be asked to select a passage of one to two pages and, in about 10 minutes, remind us of how that passage fits into the story. They will then read the passage as one might in a bible study, where explanations of obscure words, references to what might have been common knowledge at the time, comments on Anne's choice of words etc are given throughout. Please contact Christopher Cooper (chris@maths.mq.edu.au or 9804-7473) if you are willing to take part.

Details of the Christmas Event will be announced in the June Newsletter.