The Australian Brontë Association

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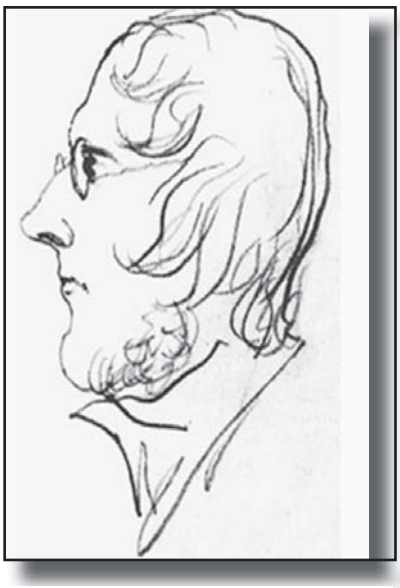
Brontë Biographies For Busy Beginners

Part 5: Branwell

In the early 1980s I presented a six part series of radio broadcasts for radio station 2SER. These short radio scripts, written together with Julie Bromhead, 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 Branwell.

Christopher Cooper

FRANCIS GRUNDY: I invited Branwell Brontë to come to me at the Devonshire Hotel, Skipton, a distance of some 17 miles. As he never came to see me, I shortly made up my mind to visit him at Haworth, and was shocked at the wrecked and wretched appearance he presented. Yet he still craved for an appointment of any kind, in order that he might try the excitement of a change; of course uselessly. I now heard his painful history from his own lips — his happiness, his misery, and the sad story which was the end. He was miserable. At home the sternness of his father had never relaxed, and he was unfitted for outside social companionship. He was lost now, for he had taken again to opium. Very soon I went to Haworth again to see him, for the last time. From the little inn I sent for him to the great, square, cold-looking Rectory. I had ordered a dinner for two, and the room looked cosy and warm, the bright glass and silver pleasantly reflecting the sparkling firelight deeply toned by the red curtains. Whilst I waited his appearance, his father was shown in. Much of the Rector's old stiffness of manner was gone. He spoke of Branwell with more affection than I had ever heretofore heard him express, but he also spoke almost hopelessly. He said that when my message came, Branwell was in bed and had been almost too weak for the last few days to leave it;



Self portrait by Branwell Brontë, c1840

nevertheless he had insisted upon coming, and would be there immediately.

Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness — all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him, in my gayest manner, as I know he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence, and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened — frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something of leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a thing which he said he had not done for long, so our last interview was pleasing, though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death — indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think that it was so near. A few days afterwards he died.

MALE NARRATOR: These were the memories of Francis Grundy who had met Branwell when he worked on the railways. Mrs Gaskell in writing of Branwell's death said:

MRS GASKELL: I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life there was strength of will to do what it chose; and when the last agony began, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned.

MALE NARRATOR: Branwell's death deeply affected life at the parsonage as Charlotte wrote in one of her letters:

CHARLOTTE: We have hurried our dead out of our sight. A lull begins to succeed the gloomy tumult of last week. It is not permitted us to grieve for him who is gone as others grieve for those they lose. The removal of our only brother must necessarily be regarded by us rather in the light of a mercy than a chastisement. Branwell was his father's and his sisters' pride and hope in boyhood, but since manhood the case has been otherwise. It has been our lot to see him take a wrong bent; to hope, expect, wait his return to the right path; to know the sickness of hope deferred, the dismay of prayer baffled; to experience despair at last — and now to behold the sudden early obscure close of what might have been a noble career.

GEORGE PHILLIPS: Branwell, during the latter part of my acquaintance with him, was much altered for the worse in his personal appearance; but if he had altered in the same direction mentally, as Mrs Gaskell says he had, then he must have been a man of immense and brilliant intellect. For I have rarely heard more eloquent and thoughtful discourse, flashing so brilliantly with random jewels of wit, and made so sunny and musical with poetry, than that which flowed from his lips, during the evenings I passed with him at the Black Bull, in the village of Haworth. His figure was very slight; and he had, like his sister Charlotte, a superb forehead. But even when pretty deep in his cups he had not the slightest appearance of the sot that Mrs. Gaskell says he was. His great tawny mane, meaning thereby the hair of his head, was, it is true, somewhat dishevelled; but, apart from this, he gave no sign of intoxication. His eye was as bright, and his features were as animated, as they very well could be; and moreover, his whole manner gave indications of intense enjoyment.

On another evening, Branwell related to me the circumstances of his early life. The whole family, he said, was fond of drawing, and Charlotte was especially well-read in art-learning, and knew intimately the lives of all the old masters, and criticised their works with great discrimination and judgement. She was a good judge of paintings, and knew the secrets of composition and analysis. Branwell was also a good draughtsman, and had attempted oil-painting. He hoped, when he was about twenty, that he should have been sent to the Royal Academy, and all his studies were directed to that end. His father had provided them all with a good teacher; but Charlotte would go her own way, and ruined her eyesight, so that for two years she could not read at all, by making minute copies of steel-engravings; and she wasted over one of these, six precious months. Branwell knew how worthless his oil-paintings were; but he mentioned a family picture of his, containing portraits of Charlotte, Emily and Anne, which a friend of mine had seen, and spoke of in very high terms as portraiture, although not as art.

Poor Branwell told me of all his dreams and hopes when that bright vision of the Royal Academy floated before his eyes. He knew he had great and versatile talents, and had no fear

of failure if he could once begin a career. So enthusiastic was he about London at this time, that he got hold of all the maps he could find illustrating its highways and byways, its alleys, and back slums, and short cuts, and studied them so closely that he knew them all by heart, and often cheated the 'commercial gents' who came to the Black Bull into the belief that he, though a young man, was an old Londoner.

He confessed to me that, if it had been possible for him to have prosecuted his own purpose and the design and hope of his family by going to the Royal Academy as a student, when he was nineteen years of age or thereabouts, all would have been well with him. He was passionately fond of art.

FRANCIS GRUNDY: One very important statement which Branwell Brontë made to me throws some light upon a question which I observe has long vexed the critics; that is, the authorship of *Wuthering Heights*. It is well-nigh incredible that a book so marvellous in its strength, and in its dissection of the most morbid passions of diseased minds, could have been written by a young girl like Emily Brontë, who never saw much of the world or knew much of mankind, and whose studies of life and character if they are entirely her own, must have been chiefly evolved from her own imagination. Branwell Brontë declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great portion of *Wuthering Heights* himself. Indeed, it is impossible for me to read that story without meeting with many passages which I feel certain must have come from his pen. The weird fancies of diseased genius with which he used to entertain me in our long talks at Luddendenfoot, reappear in the pages of the novel, and I am inclined to believe that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister's.

MALE NARRATOR: At one time Branwell and a certain Mr. Dearden entered into a friendly poetic contest. William Dearden recalled the following incident:

WILLIAM DEARDEN: We met at the time and place appointed. I read the first act of the *Demon Queen*; but when Branwell dived into his hat — the usual receptacle of his fugitive scraps — where he supposed he had deposited his manuscript poem, he found he had by mistake placed there a number of stray leaves of a novel on which he had been trying his ''prentice hand'. Chagrined at the disappointment he had caused, he was about to return the papers to his hat, when both friends earnestly pressed him to read them, as they felt a curiosity to see how he could wield the pen of a novelist. After some hesitation, he complied with the request, and riveted our attention for about an hour, dropping each sheet, when read, into his hat. The story broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and he gave us the sequel, viva voce, together with the real names of the prototypes of his characters; but as some of these personages are still living, I refrain from pointing them out to the public. He said he had not yet fixed upon a title for his production, and was afraid he should never be able to meet with a publisher who would have the hardihood to usher it into the world. The scenes of the fragment which Branwell developed were the same as those in *Wuthering Heights*, which Charlotte Brontë confidently asserts was the production of her sister Emily.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Patrick Branwell Brontë – was his the wild genius that brought forth *Wuthering Heights* and not that of his sister Emily? Some have believed it so and certainly it makes a very credible explanation for the contrast between the pagan fury which erupts all over the pages of the novel, and the sheltered calm of the life of a country parson's daughter. Yet the evidence seems to point very strongly to the fact that Branwell's influence stopped a good way short of writing the novel.

MALE NARRATOR: When Patrick Branwell Brontë was born in 1817 he found that he already had three older sisters Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte and the next couple of years brought him two more sisters, Emily and Anne. As the only son, it was naturally expected that he would be the one to bring distinction to the family, to firmly establish it in its second generation in the middle class. Yet despite some early promise, there are only two events in his life which justify his continuing memory: his birth and his death. His birth because he happened to be born brother to the most famous sisters of English literature, and his death because of the tragic yet fascinating story of the slow decay which preceded it – first of soul then of body and finally of mind.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Branwell's decline affected his sisters in different ways. Charlotte had very little patience with him. Emily with her more uncomplicated attitude had compassion on him as she might towards a sick dog, without any question whether that compassion was deserved. It is reported that whenever her father stormed across to

the Black Bull, in order to drag the drunken Branwell back home, Emily would slip out, take a short cut through the grave yard and tap on the window to warn him.

MALE NARRATOR: Emily and Branwell were quite close. After his death it was, according to the old servants, Emily who mourned most for her brother. 'She died of a broken heart for love of her brother,' is the report of Martha Brown's sister. In fact she died less than three months after her brother. Some have gone so far as to say that Emily was Branwell in the way that Cathy was Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. An overstatement surely, for Emily never followed Branwell into his Byronic infernal world. She seems to have been the most contented of the Brontë children yet such was her genius that she could understand how the world might look through other eyes. And the insight into her brother's experiences fed this genius.

The period which brought Emily and Branwell closest together was when she returned home from Roe Head School, Anne having gone to take her place alongside Charlotte. Emily and Branwell were then in their late teens.

MALE NARRATOR: It was no joyous situation she found on returning home. Branwell was there having just returned ignominiously from London with all his hopes unfulfilled. This was reckoned a disaster by the elders of the family. Because they had built such extravagant expectations on Branwell's talents, their disappointment, Emily soon found, was out of all proportion.

The true reasons for his failure could not be explained to or understood by them; he had simply found himself unequal to the strain of competing with far more capable and better qualified young men than himself. He had undergone a mental and moral collapse, as it were, within sight of his goal, and had accomplished none of the objectives for which he had gone up to London. He made no attempt to present his letters of introduction to the Secretary of the Academy, to the illustrious teachers whose pupil he might have become; without giving himself even the chance of an interview at which his work could be examined, he fled before the ordeal, a beaten man. To explain his penniless return to his father and aunt, who had financed him for a long sojourn, he had to invent tales of robbery in the coach to London; whereas he had spent his small patrimony on 'little squibs of rhum' in the 'snug' of the Castle Tavern in Holborn, among the prize fighters and the artists' models whose ordinary it was, and in whose robust but kindly company he found some comfort. His inability to face the realities of an academic training, and his moral deflation before the jostling London crowds, induced a feeling little short of terror, and was such a pitiable thing that he could not speak of it without inventing a score of false reasons to account for it. The bitterness of failure lay for Branwell far more in the loss of prestige at home than in a wrecked career. He never showed the same passion for painting that he did for writing. What he had done so far, from childhood upwards had come without effort; when a great effort was required — an effort he felt that was beyond his powers, he simply gave in.

For his miserable experiences in London Emily felt nothing but sympathy; his plight provoked the stirring of a first common cause between them, which neither had ever explored before. The sight of Branwell's hollow-eyed misery as he crept about the village, trying to elude his former cronies, was pitiable indeed, strange in its novelty, appealing to every impulse in her nature. His pride was cruelly wounded, his sense of frustration intolerably acute. He had been meant for something better, so his family had always claimed, and Emily's sympathy for the wretched figure he cut in the home circle now went very deep. Every feeling that was generous in her rose in response to Branwell's misery: if she had resented his assumption of superiority over his sisters in the past this was now all forgotten. It needed the collapse of Branwell's vanity and the stirring of Emily's protective sense (the same she extended to the injured creatures on the moors) to bring these two together.

Whatever injury his vanity had suffered, the urge to write had not been crushed in him. As Emily listened to his confident talk of contributing to *Blackwood*'s, there could be no doubt that he retained plenty of mental energy. Almost immediately after his wretched return from London he set about writing a long narrative called *The History of Captain Henry Hastings* — a rebel whose ill-success on entering the world, whose gullibility and insignificance in women's eyes, were a penetrating self-portrait, such as he could not have attempted in paint. The history of his lamentable adventures in London, written in the character of Charles Wentworth, followed in due course, a promising sign that he was exorcising the evil fortune that had crushed him.

MALE NARRATOR: Branwell's literary output, at this time, was fantastic. The complete history of the kingdom of Angria in nine parts, including several long stories and many poems, covers sheet after sheet of manuscripts, scattered as they are today, and housed in various collections throughout the world might, after years of study, give the patient reader some idea of this extraordinary conception.

Here was this imaginary colony, situated where we should find Ghana and Nigeria today, founded by the original soldier adventurers when Branwell was eleven or twelve years old; then split into kingdoms, united into an empire, given a written constitution and an army, its geography and population noted in minute particular, relief maps drawn, military and political history recorded, the life stories of the individual leaders, with their personal appearance, qualities, failings, and emotions, all described in detail.

Branwell's canvas of his friend John Brown, Haworth sexton

Those manuscripts of Branwell's which have been transcribed, the poems and stories which have been printed, show no outstanding literary merit. Manner and style are crude, the events described betray the young author's naive preoccupation with gambling and dissipation, the most deadly sins, perhaps, to a boy brought up by a Methodist aunt and an evangelical father. Nevertheless, although many a poet and novelist scribbles in adolescence, foreshadowing more mature work to come, not many found a colony and people it, as this boy and his sister founded Angria, so shaping its history and the lives of its people that to its creators the colony because a living entity.

In August, 1836, Branwell, for the purpose of reference, summarised the early life of Alexander Percy, intending to expand it later:

> This child, in the first years of his life, was a beautiful angelic looking being with golden hair and blue eyes, and a musical voice, and of a soul capricious, passionate, indulged, and bent with amazing devotion towards the science of music, for which he discovered a passion in his earliest infancy that only strengthened as it grew into a soul-wrapping sort of Idolatry. He lived in music, and when disengaged from his grand pursuit he wandered about or laid himself down for hours on hours in the stately park or girdling woods beneath the glorious skies of an African summer afternoon. The rich luxuriance of nature, the deep blue of heaven, the gold and brightness of the clouds, the dazzling effulgence of the sun, filled his unreasoning but sensitive spirit with a delight which he could not express or attempt to name.

While still in his teens, Alexander married the Lady Augusta Romana di Segovia, a beautiful but unscrupulous lady, who subsequently arranged that Sdeath should murder her husband's father for the sake of the estate which Alexander would then inherit. The lady herself was subsequently despatched with poison, and Alexander married Mary Henrietta Wharton, daughter of Lord George Wharton of Ainwick, Nigritia, a young and lovely creature, with a generous heart and quick warm feeling, with an imagination that spoke in the centre of her eyes, and a heart that could hardly last without friends and friendship round it. When she died of consumption Alexander, his heart broken, 'commenced a run of hollow heartless dissipation', and was imprisoned for treachery against his superior officer. Threatened by his creditors and by the husband of a lady whom he had seduced, in despair he decided to leave the shores of his native Africa.

But once out on the open sea his active unprincipled mind began to speculate upon some method of retrieving his broken fortunes. Piracy with his men and means seemed the likeliest way. By crossing the Atlantic northward into the seas of Europe he entered the lawless and bloody trade, taking and cruelly destroying vessels, till his name the 'Rover' became a terror of the sea.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Fragments of Angrian Tales, suggestions in poems, all give tantalising hints of Harriet, who met Percy when he was paying court to his first wife, the Italian Augusta Di Segovia. After many lines imploring the Almighty for pardon and wondering whether 'fires infernal' will hold her down in hideous pains Harriet declares through Branwell's poetry a cry that must have been Branwell's own.

Oh, I led a life of sinning
At her beck, whose soul was sin;
Yet my spirit ceased repining
If a look from him 'twould win!
Bright that band with hellish glory
Circling round Augusta's throne,
Dark those hearts whose influence o'er me,

Led me in and lured me on—
All their Mirth I knew was hollow,
Gain and guilt their path and aim,
Yet I cared not what might follow—
Deaf to warning, dead to shame.
What to me if Jordan Hall
Held all Hell within its wall,
So I might in his embrace
Drown the misery of disgrace!

Many lines further on poor Harriet admits that 'faces blushed to name her name, and silence hushed the adulterer's shame', and that:

Three short words might speak her lot—
Fallen, Forsaken, and Forgot!

Despite the absurdity of some of the verse, the reader feels a sense of regret that so much has been left unsaid. Jordan Hall, the abode of the wicked lady Augusta di Segovia, which 'held all Hell within its wall', must have whipped its creator to a high pitch of excitement; while the wicked Augusta herself was surely a forerunner of Emily's Augusta, fatal heroine of her Gondal saga, begun that very year.

There can be no doubt that Branwell and Emily, during the time when Charlotte and Anne were at Roe Head, collaborated in ideas, if not in actual incidents or verse. One of the earlier Angrian tales, *A Leaf From An Unopened Volume*, attributed to Charlotte and now in the library of A. Edward Newton, contains so many names used later by Emily in her Gondal poems that it may indeed be a contribution by the younger sister to the Angrian series.

This story, dated 1834, concerns the second generation of the Angrian dynasty. The names of the Duke of Zamorna's sons and daughters, the Archduke Julius (later Emperor), the Archdukes Adrian and Alexander, and the princess Irene and of her maid of honour Zorayda, who played the guitar, are too reminiscent of Emily's later creations not to leave the reader with a strong impression that when Emily began her Gondal saga she did so as an off-shoot from Angria.

MALE NARRATOR: During the Christmas holidays of 1836-37 both Branwell and Charlotte endeavoured to atone for the secret delight that filled them when they were writing the Angrian stories by composing and revising laborious verse, in the belief that, if it were ever to win recognition, it must set a high moral and religions note. Poets they were determined to be, rather than story-tellers; verse could be sent to Mr. Wordsworth and Mr Southey for criticism, but seduction and passion must remain hidden from any eyes but their own.

Charlotte wrote to Southey and Branwell to Wordsworth, Branwell enclosing a long poem describing the infant Percy asleep, before he had fallen from grace. In his letter he explained: 'What I send you is the prefatory scene of a much longer subject, in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, till, as youth hardens towards age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin.' He was alluding, of course, to his whole Percy Saga, and a word of encouragement from the greatest English poet of the day would no doubt have set him to work upon a more polished version of what he hoped would be an epic poem longer than Wordsworth's *Prelude*. He received no answer. His letter disgusted the ageing poet, who told Southey that it contained 'gross flattery and plenty of abuse of other poets'.

Sir-I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgement upon what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth to this the nineteenth year of my life I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank; because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke – out of the impulse and feelings of the mind; nor could I help it, for what came, came out, and there was the end of it. For as to self-conceit, that could not receive food from flattery, since to this hour not half-a-dozen people in the world know that I have penned a line.

My aim, sir, is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone; that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on. Sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk of life, would give a further title to the notice of

the world; and then again poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory. But nothing of all this can ever be begun without means, and as I didn't possess these I must in every shape strive to gain them. Surely in this day, when there is not a writing poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open if a better man can step forward.

FEMALE NARRATOR: No answer came. Neither from Wordsworth, nor from the editor of *Blackwood*'s, to whom Branwell had also written ten days before. It is very evident that he had no sense of judgement where either his own work was concerned, or that of established poets.

The poem that be sent to Wordsworth contained such lines as:

Oh, how I could wish to fly
Far away through yonder sky,
O'er those trees upon the breeze
To a paradise on high!

A Sunday School child of seven could have done better. Possibly this was, in fact, the effort of Branwell at a much earlier age — perhaps inspired by Mr. Brontë's *Cottage Poems*, put away in a drawer and revised with the mistaken idea that this sort of stuff would appeal to the Lakeland poet.

Yet Branwell's poetry in not uniformly bad. The following lines were written by him just a few days before he wrote to Wordsworth and they are surely better verse.

BRANWELL:

I'm dying away in dull decay,
I feel and find the sands are down,
The evening's latest lingering ray
At last from my wild Heaven has flown.
I feel and find that I am cast
From hope, and peace, and power, and pride,
A withered leaf on autumn's blast,
A scattered wreck on ocean's tide.

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Jane Eyre – movie review

As part of the Sydney Film Festival, I went to see the new *Jane Eyre* movie. It is directed by Cary Fukunaga, starring Judi Dench as the housekeeper Mrs Fairfax, Michael Fassbender as Rochester and Australian Mia Wasikowska as Jane Eyre. Prior to viewing the movie Mia Wasikowska – who played Alice in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wondereland* - arrived on stage, having apparently been mobbed in the foyer of the State Theatre where the movie was being shown. Looking the complete opposite to Jane Eyre, with short blonde hair and dressed in a white sequin sheath dress, she was interviewed bySydney Film Festival director Clare Stewart, before we settled down to watch the movie. While at least 18 movie versions of the novel have been made (including a silent version in 1910) not all of the actors playing Jane have been the same age as the governess, which Mia Wasikowska was when this version was filmed.

And while the movie was faithful to Charlotte Brontë's novel, the structure had been changed somewhat, beginning with Jane running away from Thornfield Hall. Those not familiar with the novel would soon discover her reasons for running away through a series of flashbacks - flashbacks to Jane's childhood both with the Reed family at Gateshead and her time at Lowood School.

Unlike some of the other versions of the movie, this version includes Jane's stay with the Rivers family, who rescue her from the moors and take her into their home for a year. We also follow Jane as she teaches in the charity school and later rejects the offer of marriage from St John Eyre Rivers.

Michael Fassbinder is well cast as the ill-tempered and volatile Rochester. And while the film does a wonderful job of showing the passionate


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relationship and sexual tension between Rochester and Jane, I for one, since reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel written by Jean Rhys telling Bertha Rochester's story, have never been able to feel quite the same about Rochester's dilemma. Judi Dench, who always gives a great performance, shines as the kindly housekeeper Mrs Fairfax, giving the film a homely feeling amongst the Gothic darkness of Thornfield Hall.

But in the end, for once we don't arrive at the 'reader I married him' moment, as the movie finishes when Jane and Rochester meet once again following the fire and destruction of Thornfield Hall. Nevertheless we are in no doubt what the outcome will be for these two star-crossed lovers.

I think this new version of an old classic is well worth watching as the story is revitalised while retaining what Charlotte Brontë wrote so well.

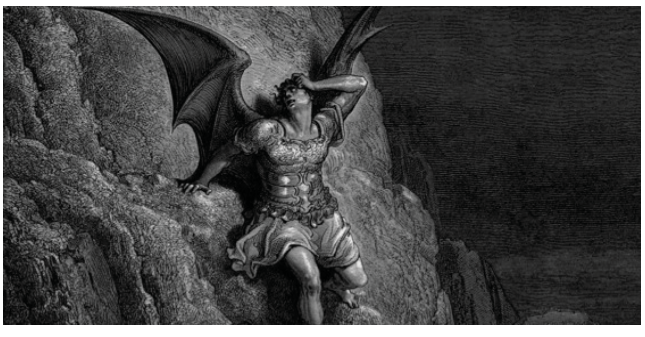
Michelle Cavanagh

For release in 2013 — *Paradise Lost*

Sydney director, Alex Proyas, is currently casting for the new big-budget, effects-heavy screen adaptation of John Milton's 17th century biblical poem, *Paradise Lost*, centring on an epic war between archangels Lucifer and Michael. There will be plenty of CGI and grand-scale set pieces in Heaven, Hell and Eden. Production begins in Sydney in January 2012, release in late 2013

The cast currently includes Bradley Cooper as Lucifer, and Ben Walker and Casey Affleck as the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Callan McAuliffe (the young Gatsby in Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby)* is also featured.

Sarah Burns



Right: James MacArdell, MARY, DUCHESS OF ANCASTER Mezzotint after a painting by Thomas Hudson National Portrait Gallery, London.

Below: Thomas Hudson, LADY OXENDEN, Art Gallery of NSW, purchased 1952

Dressing for Ranelagh

The Society's 'Brontës and Education' weekend in August was at Ranelagh, NSW southern highlands. It was not, probably fortunately, an occasion to 'dress'. In the 18th century however, attendance at the Ranelagh masquerades certainly did *require such 'dress'.* ***Sarah Burns*** *produces examples:*

Mary, Duchess of Ancaster, was a leader of fashion in the 18th Century, and Mistress of the Robes to the young Queen Charlotte. She is shown here dressed for a masquerade at ***Ranelagh*** wearing a variation of the fashionable 'Van Dyck dress' in which artists had portrayed sitters since the 1730s. The feathered hat and fan, the puffed sleeves and the skirt pinned up at the sides are all taken from the costume worn in a portrait then thought to show Helena Fourment by Van Dyck (it is now identified as Susanna Fourment and attributed to Rubens), but the 17th Century ruff is merely hinted at in the lace around the Duchess' neck.

It became fashionable for English ladies to adopt fancy or historical dress for the very popular Ranelagh Masquerades. After a masquerade given by the Duchess of Norfolk in 1742, Horace Walpole described seeing: 'quantities of pretty Vandykes, and all kinds of old pictures walked out of their frames'. Thomas Hudson's portrait of the Duchess was so popular that it was engraved by James MacArdell and published in 1757 wit many society ladies requesting that they be depicted in the same manner, including Lady Oxenden whose portrait is in the Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales**.**

Sarah Burns

John Martin and the Brontës

At the October 2011 meeting of the Society, the current exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London was discussed, featuring prints by John Martin. The Brontë parsonage displays prints of Martin's paintings

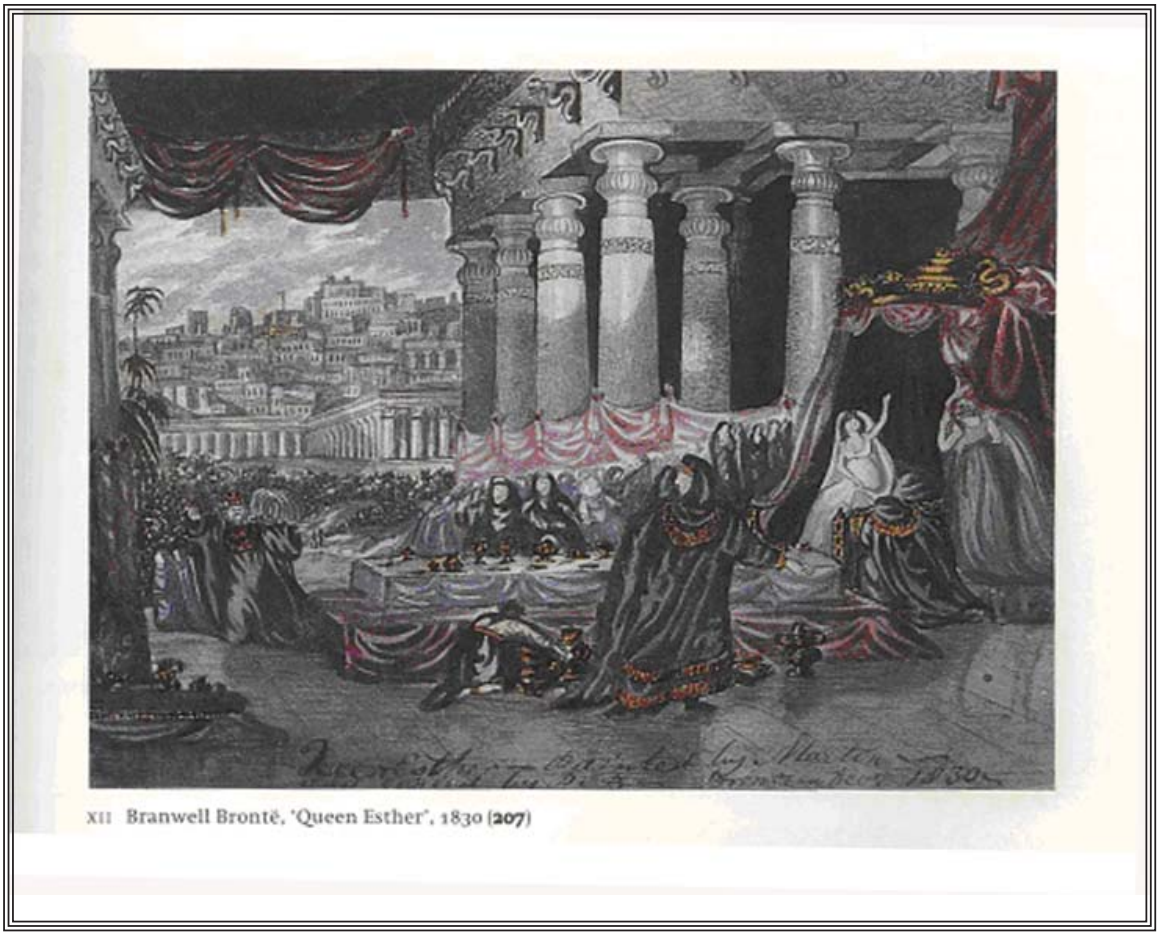
At the age of 12, Branwell reproduced Martin's extravagant style in his painting of *Queen Esther* (below). John Martin (1789–1854) was one of the great visual influences of the Brontës in their juvenilia and later novels. A number of his engravings hung on the walls of the Haworth Parsonage. His large melodramatic paintings were very popular in the early 19th century. In the 1820s he published a series of 24 mezzotints illustrating John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, followed by another great series, *Illustrations of the Bible*, from 1831-35.

Above: John Martin *Belshazzar's Feast*

The Art Gallery of NSW recently purchased a collection of more than 60 prints consisting of mezzotints engraved by Martin, line engravings made by commercial engravers, other prints emulating Martin's style and a number parodying his compositions outright.

A major retrospective *John Martin: Apocalypse* recently opned at the Tate in London and runs until 15 January 2012.

Below: 12yo Branwell Brontë's copy of John Martin's *Queen Esther*



xii Branwell Brontë, 'Queen Esther', 1830 (207)

Arthur Bell Nicholls

This (part of) a newspaper article (quoted verbatim) from 1906 on the death of Charlotte Brontë's husband was found online at www.brontefamily.org/nicholls.html

The article was a random find in one of the many used bookstores of Hay-On-Wye. It fell out of Clement Shorter's Charlotte Bronte and Her Circle. *Unfortunately, whoever clipped it did not clip all of it,`nor identify the publication!*

The Rev. Mr Nicholls, husband of the author of 'Jane Eyre', died only last week [1906]

Like a voice from the dead past comes the announcement by cable of the death, on Dec. 3, of the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, the husband of Charlotte Brontë. This generation, and in fact, the one preceding it, has been accustomed to consider the author of *Jane Eyre* and all those belonging to her as people of a bygone time, so that the news that her husband has been living all these years comes as a surprise to almost everybody.

Arthur Bell Nicholls was born in County Antrim, Ireland, in 1817, of Scotch parentage on both sides. After going to the Royal School of Banagher, Ireland, he was graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, and succeeded Mr Smith, a countryman of his, in the curacy of Haworth Parish, Yorkshire, England, the incumbent of which was the Rev Patrick Brontë, father of Charlotte Brontë.

Arthur Bell Nicholls, c1854

Charlotte Bronte's first impressions of her future husband were not particularly favorable 'I cannot for my life' she says in a letter to a friend, 'see those germs of goodness in him which you discovered'. In another letter she says; 'A cold, faraway sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr Nicholls'.

This attitude was due entirely to Mr Nicholls' Scotch reticence, so different from the light-heartedness of the Yorkshire people to whom she was accustomed in Haworth. But her feelings soon began to change toward the silent curate she refers to in *Shirley* as 'the true Christian gentleman ...'

… Parsonage very painful …. made extended visits to Manchester and London. [para incomplete]

Mr Nicholls, however, did not give up his suit. He continued to correspond with Miss Brontë from Ireland. Her father's objections were based entirely on the inadequacy of Mr Nicholls' prospects. When he saw the failing health of his daughter, he gave his consent to the marriage. Mr Nicholls resumed his curacy at Haworth, after giving assurances that after his marriage the old man's 'convenience and seclusion were to be scrupulously respected.'

The marriage took place on June 20, 1854. The bride was given away by her old teacher and lifelong friend, Miss Wooler. Soon after the marriage she went with her husband to pay a visit to his relations in Ireland, whom she speaks of pleasantly in her letters. 'Some of the old servants and followers of the family,' she says, 'tell me that I am a most fortunate person, for that I have got one of the best gentlemen in the country.' After a short tour through the Killarney Lake region, Mr Nicholls and his wife returned to Haworth in order to be near old Mr Brontë. Owing to his desire to remain with the old gentleman, Mr Nicholls shortly afterward refused the offer of a more advantageous post.

Mrs Gaskell refers to Charlotte Brontë's married life as 'that short spell of exceeding happiness'. Much has been made by some writers of the more or less disparaging remarks made by Miss Brontë about Mr Nicholls in the first days of their acquaintance, with a view to showing that her married life was unhappy. According to the best authorities there seems to be no ground whatever for this view. Even Mrs Gaskell, who is described by another writer on Charlotte Brontë as 'unfriendly' to Mr Nicholls, speaks of him in the most glowing terms, and takes occasion to contradict a statement to the effect that he discouraged her literary labors by citing a passage from one of her letters written during the short period of her married life, in which she speaks of Mr Nicholls' interest in a forthcoming book by her, a chapter of which she and he had been working on together.

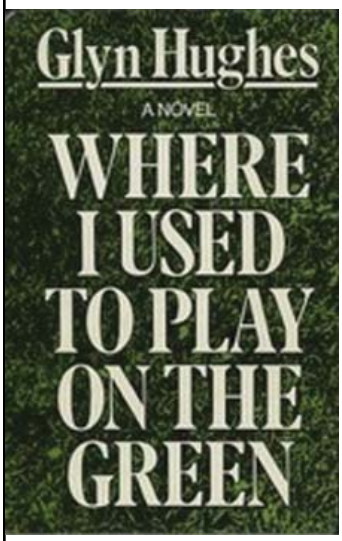
Early in 1855 her health began to fail. 'A wren would starve on what she eats' said one of her

friends. In March her condition became hopeless. Just before her death, wakening for an instant from her stupor, she saw the woe-worn face of her husband, who during her illness had been, in her own words, 'the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had.' Lifting her eyes to his she murmured: 'Oh, I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us after we have been so happy.' She died on March 31, 1855. Mr Nicholls remained at the lonely Haworth parsonage to comfort the declining years of old Mr Brontë. 'He was a patient companion of his hours of pain and weariness,' says one writer, 'and a faithful guardian of that living legacy which had been bequeathed to him by the woman whom he loved. By this self-sacrificing life he did greater honor to the memory of Charlotte Brontë than by the most tender and vivid appreciation of her intellectual greatness.'

After his wife's death pilgrims came to Haworth from many countries, but no country furnished so many and enthusiastic visitors as the United States. Mr Raymond, the editor of *The New York Times,* had a pleasant interview with Mr Nicholls and old Mr Brontë shortly after Charlotte Brontë's death, in which Mr Nicholls said that 'the words 'New York' upon Mr Raymond's card were quite sufficient to insure him a welcome.' But the quiet husband drew back instinctively from publicity. All the controversies that raged after the death of his wife moved him to write only two letters to *The Halifax Guardian*, which Mr Clement K Shorter characterizes as 'masterly'[article incomplete].

Arthur Bell Nicholls, photographed c 1867

Death of 'Brontë' novelist



Glyn Hughes, the Yorkshire writer 'best known for his imaginative insights into the Brontë family', has died aged 75. (*UK Daily Telegraph* 6/7/11) His first novel, *Where I Used to Play On the Green* was published in 1982 and was based on the career of the notoriously dogmatic and fervently evangelical 18th century parson William Grimshaw, Patrick Brontë's immediate predecessor at Haworth. The novel received great praise, being awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize, and Hughes was acclaimed as Yorkshire's answer to Thomas Hardy.

Hughes then immersed himself into the Brontë lives and works, the result being a fictional portrait of the family published in 1996 and simply entitled *Brontë. The Yorkshire Post* stated that'It is the combination of immersion in the evidence and historical imagination that makes his novel the best likely to be written about the sisters', whilst the *Daily Mail* critic thought it 'compulsive... Brontë fans will relish Hughes' novel'. Beryl Bainbridge declared that 'No-one describes the Brontës' world better than he does', whilst *The Times* lauded his passionate involvement with the whole Brontë scene.

Catherine Barker

1812 - A Year in the Lives of the Brontës

The beginnings of the Brontë family

8 January	Wesleyan Academy at Woodhouse Grove opens, originally for 8 pupils (70 by 1813); John Fennell, an associate of Patrick, appointed First Master and Patrick appointed an examiner.
11-12 April	Luddites attack William Cartwright's Rawfolds Mill at Liversedge and receive their first defeat (later used in *Shirley*).
June	Patrick meets Maria Branwell, who is staying with her cousin John Fennell.
End August-September	Patrick proposes to and is accepted by Maria whilst on a visit to the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey.
14 November	Maria Branwell hears of the shipwreck resulting in the loss of most of her personal belongings being sent from Penzance.
29 December	Marriage of Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell, at Guiseley church, near Leeds, conducted by William Morgan, and of William Morgan to Jane Fennell, conducted by Patrick Brontë, both brides given away by John Fennell.

Ref: The Oxford Companion to the Brontës, Christine Alexander & Margaret Smith,

Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sarah Burns

STOP PRESS

Charlotte Brontë Treasure for Sale!

Sotheby's announce the upcoming sale of Charlotte Brontë's 1830
Young Men's Magazine *manuscript, expecting a price of £200,000 to £300,000*

Extract from Sotheby's announcement.

Photograph by Sotheby's

LONDON.- Sotheby's London announces the sale of an unpublished manuscript by Charlotte Brontë as part of its sale of English Literature, History, Children's Books & Illustrations on Thursday, 15th December 2011, estimated at £200,000-300,000*. Never before seen by scholars, it is the most important Brontë manuscript to have appeared at auction in more than thirty years, and is one of only a handful of such manuscripts remaining in private hands. Set in 'Glass Town', the earliest fictional world that the four Brontë siblings created, and written by a 14-year-old Charlotte in miniature magazine format, *The Young Men's Magazine*, Number 2, is dated August 1830.

Gabriel Heaton, Sotheby's Senior Specialist, Books & Manuscripts Department, comments, 'Crafted with extraordinary care, this minute manuscript marks Charlotte Brontë's first burst of creativity and, significantly, provides a rare and intimate insight into one of history's great literary minds. It contains a colourful tale of murder and madness which includes a precursor to one of the most famous scenes in Jane Eyre – the moment when Bertha, Mr Rochester's insane wife seeks revenge by setting fire to the bed curtains in her husband's chamber.'

THE WORLD OF 'GLASS TOWN'

The childhood empires of the Brontë children's imaginations play a significant role in our understanding and appreciation of their works, which include some of the greatest novels of the nineteenth century. The world of 'Glass Town', the first expression of the incredible imaginative community at Haworth parsonage in Yorkshire where the children grew up, had its origins in a gift of toy soldiers: 'Papa bought Branwell some soldiers from Leeds. When Papa came home it was night and we were in bed, so the next morning Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed and I snatched one up and exclaimed, 'This is the Duke of Wellington! It shall be mine!'...' (Charlotte Brontë, *The History of the Year*, 12 March 1829). Following Charlotte's lead, each of the siblings took one soldier as their own and named them

for a hero: Branwell chose Napoleon in a riposte to Charlotte's Wellington, whilst the younger sisters Emily and Anne named theirs for the explorers Edward Parry and William Ross.

The children assembled a world around these characters – a 'confederacy' in which all four siblings had their own realm – from the material to hand: the towering cities of 'Glass Town' were inspired by prints of Biblical illustrations by John Martin which hung in Haworth Parsonage. 'Glass Town' wonderfully illustrates the Brontë siblings' precocious imaginations.

The Young Men's Magazine, Number 2 contains more than 4,000 words painstakingly crammed on to 19 pages, each measuring approximately 35 x 61mm.

This imaginary world was intensely private and the minuteness of these works ensured that they were easily hidden and could only be read without the aid of a magnifying glass by the sharp eyes of a child. The manuscript's table of contents lists 'A letter from Lord Charles Wellesley,' a remarkably vivid adventure tale; 'The Midnight Song by Marquis Duoro,' a poem; 'Frenchman's Journal,' a continuation of a fictional diary series; and a mocked-up classifieds section, 'Advertisements.'

The manuscript is encased in the original, specially made protective red folder, in addition to an equally minute brown morocco slip-off case with gilt lettering on the spine. Charlotte Brontë's manuscripts were dispersed in the nineteenth century but the vast majority are now in institutional collections in the UK and USA.

Further Bronte Sale Highlights to be offered

A further eleven Brontë highlights to be offered in Sotheby's sale of English Literature, History, Children's Books & Illustrations on Thursday, 15th December, 2011, include an extremely rare copy of the first edition of Anne Bronte's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), inscribed by the author to their friend Ellen Nussey 'by her affectionate friend' (est. £30,000 – 50,000), and Ellen Nussey's copy of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), with Ellen's ownership signature (est. £70,000 – 100,000), in addition to Ellen's annotated copy of Elizabeth Gaskell's pioneering - and at the time notorious - first biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) (est. £4000 – 6000).

Each of these eleven lots to be offered are formerly from the library of Sir George John Armytage, FSA., 6th baronet Kirklees (1842-1918), of Kirkleees Park, Brighouse in West Yorkshire. which some have thought to be the model for Ferndean Manor in *Jane Eyre*. The local parish church, where Armytage is buried, is a few miles away at Hartshead, of which Rev. Patrick Brontë was curate from 1811 to 1816, before later moving to Thornton and then Haworth. Armytage was an active member, and sometime chairman, of the recently formed Brontë Society. Eight of the lots are a special group of presentation copies of first and other editions of the Brontë sisters which he acquired in May 1889 from Charlotte Brontë's lifelong friend and correspondent Ellen Nussey (1817-1897), the chief source for Elizabeth's Gaskell's pioneering biography of Charlotte Brontë.

From www.artdaily.org

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Society Notices

The Brontë Society has a new web address – www.ausbronte.net

And a new email address – info@ausbronte.net

From 2012, the Society will have its meetings on Level 1 of the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169-171 Castlereagh Street, just up from Town Hall. This change has been made because of the level of service this new venue offers, and the fact that members can have a light lunch together after the meeting on the same site. The time is unchanged – 10am for 10.30am.

This is slightly more expensive for the Society, but there are extra advantages – a comfortable room is already set up for us, with tea and coffee ready available for members. A screen is also in place, for images illustrating talks. Lunch after the meeting will also become easier and more pleasant. We hope for a larger attendance of members in these comfortable surroundings.

Membership subscriptions are due, and for the very first time for this Society, it has been seen as necessary to increase the subscription amount. Payment will be accepted at the Christmas luncheon on 1 December and at the first meeting 17 March 2012, or cheques can be posted to the treasurer Michael Links at 13 Greygum Place, Gymea Bay, 2227.

$30	standard membership
$40	two members at the same addrtess
$25	for members of the UK Brontë Society
$20	for fulltime students, and concession card holders

ABA President, Dr Christopher Cooper

Christopher Cooper, who has been President of the Australian Brontë Association since its inception 14 years ago, has decided not to stand as President in 2012. He will, however, remain active on the committee.

As members, we owe a very great deal of appreciation to Christopher for his commitment, the breadth of his knowledge of the Brontë world and canon, and the sheer amount of time and effort he has given us over the time of this involvement. Christopher will continue as the ABA representative to the UK Brontë Society and will keep us informed of Haworth activities.

We thank Christopher, Elisabeth and Marloesje wholeheartedly for their hospitality and their long contribution to the ABA, and look forward to their continued participation in future meetings and activities.

PROGRAM FOR 2012

This symbol indicates meetings held at the Level 1, Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169-171 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, between Park and Market Streets, just up from Town Hall station. Meeting charge is $5. Morning tea from 10am - meeting begins at 10:30am

abaW

Saturday 17 MARCH: **Annual General Meeting**
Christine Alexander
Charlotte Brontë and 'The Treasures of the Bible'

Christine Alexander will look at the beliefs that shaped Charlotte Brontë's reading of the Bible. She will explore the way these beliefs were reinforced by Charlotte's familiarity with the biblical paintings of John Martin as well as the ways in which Charlotte's use of the Bible informs and embellishes her writing.

Saturday 2 JUNE **Will Christie**
Charlotte Brontë and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazin*e

In this paper Will Christie discusses aspects of the history of the magazine and its contributors, as well as the influence of the magazine on Charlotte Brontë's writing and conceptions of writing.

Saturday 4 AUGUST **Susannah Fullerton**
Charlotte Brontë in London

In 1851 Charlotte Bronte visited the great Exhibition for the second time and spent 3 hours looking at the exotic and fascinating exhibits. By that time she knew the capital city quite well. But what else did she see and do when in London? Who did she meet and dine with, where did she stay? Susannah Fullerton recounts the story of Charlotte's London visits, with illustrations.

Saturday 6 OCTOBER **Michelle Cavanagh**
The Brontës and Food

Eating is one of the pleasures of life. But how different is our diet to that of the Brontë family? And what constituted good food in 19th century Yorkshire? From the backkground of a Yorkshire grandmother, Michelle Cavanagh explores the Brontë relationship to food, in their own lives and those of some of their characters.

Saturday 1 DECEMBER: Christmas lunch with Dickens' Society at the Castlereagh (12 for 12:30)

ABA Website: www.ausbronte.net **Email: info@ausbronte.net**

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	Production: Helen Malcher	**9416 5444**	**hm@malcher.com.au**

Members are strongly encouraged to submit pieces for this, their Newsletter.