The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

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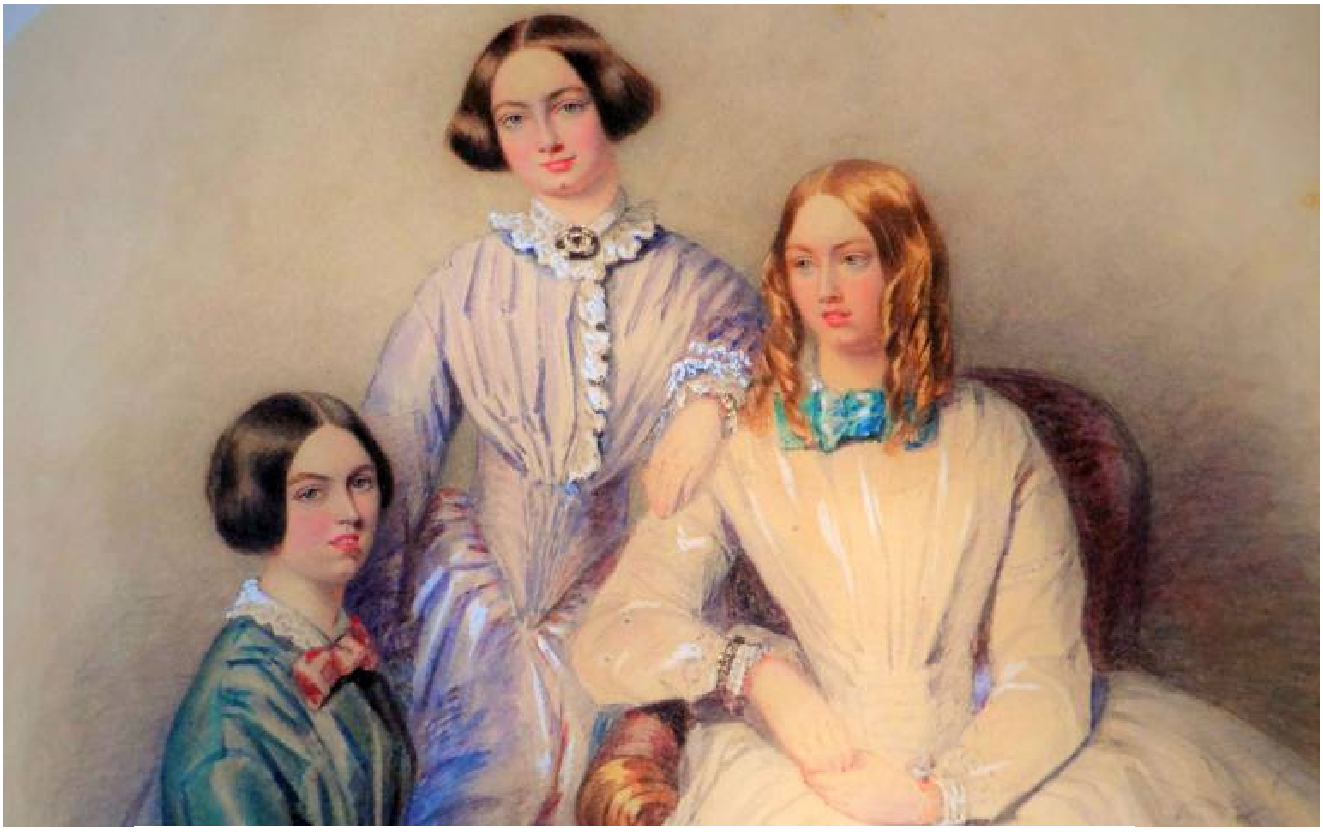
NEWLY DISCOVERED PORTRAIT OF THE BRONTË SISTERS

From the UK Daily Telegraph, spotted by Catherine Barker

By Anita Singh, Arts andEntertainment Editor



The Brontë Sisters watercolour attributed to Sir Edwin Landseer
Credit: JPHumbert/BNPS

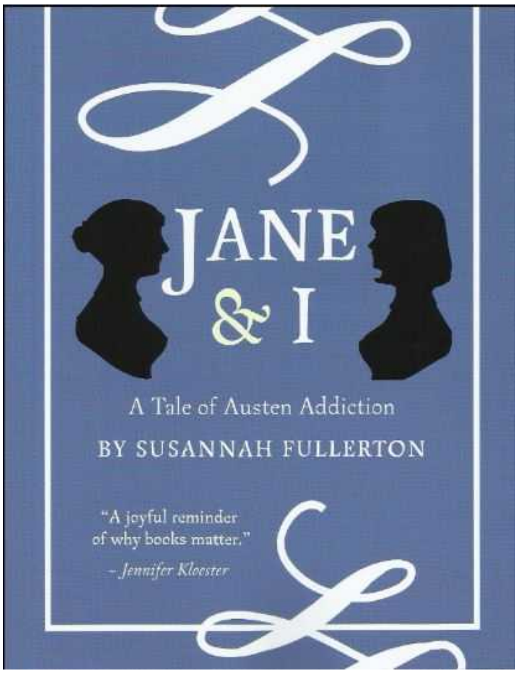
A painting acquired by mistake in an auction house muddle has been sold for £50,000 after it was identified as the earliest known portrait of the Brontë sisters. The watercolour is believed to be the work of Sir Edwin Landseer, making it only the second group portrait of the sisters in existence. The anonymous seller was given the portrait a decade ago. He had successfully bid for a different work but, when he arrived to collect it, was told it had been lost. By way of apology, he was offered a painting of three women for the same price of “a couple of hundred pounds”. He accepted and set about trying to identify the sitters, intrigued that one of them held a notebook and pen. Richard Ormond, a Landseer expert, has identified it as one of the artist’s works. He said it is “undoubtedly related” to a pastel drawing in the archives of the National Portrait Gallery, attributed to Landseer. The artist is thought to have met Charlotte, Anne and Emily in 1833 when they visited Bolton Abbey in North Yorkshire, where he was an artist in residence. At the time, he was a young painter, yet to become a favourite of Queen Victoria. The portrait is dated 1834. J P Humbert, a Northamptonshire auctioneer that specialises in Brontë memorabilia, has sold the portrait for £50,000. Jonathan Humbert said: “The seller bought the painting when another auction house lost his original purchase and offered this to him as a substitute. “He had no idea who the sitters might be but thought it was quite well done.”

Clues in the picture include the detail of “Charlotte’s protruding front tooth” and a bracelet and brooch that match objects on display in the Brontë parsonage in Haworth, said Mr Humbert. “We are never going to be able to prove anything 100 per cent because this is a cold case,” he said. “But it has been widely accepted by the establishment as a Landseer portrait of the Brontës, as shown by the fact that it came from nowhere and sold for £50,000.” The new owner is a private art investor who plans to commission further research and sell on the painting at a later date.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MEMBER, SUSANNAH FULLERTON

Susannah Fullerton, founder member of the ABA, was awarded an OAM in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours List. She has also recently been made a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW. She is really thrilled by both honours and shares them with all those who love literature, attend her talks, buy her books and come on her tours.

As you know, Susannah is the President of the Jane Austen Society of Australia and as 18th July, 2017 is the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen's death and Susannah has marked this important literary anniversary by writing a memoir. Her new book is *Jane & I: A Tale of Austen Addiction*. This new book is now available for sale at $20 (including postage within Australia). You can order it via Susannah's website https://susannahfullerton.com.au/store/ or by sending a cheque made out to S. Fullerton to 26 Macdonald St, Paddington, NSW 2021. Or you can email Susannah about making a direct bank transfer on fullerto@bigpond.net.au


JANE & I
A Tale of Austen Addiction
BY SUSANNAH FULLERTON
"A joyful reminder of why books matter."
– Jennifer Kloester

‘PERSON’ IN THE BRONTË NOVELS

by Christopher Cooper

In the beginning, as they say, God created the ‘third person’. It was all about ‘he’ and ‘she’ and ‘they’. First person was only ever used in letters, but these were never intended for publication.

The Old Testament is written entirely in the third person, but a large chunk of the New Testament, the letters of St Paul, are written in the first person. These were never intended for general publication. A few, like the letter to Timothy, were written to a specific individual, but most were written to a community – the letter to the Romans, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians. They may have been read out in church, or copied and circulated, but they were never intended for a wider audience.

Now, in grammar, there are three ‘persons’. First person is where you say “I”, or “we”. Second person is ‘you’ or ‘youse’. French has ‘tu’ and ‘vous’. Dutch has ‘U’ and ‘jij’ for singular and ‘jullie’ for plural. Here is an even finer distinction. Many languages have a formal ‘you’ and an informal ‘you’, but we won’t go into that. Let’s dwell on that ugly word ‘youse’. Very few languages bother to distinguish between second person singular and plural. Isn’t it useful to make this distinction, to remove ambiguity?

But think about it logically. Is there ever any doubt as to whom the ‘you’ is referring? In any conversation you have the speaker and the listener and there are just four possible combinations of these: speaker, listeners, both and neither.

If the speaker refers to himself or herself alone the word “I” is used. If the speaker wants to refer to just the listeners, the word “you” is quite adequate. It doesn’t matter whether there’s one listener or many. If the speaker wants to refer to *both* speaker and listeners they use the word “we”. And finally, if the speaker is referring to *neither* themselves or their listeners they use “he”, “she”, “it” or “they” – the third person.

In the case of the third person, it must be understood to whom the pronoun refers. In the case of first and second person it is obvious. The need to distinguish between second person singular and second person plural would only arise if the speaker was singling out just one member of his audience? Does this situation arise? Well, possibly in vert rare situations.

Suppose I have won an Oscar, and am giving my acceptance speech. I might like to say, “I would like to thank my wife for her long suffering support. Without you I wouldn’t have been able to do it.” Would there be any doubt as to whether the “you” is singular or plural? Could the thousands of people in the audience, or the millions of viewers all round the world, possibly think that the winner is grateful for *their* collective support? No, there is never any need to distinguish between singular and plural when it comes to the second person. Make no mistake – if there *was* a real need for ‘youse’ it would have become standard English.

Literature encompasses many genres. Poetry can be written in the first person, especially love poetry, with a particular listener in mind, in which case you could even consider it as being second person singular. A good example is the poem that Patrick Brontë wrote to his first fiancée, Elizabeth Burder, on her 18th birthday. He begins by telling her how beautiful she is, but reminds her that her beauty is a gift from God and that it won’t last. She should cultivate her inner beauty. That last bit is unnecessary but, coming from a newly ordained curate, you can understand the pious thought about spiritual beauty. But he doesn’t stop there. He underlines the impermanent nature of her beauty in a way that would have shocked Elizabeth,

But let me whisper, lovely fair,
This joy may soon give place to care,
And sorrow cloud this day …

Getting worse!

Full soon your eyes of sparkling blue,
And velvet lips of scarlet hue,
Discoloured, may decay.

Oh dear! Patrick, stop there! But he didn’t.

You’re but a breathing mass of clay,
Fast ripening for the grave.

He was a good man, but oh, he *was* eccentric!

In the case of drama the question of first, second or third person is entirely irrelevant. By definition *every* piece of dialogue is in the first person.

In the eighteenth century memoirs became an important literary genre, and these were written in the first person. But in all such cases the story being told was autobiographical, that is, not fiction. So what about person in fiction?

In the eighteenth century fiction writers began experimenting with the epistolary novel – where there was a series of letters written by a fictitious person to another fictitious person. Richardson, in his novel *Pamela*, wrote as if he was Pamela herself, and the chapters are the letters she is supposed to have written. In some cases there is a dialogue, with alternating letters that were supposed to have gone back and forth. In other cases there were even more correspondents.

None of Jane Austen's adult novels were written in the first person, though she did experiment with the letter novel her juvenile work, *Lady Susan*. She even wrote *First Impressions* as a series of letters, but by the time it became *Pride and Prejudice*, she had reworked it into the usual third person form. She obviously discarded the first person as not being 'her thing'.

Writing in the third person has the distinct advantage of being God. You can know everything. You even know what is going on inside the hearts and minds of the characters. The first person protagonist has to rely on being told what is outside their own experience and they can only infer what others are thinking by what they say. But, with the first person, there is the possibility of really opening up the protagonist's deepest thoughts in a way that a God-like author, writing in the third person, can't possibly do. God may know what is in my heart and mind but only I can express it from within.

The trouble with the letter form of first person writing is that the letters are written to someone – someone that the writer knows. This colours what the writer reveals. The dramatists get around this by the use of soliloquy. "To be or not to be …" The character, in speaking to nobody, can pour out his heart. But that doesn't work with a letter. A diary, or a fictitious memoir, might be better.

In her novel, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley begins with a series of letters from Captain Walton to his sister. He tells how, sailing in the arctic, he has come across Dr Frankenstein, trekking across the ice in search of his creature. The rest of the book consists of Frankenstein's account, as related to Captain Walton.

What about the Brontës? Essentially they are all written in the first person.

Charlotte's first novel, though the last to be published, was *The Professor*. Here we see Charlotte experimenting with the epistolary style. The novel begins with a letter written by Crimsworth to an old school friend. The friend doesn't write back, but Crimsworth decides to continue with his story in case, as he says, it may be of interest to the wider public. Possibly for the first time ever, we have a first person novel where the supposed author declares that it is being written for publication. Like Jane Austen, Charlotte found that the letter form is too restrictive. But rather than switch to third person, she has Crimsworth continuing to write in the first person.

In *Jane Eyre*, she dispenses with the letter altogether. It is Jane who is telling her own story. There is no intermediary. It is not a diary that someone finds in a dusty attic. It is written *expressly* for publication.

It is also remarkable in that she, Jane, writes about her childhood memories. Dickens did something similar in *David Copperfield* which, like *Jane Eyre*, is partly autobiographical, but he did that somewhat later. Could he have been influenced by *Jane Eyre*?

But something even *more* remarkable occurs towards the end of the novel. There you have what is, undoubtedly, the most memorable sentence ever written. Now people often quote Jane Austen's "It is a truth universally acknowledged …" But that sentence is a fairly long one and you do have to think hard to get the rest of it right.

The sentence I'm referring to is memorable, partly because it is so short – only four words. Do you know what it is?

Yes, it is the sentence that jumps out at us: 'Reader I married him." What a shock! No, it isn't shocking that Rochester and Jane eventually marry. We could see that coming as soon as we learnt that

Bertha had died. No, there are two very controversial aspects of that iconic sentence.

Firstly, she didn't say, "Reader, *he* married *me*." or "Reader *we* were married." No, it was starkly, "Reader *I* married *him*." Jane has a lot of spunk. She is not one of the 'angels in the house' that the Victorians so admired – the pretty woman who stood behind her husband and supported him domestically. No. Jane is a woman who takes things into her own hands. She acts for herself. She wants to be married, but she wants a marriage where she can be on equal terms with her husband.

It is her forthrightness that attracts Rochester to Jane in the first place. She calls a spade, a spade. "Do you consider me handsome?" asks Rochester. "No sir," is her reply. Rochester has never met a woman who was that direct – who feels that she is equal to a man.

So what is the second shocking aspect of that short sentence? Instead of merely saying "I married him" she says "*Reader* I married him." This is almost *second* person singular. She's talking to *me*, the reader.

Have you ever been caught out observing someone secretly, only to have that person call out "what are *you* staring at?" It comes as a shock that all along I thought I was just an onlooker, as she tells her story, only to discover that she has seen me and is talking to *me*. Notice she doesn't say "*Readers* I married him" but "*Reader*". She has singled me out! This may well be the first novel where the author speaks so directly to the reader.

Shirley is the exception. Charlotte writes it in the third person. It is an historical novel and historical novels are usually, though not always, written in the third person. However, although it is technically written in the third person, the word "I" is used quite often. Charlotte makes no secret of the fact that this story has been written for publication, and she engages in dialogue with her reader.

> If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. It is not positively affirmed that you shall not have a taste of the exciting, perhaps towards the middle and close of the meal, but it is resolved that the first dish set upon the table shall be one that a Catholic -- ay, even an Anglo-Catholic -- might eat on Good Friday in Passion Week: it shall be cold lentils and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb.

In *Villette*, we again have a first person novel, without the need for letters. But here Charlotte does something else which I think had never been done before. In fact it has rarely been done since. The narrator, speaking in the first person, is an *unreliable* narrator. She deliberately misleads us. It is a novel that we simply *must* read at least twice. Halfway through we discover that Lucy Snowe is a liar, so we must reread it in the light of that knowledge. Well, "liar" might be too strong a word. But she *does* mislead us, and she omits to tell us what she should have told us earlier.

As the novel progresses Lucy meets four gentlemen: Graham Bretton, in the house where she is living as a young girl, a mysterious gentleman who assists her when she first arrives in Villette, Dr John, the doctor who attends the Pensionnat and Isadore, the beau of Lucy's friend Ginevre. Then she tells us that all four are one and the same. And she has the gall to tell us, "oh, I've known this for some time but I didn't get around to telling you". Not only is she speaking to the reader but she is *playing* with the reader. What a bitch!

Although there is a lot of biographical content in *Villette,* Lucy was not supposed to be an alter ego of Charlotte. In fact Charlotte is recorded as saying she didn't like the character at all. In *Jane Eyre* she presents us with a character who is plain on the outside, but who has inner beauty. Lucy, in *Villette*, is not only plain in appearance, she is not a nice person on the inside.

Charlotte gave a lot of thought to the choice of name. "Lucy" means "light", but a "trans*luce*nt" window lets in light but conceals the shape of what's on the other side. And "Snowe" suggests a frosty personality. In fact Charlotte had originally intended to call her "Lucy Frost" but ended up with "Snowe".

Finally, we come to Emily. With *Wuthering Heights* she blows the question of first or third person right out of the water. Like Frankenstein, there is a narrator who has very little to do with the story. Lockwood is the Dr Walton of *Wuthering Heights*. But Emily takes it one step further. The main narrator in *Wuthering Heights* is Nelly Dean but she isn't one of the main protagonists.

Even Nelly is not the original source in several places. In chapter 13, when the story has reached the point where Isabella is living in Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff, Ellen reads out a long letter from Isabella, describing her unhappy married life. So the story is now being told third hand!

On another occasion Nelly Dean reports what young Catherine says to her about her unauthorised visit to Wuthering Heights. Now, with a story that passes through so many hands, we have the possibility that it might have got distorted along the way, but we generally trust the accounts. Towards the end of the novel, Lockwood returns to Thrushcross Grange, and lets Nelly Dean resume the story.

We have discussed all the Brontës' published novels. Let us conclude with a short examination of the novel *Emma*, that she commenced in the final year of her life. We only have two chapters, and in those chapters we never learn who the character Emma is and how she would have fitted into the story.

Charlotte has continued with the genre of first person narration that she had found so successful. The narrator is a Mrs Chalfont, who appears to have no connection with the story apart from the fact that she is a neighbour of the two ladies who might be major characters in the story. The Misses Wilcox run a school for girls and they have recently enrolled a new pupil Matilda Fitzgibbon. Matilda appears to come from a high class family with plenty of money and an estate May Park. She arrives in great style with a trunk full of the finest clothes and the first term's fees paid in full. But when enquiries are made as to whether she was to go home for the holidays or would stay at the school, it was discovered that there was no such person as Mr Fitzgibbon of May Park. And so would have begun the world's first detective novel, as Mr Ellin, a close friend of Miss Wilcox, undertakes to uncover the mystery as an 'amateur detective'. Charlotte actually uses the phrase 'amateur detective' as well as the phrase 'the game is up'.

It is possible that Mrs Chalfont is Emma Chalfont, but it seems unlikely. Charlotte would appear to be following her sister's example in choosing as a narrator, one who had only peripheral involvement in the events. Mrs Chalfont is Charlotte's Mr Lockwood.

But how does Charlotte use her narrator? Does she write a series of letters? No. Mrs Chalfont engages in direct conversation with the reader, a device used first in *Jane Eyre* and developed in *Shirley*.

She invites us into her cosy parlour where she plans to tell us the story. But though she appears no to have any involvement in the story, and is merely passing on second hand gossip, she feels the need to establish her credentials.

Look at it, reader. Come into my parlour and judge for yourself whether I do right to care for this thing. First, you may scan me, if you please. We shall go on better together after a satisfactory introduction and due apprehension of identity. My name is Mrs. Chalfont. I am a widow. My house is good, and my income such as need not check the impulse either of charity or a moderate hospitality. I am not young, nor yet old. There is no silver yet in my hair, but its yellow lustre is gone. In my face wrinkles are yet to come, but I have almost forgotten the days when it wore any bloom. I married when I was very young I lived for fifteen years a life which, whatever its trials, could not be called stagnant. Then for five years I was alone, and, having no children, desolate. Lately Fortune, by a somewhat curious turn of her wheel, placed in my way an interest and a companion.

The neighbourhood where I live is pleasant enough, its scenery agreeable, and its society civilised, though not numerous. About a mile from my house there is a ladies' school, established but lately--not more than three years since The conductresses of this school were of my acquaintances; and though I cannot say that they occupied the very highest place in my opinion--for they had brought back from some months' residence abroad, for finishing purposes, a good deal that was fantastic, affected, and pretentious--yet I awarded them some portion of that respect which seems the fair due of all women who face life bravely, and try to make their own way by their own efforts.

BRONTË 200

Program for 2018

This year is the 200th anniversary of Emily's birth. She was born on 30th July 1818 and died on 19th December 1848.

The Australian Brontë Association meets in Sydney five times a year. Meetings are held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel (near Town Hall Station) at 10:30am, though we serve morning tea from 10:00am. Those who wish to do so, have a light lunch at the hotel. At each meeting, a paper on some aspect of the Brontës' life and work is presented. There is a meeting charge of $5 (members and non-members).

Saturday 10th March

***Gypsies in Europe* – Souha Korbatieh**

Heathcliff is referred to as "*that gipsy brat*" and Rochester masquerades as "*the Sybil*" in his own home "*to tell the gentry their fortunes*". Souha will examine the history of the gypsies in Europe and what such references tell us about the central characters, themes and issues of both novels whilst highlighting the plight of marginal classes and the dangers of romantic imaginings.

Saturday 12th May

Siblings: Emily and Branwell – **Cindy Broadbent**

A look at the sometimes strained relationship between these two siblings.

Saturday 14th July

Reacting to Wuthering Heights – **Susannah Fullerton**

Many of us fall in love with Emily Bronte's great novel as teenage readers. But how do our responses to the book change as we grow older. Do we fall out of love with Heathcliff and Cathy? Do we see more or less in it than we saw before. Join Susannah Fullerton for a talk and discussion about *Wuthering Heights*.

Saturday 8th September

Emily Brontë and Romanticism – **Christine Alexander**

Saturday 10th November

Brontë Tourism - A Place for Anne? – **Roslyn Jolly**

The Brontë tourist industry is in overdrive with the bicentennial celebrations of the siblings' births. Major events took place in the UK and around the world in 2016 to mark Charlotte's 200th birthday, and the celebrations for Emily in 2018 will probably be on a similar scale. What will happen in 2020 for Anne? My talk will discuss the extent to which Anne has historically been remembered or overlooked in Brontë tourism, and will suggest ways in which her life and achievements can and should be commemorated.

December **ABA/Dickens Christmas Lunch**

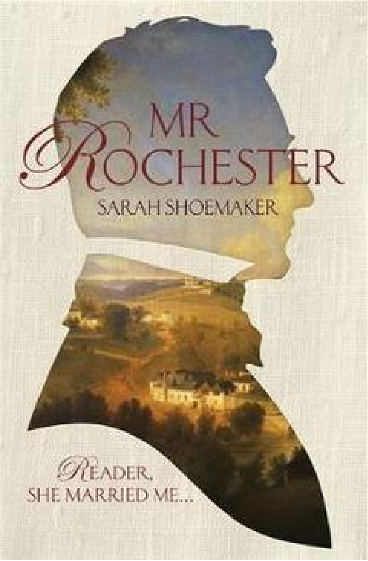
Details of date, time and venue will be announced later.

BOOK REVIEW

MR ROCHESTER – READER SHE MARRIED ME

by Sarah Shoemaker, Headline Publishing 2017 ISBN 978 4722 4894 7

Reviewed by Michael Links



My first thought on reading this was “is this real?”. Of course not – neither novel is real. *Jane Eyre* and *Mr Rochester* are both works of fiction. *Jane Eyre* does have parallels with Charlotte Brontë’s life and is typical of the period in which it was written, as are other Brontë novels such as *Shirley* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Mr Rochester has no connection with any living individual that I know of, but it does accurately reflect the time in which it is set, especially with reference to the situation in Jamaica at the time, and the practice of slavery there.

Mr Rochester is a novel that fills in the frustrating, mysterious gap in *Jane Eyre*. Jane meets him and his background is a mystery, both for her and the reader. The novel is a careful, believable biography of Rochester that would have probably made Charlotte nod in agreement. It is a satisfyingly interesting novel in its own right.

The young Rochester is completely in the hands of his father from the age of nine. Until then, his life is happy and carefree. The type of education he receives at each stage is carefully planned and for a purpose that is unknown to him and to the reader. After several years he is sent to work in a woollen mill, for which his education has prepared him. He works in administration and finance, not on the shop floor. From there he goes to Jamaica, a place that has fascinated him since childhood. He inherits property and has business interests there and is given responsibility for managing them.

As the novel progresses, familiar characters and places are introduced. He goes to Jamaica where he meets Bertha Mason. What kind of woman is she? His marriage is pre-ordained. Why does she have a pre-disposition towards madness? All is revealed. After he leaves Jamaica, we meet Adele’s mother and see how his relationship with her develops and why he feels responsible for Adele’s welfare.

In the final third of the book he encounters Jane. The two novels are intertwined. At last we are on familiar ground and we see the events that we are already familiar with from our reading of Jane Eyre. But this time we see them from Rochester’s point of view instead of from Jane’s.

Reading both sides of the same story, with the help of Mr Rochester, enriches our reading of the original novel *Jane Eyre*.

VALE MARGARET DEAKIN 1939-2017

Margaret Deakin was a keen reader, blessed with a prodigious memory that allowed her to remember astonishing detail about the books she enjoyed so much. She read a wide variety of genres, but classics and crime were always special favourites. A collector of beautiful books as well as a reader, Margaret spread her joy of reading and knowledge not only through the Bronte Society, but fellow literary organisations the NSW Dickens Society and the Jane Austen Society of Australia. People meeting Margaret for the first time were delighted to discover how much she knew about literature, and also her great love for classical music, theatre, film and travel (and red wine). It was always wonderful to ask what she'd been reading, watching or listening to; an absolutely magic conversation would ensue. Margaret was a meticulous, hard worker all her life, spending many years working for the ABC, then through an agency. She loved her family and her church and made friends everywhere she went, greeting people with her lovely smile. As fellow Bronte Society members, we're privileged to call her a most beloved and treasured friend, and grieve that we've lost her so suddenly.

VALE, Margaret. You will be greatly missed. **Malvina Yock**