

The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter



Issue No 6 December 2000



**Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor,
Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or door,
The little lamp burns straight, its rays shoot strong and far,
I trim it well, to be the wanderer's guiding star.**

Emily Bronte

BRONTË AT THE OLYMPICS?

In the recent Brontë Society's Honorary Secretary's Newsletter a challenge was thrown out to we Antipodean Brontëphiles.

Whilst watching the Olympics some of us heard a reference to BRONTË BEACH. No further information was given and I wonder if any of our Australian members could provide us with more details.

Well, of course we all know BRONTE BEACH (without the accent over the e). It's a very quiet, pleasant ocean beach just south of the more commercialised Bondi Beach. Some of the following information is thanks to



Elder's Real Estate Co. who provide a web page on each of the suburbs in their area and other facts come from the

book "Eastern Suburbs Album" by Portia Fitzsimmons.

The suburb of Bronte was established at Nelson Bay over 100 years ago. That's not Nelson's Bay, just north of Newcastle, but just "Nelson Bay". The area was in fact named after Lord Nelson. The title "Duke of Brontë" was bestowed on Nelson by the King of Sicily after his victory at Aboukir in 1798. If you get your atlases out you should be able to find Brontë in the west of Sicily at the foot of Mount Etna.

Which is a long way from Haworth. The tenuous Brontë connection is simply the common link to Nelson. And of course Nelson spelled Bronte the way we do in Sydney. It was Patrick's affectation to dress it up as Brontë.

Our Brontë friends in Britain may wish to know that Bronte was a small village with a beach and a large park tucked away in a valley. It still retains its village atmosphere, focussed on the beach area. Whereas Bondi and Coogee attract beachgoers from all over the Sydney region, the main users of Bronte beach are the locals.

Brontë is 8 km (5 miles for our UK readers) from the business centre of Sydney. It has one of Australia's oldest surf clubs, formed in 1903.

William Lewis Mortimer, the Colonial Architect of the time, bought the land in 1836. (At that time, Charlotte was at Roe Head.) He laid the foundations of what is now known as Bronte House but he ran short of money in the Depression of the

early 1840s and sold the land plus foundations to Robert Lowe, a solicitor and politician. Lowe completed the house in 1845, just before the Brontës began to publish.



"The scenery resembles Jersey, the vegetation is so lovely. We have a beautiful bay to ourselves" wrote Georgiana Lowe to her mother in England in the 1840s. Lowe and his family returned to England in January 1850 and he became Chancellor of the Exchequer and became Lord Sherbrooke.

The property changed hands several times and was bought by the Waverley Council in 1948 in a bad state of repair. It was leased at a "peppercorn rent" on the understanding that the tenant put it back into a satisfactory state of repair, which has occurred. More recently Sydney personality Leo Schofield took over this lease and has spent a lot of money on the house and the gardens. *Burke's Backyard*, a TV Garden show, has visited the gardens and featured them in the show.

Another "Bronte House" is in Morpeth, near Newcastle. It's a bed and breakfast establishment dating from 1860. And there's another "Bronte House" in St Mary's in Sydney. And a property on the Castlereagh Rd just out of Richmond that goes by the name "Historic Bronte". Do any of these have Brontë connections? Probably not otherwise they would be Brontë Houses.



REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well here we are at the end of our third year. As I am writing this I am looking forward to our Christmas lunch at St Judes. I would like to thank all of you who have supported this event. We have 37 members and guests coming, more than last year. We have to work within a very small margin. We needed at least 35 to meet our minimum with the caterers and any more than 40 would be too crowded, so we did well.

For those of you who couldn't make it this year here's what you have missed out on: lovely food, great company, and a chance to be a fly on the wall at Staningley as the Christmas Rose flies in and out of the window in the proposal scene.

An exciting coincidence is that at the very time we are assembling for our lunch the new bells for St Judes Church will arrive. with great pomp and ceremony, accompanied by a procession. The old bells were installed when the church was built in 1865.

As a one-time bellringer I remember ringing these bells. They had somewhat of a reputation amongst the Sydney ringers for their rather odd tone. The new set have been made of the more usual bell metal and should sound very much better.

There's a Brontë connection with these new bells in that our Patron, Christine Alexander, has donated one of them as a memorial to her daughter, Rebecca, who died tragically last year. It is inscribed "Rebecca Mary Alexander 1981 – 1999".

We've had a good year in 2000. To help you remember, or fill in the gaps of any meetings you may have missed, this is briefly what took place.

We began in February with an evening of dramatic readings at Collins Bookshop on Broadway. Susannah Fullerton assembled a marvellously varied collection of readings with a marvellously varied collection of readers. I would like to thank her, together with all those who took part, for an excellent evening. It was so much fun that we've decided to have another such evening, this time at Borders Bookshop at Macquarie Centre.

The theme is "The Brontë Sisters' Wicked Men". Of course this refers to the

heroes and anti-heroes of the novels and not to poor Arthur Bell Nicholls and his fellow curates!

Then in April Jack Nelson gave us an interesting talk on Emily and her poetry. There were many requests along the lines of "when can we have him again". Jack, unfortunately, has had a prolonged illness in the second half of the year so we left him out of consideration for 2001. But he seems to be much better now so we'll definitely keep him in mind for 2002.

But we will be following up on Emily in 2001 with an afternoon of reviews of biographies of her life. Now this is where you can help. I have six biographies of Emily. What I need now are six volunteers to read one and give a 10 minute talk about it. Please let me know if you can help in this way. If you did one of Charlotte's biographies last year that doesn't automatically rule you out.

In July Brydie Maguire led a workshop on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Her talk and the group discussion that followed were most stimulating. We followed up the theme that formed the basis of her honours thesis: The Female Saviour. Thanks Brydie.

And in October Fran de Groen gave us a most absorbing talk of a psychobiological nature. I hadn't realised before how much sado-masochism can be found in the novels, yet as she gave example after example I found myself saying "yes, why hadn't I noticed it before?" You can read a shortened version of her talk elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thanks to both Brydie and Fran. Along with Jack we hope to make use of you again in the future.

I almost forgot the informal evenings in the winter when about a dozen of us watched a five part Brontë documentary over two nights. These informal evenings seem to provide a nice contrast to the regular meetings and so we're continuing this tradition in 2001.

But something new we want to try for next year is an informal weekend away. It will be called **The Three Sisters at the Three Sisters**. I got the idea from attending the dinner at Haworth as part of the annual Brontë Society weekend. It was held at a restaurant called "The Three Sisters" and I thought what an appropriate place for a Brontë weekend – our own The Three Sisters at Echo Point at Katoomba!

The idea is that we'll organise some activities from mid-morning on the Saturday to lunch on Sunday at the guest-house La Maison, a few minutes walk from Echo Point. We'll charge a small registration fee to cover costs of printing etc but accommodation and meals will be your responsibility.

It isn't necessary for you to stay there but we hope that enough people will choose to stay there to justify our use of their excellent conference facilities.

Some of us will choose to stay both Friday and Saturday nights, others just the Saturday. The rates are quite reasonable (this year after GST it was \$110 per room per night). And there's no requirement, as there is at some other mountain establishments, to stay both nights. Further details later.

Those of you who are members of the "mother society", the Brontë Society, will know that they've been having quite a few difficulties lately. In February of this year the Chairman of the Council of the Brontë Society received a letter, signed by all twenty members of staff at the Brontë Parsonage Museum which stated '*That the Museum staff has no confidence in the Director.*' The situation has been resolved and the Director is no longer with them.

They've also been going through difficult times financially. Their membership numbers are quite healthy but they've had falling numbers of visitors to the Parsonage over the last few years. They rely on this money to carry out their enormous responsibilities in terms of maintenance of the parsonage and custodianship of the many Brontë treasures. We're fortunate that we're free of such responsibilities. But let me add that if you're not already a member of the Brontë Society perhaps you might consider joining. There are benefits, such as the excellent publication *Brontë Society Transactions*. But you could also consider that your membership would be assisting them in their important role at the centre of the Brontë universe.

Now for some more news just to the left of centre of the Brontë universe. Oxenhope is a couple of miles from Haworth

and friends of mine from there keep me posted, from time to time, with cuttings in the local and national press concerning the Brontës. Here's some of that news.

There's a newly unearthed letter in which Charlotte tells of the buying of her wedding dress:

"I stuck ... to muslin or plain book muslin with a tuck or two. Also I took care that the veil should be a matter of five shillings. If I must make a fool of myself it shall be on an economical plan."

The letter is expected to fetch £4,000 at auction. Sounds a real bargain! A letter describing how she snubbed a clergyman's proposal of marriage fetched £69,700 when it was auctioned a few years ago.

A book on "what the Brontës mean to me" has been compiled using invited contributions from a group of prominent actors, novelists, poets and politicians. They were asked how they were inspired by the classic works of the Brontë sisters. The compilation has been part of an exhibition at the museum and will go into the archives when it closes.

Cliff Richard wrote: "Had there been no Elvis, there'd have been no Cliff. If there'd been no Emily there'd have been no Heathcliffe." You can't argue with that I suppose. "Elvis inspired my career, Emily provided what for me was my most satisfying and successful artistic achievement." He was referring, of course, to *Heathcliff* the musical which he wrote and in which he played the title role.

Thelma Barlow, a former star of *Coronation Street* wrote: "The Brontës affected me as a young girl. It seemed so romantic and sad, but in later years that response has changed and become one of huge admiration for their writings."

Another clipping from the local newspaper mentioned that if you were in Haworth at Halloween you could have taken part in a spooky night tour of the Haworth graveyard. Historian Phil Lister unlocked the secrets of "Horrid Haworth" as he led a party around the village and through the tombstones by lantern light. He will probably do it again so keep it in mind next time you find yourself in Haworth at the end of October.

Christopher Cooper

SADISTIC IMPULSES IN THE WORK AND WORLD OF THE BRONTËS : or ‘life being what it is, one dreams of revenge’

by Dr Fran de Groen

When invited to talk to members of the Brontë Society on a psychobiographical theme, I was initially at a loss to choose a topic. My credentials for such a task are scanty. I am not a psychologist (or psychoanalyst) and have not carried out serious scholarly research into the lives or works of the Brontës. My biography of the Australian writer Xavier Herbert (*Xavier Herbert : A Biography*, UQP 1998) has, however, been described by some reviewers as a psychobiography (biography that focuses on the *psychology* of the subject), but this genre is regarded with suspicion in Australia where the dominant biographical tradition is predominantly concerned with documenting the *social* significance of the subject's life.

Intellectually respectable psychobiography (to many, a contradiction in terms), requires sound psychological theory and copious data about the subject's behaviour patterns and relationships, and innermost thoughts, feelings and dreams. There are several psychobiographical studies of the Brontës, more or less speculative and fanciful. They tend to ‘explain’ the Brontës in terms of, for example, maternal and sibling loss, enforced seclusion in the wilds of Yorkshire and brutal paternal domination and/or neglect, or they sensationalise the sexuality of the Brontë siblings, suggesting

incest and/or lesbianism. As Brontë Society members would be aware, many of these studies are speculative and tendentious, relying primarily on tenuous literary evidence.

Juliet Barker's monumentally detailed study of the Brontë family is a traditional socio-historical biography that hazards only such psychological interpretations as can be supported by documentary evidence (i.e. that relating to Charlotte Brontë's bossiness and depression) . Drawing on hitherto unconsulted contemporary local sources, Barker corrects her predecessors' distortions of the Brontës' lifestyle and familial relationships and challenges the dubious psychological theses they promoted. She avoids lurid speculation about the psycho-sexual dimension of her subjects. Her discretion is a consequence of middle-class Victorian reticence about the



erotic body, sexual desire and bodily functions (apart from those associated with illness and death). In refusing to pry, for example, into Charlotte's bedroom on her wedding night, Barker acknowledges the limitations placed upon the responsible biographer by lack of data: to fill in the sexual and emotional ‘blanks’ would require the imagination and strategies of the fiction writer.

Since Freud, the art of drawing inferences about the psychology of writers from their texts has proven an interesting and intriguing pastime but lacking the necessary evidence for a serious psychobiographical

study of the Brontës, I decided instead to explore a ‘psychological’ (perhaps a ‘psychopathological’) aspect of their writing. My starting point was Wade Thompson’s *‘Infanticide and Sadism in Wuthering Heights’* (1968), an illuminating discussion of the frequency of instances of interpersonal cruelty and violence (hair-pulling, pinching, beatings, torturing and killing of animals) in that novel. Scholarly introductions to recent editions of *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Villette* likewise separately noted the sadistic behaviour of many of the characters, the self-abnegating tendencies of the narrators and the ruthlessly oppressive (and repressive) institutions – most notably the religious and educational institutions -- of the social worlds the characters inhabit. The melodramatic juvenilia of the Bronte children – particularly the Angrian sagas of Charlotte and Branwell -- also exhibits gratuitous cruelty and abjection on the part of the central characters. Colin Wilson’s ‘A Personal Response to *Wuthering Heights*’, linked that novel’s pervasive cruelty to a certain (thwarted) ‘childish’ will to power on the part of Emily Bronte. Citing Gaugin’s perception (quoted by Graham Greene) that ‘life being what it is, one dreams of revenge’, Wilson offered an intriguing way of thinking about the works of the Brontës as the fantasies of power dreamed by powerless children.

These insights prompted me first to consider recent discussions of sadomasochism as the convergence and interchangeability of fantasies of mastery and childlike helplessness respectively within a single individual, expressing a ‘linkage of sexuality with violence and power’¹; secondly to relate sadomasochism

to a selection of the novels by the Brontës² and to their social context and thirdly to provoke questions about the *significance* of the preoccupation with sadomasochism in the fiction of the Brontës. What, if anything, does it mean in relation to their lives.

I chose specific passages from four novels to illuminate and explore instances of sadistic and/or masochistic behaviour. Charlotte Bronte’s *The Professor* (her first novel, published posthumously in 1857) enacts the sadomasochism of ‘self-improvement’ in a repressive and puritanical society that values wealth and social status. The male protagonist, Crimsworth, ruthlessly suppresses his spontaneity and tender feelings in order to gain a foothold in the world. His relationship with his wife Frances is expressed in images of domination and submission, reward and punishment. His son, Victor’s ‘spirit’ must be ‘curbed’: ‘I call it the leaven of the offending Adam, and consider that it should be, if not *whipped* out of him, at least soundly disciplined’ (289). Victor will be sent to Eton to suffer the tortures of fagging and homesickness. His mother anticipates this with ‘a kind of patient pain ...but from which her fortitude will not permit her to recoil’ (288-89). Having suffered the pains of repression himself, Crimsworth now visits them on his son: ‘life being what it is, one dreams of revenge’.

A similar pattern can be discerned in Anne Bronte’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Here, however, the source of the sadomasochistic linkage of sex, violence and power is Victorian marriage. Very early in the narrative we witness the power to hurt vested in the male, evident in the repeated use throughout the novel of forms of the word ‘torment’. Gilbert, the male narrator of the first

¹ See the entry on ‘sadomasochism’ in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis : A Critical Dictionary*, ed. E. Wright, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, 385-91. A recent study of the S-M industry found that clients seeking to be ‘disciplined’ and ‘humiliated’ were predominantly senior executives exercising power

over large numbers of staff. It appeared that they used S-M to relax and escape from the stress of jobs which required them to be constantly in control.

² Although the abject experience of the governess heroine of *Agnes Grey* (1847), cruelly tormented by her charges and her social superiors, exhibited sadomasochistic impulses. I did not discuss this novel because I had not read it .

half of the book, carries a gun and has 'succeeded in killing a hawk and two crows.' The garden of Wildfell Hall, emblematic of the barrenness of bourgeois marriage, is neglected and planted only with 'such shrubs and trees as could best endure the gardener's torturing shears'. The privet hedge has 'withered away' and a boxwood swan has 'lost its neck and half its body'. As the narrative unfolds we learn that, by and large, males are sexual predators who take advantage of the legal and social powerlessness and physical weakness of females. Behind the patriarchal power of the state lurks the metaphysical power of the cruel deity of Calvinist Christianity, resisted by the heroine, Helen Huntingdon who believes in the doctrine of universal salvation. Her ministrations at the deathbed of the abusive, violent alcoholic and philandering husband whom she had fled are saintly in the extreme but perhaps they, too, are a form of revenge. He now is powerless and she witnesses his paroxysms of extreme fear. Moreover, she cannot completely convince him that he will escape hellfire and brimstone (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Oxford World Classics, 430-31). Finally, after all, his death frees her to marry Gilbert and given that he is younger and less wealthy than she is and very devoted to her we imagine that the marital power-balance will shift in her favour.

The most vivid example of the reversal of roles of sadist and masochist occurs in *Jane Eyre* (1847) There is no question that Rochester cruelly torments Jane, especially just prior to proposing to her when he pretends to be about to marry someone else and send Jane to Mrs Dionysius O'Gall at Bitternut Lodge in Ireland. Jane is entirely at his mercy and her grief turns to joy when he admits that he was teasing her. Later after learning that Rochester is already married, Jane is torn between passion and conscience. Just as passion is about to win, a 'voice within' commands her to tear herself away from

Thornfield: 'none shall help you : you shall, yourself, pluck out your right eye ; yourself cut off your right hand ...' (*Jane Eyre*, Everyman edition, 295). When we consider Rochester's fate, blinded, lamed and his *left* arm mutilated by the fire that destroyed Thornfield, it seems that he now bears physically the emotional suffering he had previously inflicted on Jane. And, of course their positions are now reversed. Jane has the power of sight, of mobility and of financial independence. Rochester is dependent on her, rather than the other way around, as formerly.

Lucy Snow, narrator and heroine of *Villette* (1853) tormented by employer and beloved alike, presents a different case. She suffers for love, but her strategy is, like Crimsworth's to suppress her passion, to remain silent. She doesn't 'get her man', although she does get some of his money: he establishes her as mistress of a school that will give her financial independence. He sails away at the behest of his masters, a matriarch and a priest and although we never learn whether he returns safely it is implied that he drowns in a violent storm. Lucy indulges her suffering in imagining his death. She is a masochist, the pain of her self-abnegation seems pleasurable. Her most intense feelings are those of agony, of being tortured, of anticipating agony and torture (*Villette*, Everyman edition, 481, 483).

To what extent, then, does the sadomasochistic preoccupation of these narratives express a wish for 'revenge' on the part of the authors, a desire to compensate for their sufferings? It is tempting to speculate along these lines, especially in the case of Charlotte, whose unfortunate infatuation with M. Heger provided the motive force and settings of especially *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The problem with this 'reading' of the relationship between author and text is that it is reductive, ignoring so much else that is in the texts and assuming that there is a simple formula for the transformation of 'life' into art'. Nevertheless, the temptation to accept it is strong.

Emily and her Poetry

BOOK REVIEW by Jack R. Nelson

Maureen PEECK-O'TOOLE:

Aspects of lyric in the poetry of Emily Brontë Rodopi, Amsterdam 1988

To the best of this reviewer's knowledge, this is the first full monograph devoted to Emily's poetry. It is well presented and well-structured, covering both the Gondal and non-Gondal poems, giving detailed analyses of individual poems, with three poems ("Remembrance", "Stars", and "The Prisoner") being given fuller analysis. These analyses are both well informed and sensitive, offering intelligent interpretations of often difficult poems.

The author says of her work's intention that "If Emily Brontë's poetry is not examined as an oeuvre in its own right we shall be doomed to regard this poet forever as "the Sphinx of English Poetry" (p134) and "I have placed the emphasis firmly on how the poetry works rather than who the author is". (p135)

Her analysis of the poetry in its own right, rather than a source of biographical hints or as an interpretation of "Wuthering Heights", gives us a clearer awareness of how good the poetry is as poetry rather than an addendum to Emily's

novel. Her insistence on how the poetry works irrespective of its authorship also offers many insights into the poetry rather than as merely the output of the enigmatic person Emily was.

The texts of three versions of Emily's poetry are compared: the 1844 notebook transcripts, the 1846 "Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell" and the 1941 Hatfield edition. The author tends to prefer the 1844 transcripts as being closer to Emily's intentions. There are admittedly only minor variations between these three versions, however, the author's careful comparison of the poems in the three texts is done with care and sensitivity.

An appendix of transcriptions of the poems treated is included as well as a comprehensive bibliography.

For those interested in the genesis and critical analysis of Emily's major poems this work is highly recommended both for its enthusiasm and for its scholarship. Peeck-O'Toole has a fine insight into the poetry combined with an erudition which is lightly but firmly worn. This is an excellent piece of work, well worthy of attention by lovers of Emily's poetry.

“AN ACCURATE, THOUGH INTERPRETED, ACCOUNT OF THE BRONTËS LIVES”

BOOK REVIEW by Annette Harman

Hughes, Glyn, *Brontë*, London, 1997.

Glyn Hughes's novel *Brontë* alerts us to the journey we all make when developing our relationship with the Brontë writings and lives. In the Acknowledgements Hughes claims:

"My novel can therefore be read as what I believe to be an accurate, though

interpreted account of their lives and circumstances"(Hughes, 1997,p5)

How do **you** interpret your responses to the electrifying words written by Emily, the pictorial elegancies of Charlotte, the Christian certainties of Patrick and Anne, Maria's playfulness and the shame exhibited by Branwell?

In my opinion Hughes has decided to collect, collate and publish his "obsession" with the Brontes. He has marshalled the resources of "a canon of biography and scholarship" (1997, p5) to present a detailed and vivid novelistic account of the Brontes' lives.

The style of Hughes's novel is typified by the following quotation, concerning Charlotte's writing of *Villette* at wintertime:

"The winter of 1851 to 1852 was vile...Such howling, savage bites of cold and wind pierced the windows, and left crusts of ice on chamber pots, that it seemed a monster was curled around the parsonage trying to crush it, or to insert claws & teeth... Dressed in overmantles, the two remaining Brontës haunted the house which stank of candle grease & confined animals"(1997, p488).

The scene is dramatic and vivid, with neat practical details (the ice on the chamber pots) contrasting with the sensational "monster" who is amplified with verbs (crush, haunted, howling and confined). Does this passionate description of the winter's effects on Charlotte's writings capture what did happen? Does it need to? you may be thinking. For me Hughes's quest is the same as our own. We, the readers, passionately want to discover for ourselves **what happened?** Hughes's novelistic enterprise is a worthwhile read of a shared Bronte mystery.

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THE LIBRARY

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BOOKS \$1 per book. (4 weeks)

VIDEOS \$2 per video set (2 weeks)

AUDIO TAPES \$1 per cassette up to a maximum of \$5 per set. (2 weeks)

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LIBRARIAN: Maria-Louise Valkenburg 31 Epping Ave EASTWOOD NSW 2122

BOOKS:

Regarding Jane Eyre ed by Susan Geason
Brontë by Glyn Hughes

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys

Charlotte Brontë by Jane Sellars

The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë by James Tully

The Brontes by Juliet Barker, Phoenix Giant
 Paperback (1994) 1003 pp

The Brontes - A Life in Letters by Juliet Barker,
 Viking (1997) 415 pp

BOOKLETS:

Blackwood's Magazine

A Leaf from an Unopened Volume

Treasures of the Brontë Parsonage Museum

Notes on Charlotte Bronte: Jane Eyre by Kathleen Good, Brodie Notes 78 pp

Notes on Emily Bronte: Wuthering Heights by Norman Carrington Brodie Notes 76 pp

Brontë Society Transactions from 1985

VIDEO TAPES:

Jane Eyre starring Timothy Dalton and Zelah Clarke, BBC Video (1983) 225 mins on 2 cassettes

Wuthering Heights starring Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon and David Niven (1939) 104 mins

AUDIO TAPES:

Jane Eyre (complete) Maureen O'Brien (reader) 14 cassettes (may be borrowed for 4 weeks)

Jane Eyre (abridged) Emma Fielding (reader) 3 cassettes

Letters of Charlotte Brontë Imogen Stubbs (reader) 2 cassettes

The Brontës of Haworth Christopher Cooper (reader) 3 cassettes

The Great Yorkshire Spice Cake

from BRONTË CHRISTMAS

compiled by Maria Hubert

published by Sutton Publishing, Stroud 1997

The origins of the Yorkshire Spice Cake, which Charlotte Brontë took to the homes of the parishioners in her father's and later in her husband's parish, are lost in the mists of time. Certainly it has connections with York Main Bread, which was well known throughout the country as early as the fourteenth century.

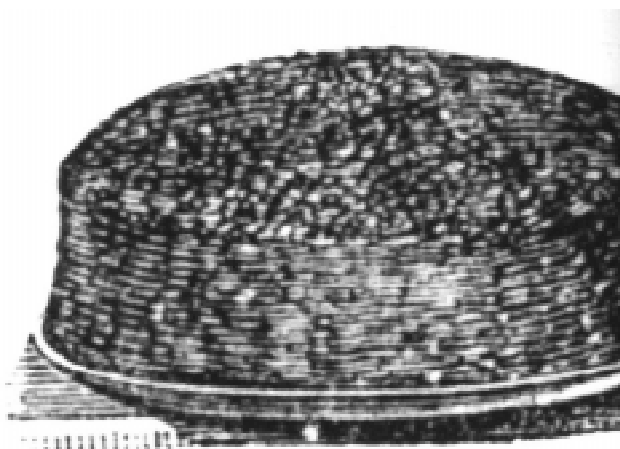
Served with a slice of cheese, the great cake was given to the family and visitor alike, and no home would be without it. In Wuthering Heights we read that the grumpy puritan servant, Joseph, left his 'cake and cheese for the fairies'.

Not only in Yorkshire, but throughout Britain, great houses and farms, which supported the local populace, would bake a huge batch of such cakes to give to those who would not have been able to afford the dried fruits and spices necessary to make their own.

Parsonages the length and breadth of the country were filled with the rich spicy fragrance, as dutiful wives, daughters and servants prepared the great Christmas cakes.

It is the one custom we can be sure was observed at the Brontë parsonage. The Brontës write about the baking of the cake in several of their novels.

Here is a typical West Riding moorland recipe for the Christmas Spice Cake dating from the early 1900s, which will be similar to that prepared by Charlotte Brontë.



2 lb flour
½ lb butter
1 lb currants
½ lb sultanas
½ lb Demerara sugar
4 eggs
½ lb mixed peel
1 oz yeast
half a nutmeg
1 teaspoon cinnamon
(1 lb = 450g, 1 oz = 30g)

Crumble the yeast into a little warmed milk. Cover and let rise till frothy. Meanwhile put the flour and two teaspoons salt into a warm bowl. Rub in the butter, then add the risen yeast mix, and the rest of the warm milk, and mix. Cover with a clean cloth and leave in a warm place to rise for 20 minutes. Knead it as you would bread. The more you knead, the lighter the mix will be. Let it rise for a full hour longer, then add the dried fruit and the eggs, which have been well beaten. Mix in thoroughly with your hand. Cover, and leave to rise again until double size, about another hour.

Meanwhile prepare cake tins with lining paper, double on the base, and then put in your mixture to about two-thirds. If you want a level top, hollow the mix slightly so that it will rise level and not to a peak. Bake in a well heated moderate oven (160°C) until a knitting needle comes out clean. This takes about 1 hour if you make the mixture into two cakes.

INTRODUCTION TO *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*

by Stevie DAVIES

BOOK REVIEW by Annette Harman

Dr Stevie Davies has written numerous books on the Brontës, the most significant for me being *Heretic*, an exploration of her own "obsession" with Emily Brontë's life and writings. Stevie Davies lectured in English Literature at Manchester University from 1971 to 1984. She left to become a full-time novelist and literary critic. She is currently Senior Research Fellow at Roehampton Institute.

The "Introduction to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" written by Davies is thoughtful, comprehensive and interesting. I am going to present some of the major ideas from the Introduction, to reawaken your interest in this novel by Anne Brontë.

"Anne Brontë's novel is a powerful and disputatious sister-novel to Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. The very initials of the place - 'W.H.' - and those of the system of 'H' characters (playing on the Heights series, Hindley, Heathcliff, Hareton) spell out this kinship. In both novels, the moorland house is dynastic and the locus of desire and curiosity. But neither uncanny presences, violent usurpation nor extremes of possessive hatred and need, haunt Anne's hall as they do Emily's. 'Wild' and on the 'fells', just off the edge of the community, where culture meets nature... Perhaps both houses derive from a common Ur-hall in Gondal. Emily's utilitarian Romanticism is answered by Anne's picturesque rationalism." (Davies, 1996, pp ix-x)

The differences and similarities of the Brontë sisters' writings is fascinating in itself. Do we need to divorce the biographical information we have from the novels and poetry? Or is it legitimate to utilize it to inform our readings and interpretations? Arthur Huntington is certainly not Heathcliff; he is a privileged male not a cuckoo's fledgling; but he does violently usurp Helen's rights of access to her painting materials and diary. He is possessive of Helen's time, attention and affection, before he turns to adultery. He 'needs' Helen's moral strength and superiority to champion his case, whilst hating her goodness, at his approaching death and judgment. Suddenly there are links of substance between these two apparently different characters. In my opinion, these similarities require further discussion than possible here.

"The power to make this feminist statement derived from Anne Brontë's Christian belief: she represents a development of radical Protestantism which insists on

the right and duty of the individual to interpret the Scriptures for herself in the light of the Spirit's promptings, and to make known her understanding. The Authorized Version of the Bible is warp and weft of the discourse of Wildfell Hall, both as a code of belief and behaviour and as a sacred poem..." (Davies, 1996, page xx)

There are links here to be made from Anne's radical Christian individualism to Charlotte Brontë's independent character Jane Eyre. Energy and truth to self are considered to be fundamental conditions of being human, not gender or class specific. Christian choices are dynamically explored and analysed in this novel.

"...Helen's very self in its moment of absolute affliction, ...when she overhears her husband's oath "by all that's sacred" that he no longer loves his wife, affirms her steadfast Christian belief in God, "I knew their God was mine, and He was strong to save and swift to hear". (Davies, 1996, page xxiv)

Helen's strong-minded faith enables her to leave her husband to save her child. Her faith also compels her to return and care for Arthur at Grassdale, as she has the spiritual fortitude to do so. Anne Brontë has radically presented Christian thought and action to a male dominated society she perceives as fallen.

THE 2000 COMMITTEE

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PROGRAMME FOR 2001

The New College Meetings are held in the Meeting Room of New College at the University of New South Wales. It is best entered from Anzac Parade near the main university entrance and parking is readily available nearby in Anzac Parade. Frequent buses from Central Railway and Circular Quay pass the university.

FRIDAY 23rd FEBRUARY 6pm to 7:30pm at Border's Bookshop, Macquarie Centre \$5
The shop is on Level 4 Macquarie Centre NORTH RYDE.

An evening of dramatic readings:

THE BRONTË SISTERS' WICKED MEN

The three Brontë sisters knew, in their imaginations, the sort of men that no Victorian parsonage daughter should ever have met. We visit them as they pace around the parsonage dining room table, discussing their creatures, Heathcliff, Rochester and Huntingdon and reading excerpts from *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. After a coffee break we hear Patrick Brontë and his three famous daughters reading some of their poetry.

SATURDAY 7th APRIL 2pm \$5
at New College UNSW

THE MANY LIVES OF EMILY BRONTË

In 1999 we had several of our members present short reviews of biographies of Charlotte. Now it's Emily's turn.

A short Annual general Meeting will also be held in order to elect the office-bearers for the year.

SATURDAY 2nd JUNE 2pm \$5
at New College UNSW

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE AGE OF THE BRONTËS

Dr Geoff Treloar, Dean of Menzies College, Macquarie University.

FRIDAY 22nd JUNE 7:30pm at the home of the President, 31 Epping Ave EASTWOOD
No charge, but bring something for supper.

THE MUSIC OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

In this informal evening we'll relive the story of *Wuthering Heights* as we listen to musical excerpts from Bernard Hermann's opera *Wuthering Heights*, Bernard Taylor's musical *Wuthering Heights* and Cliff Richard's *Heathcliff*. We will be following the libretto and there will be opportunity to discuss how each of the musical versions deals with the narrative.

SATURDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2pm \$5
at New College UNSW

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF AN UNPROTECTED FEMALE

Dr Tim Dolin from the University of Newcastle.

The talk will explore *Villette*'s indebtedness to the Punch Series *Scenes in the Life of an Unprotected Female* that ran from November 1849 to April 1850.

SATURDAY 22nd and SUNDAY 23rd SEPTEMBER THE THREE SISTERS WEEKEND

We will be holding an informal weekend at the Guest House *La Maison* in Lurline St Katoomba, just a short walk from the Three Sisters at Echo Point. It will start mid morning on the Saturday and run till lunch on Sunday. Further details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

SATURDAY 8th DECEMBER 12 noon **ABA CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

The venue and cost are to be announced in the next newsletter.

