

# The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter



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## **THREE SISTERS WEEKEND AT KATOOMBA IN SEPTEMBER**

(more photographs inside)

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Once again we've had a good year. At Borders Bookshop we met the Brontë sisters' "wicked men". Then, in April, we had several of our members reviewing a number of biographies of Emily. Geoff Treloar talked to us in June on the Church of England in the time of the Brontës and in September Tim Dolan talked to us about the Punch Series *Scenes From the Life of an Unprotected Female* and related it to the Brontës. Also in June a few of us sampled the several musical and operatic versions of *Wuthering Heights*.

It was a little bit of a disappointment that our change of venue for the Christmas Lunch (because St Jude's had been getting too crowded) resulted in fewer people attending. But it didn't detract from the enjoyment of those who did attend. The venue is light and airy, and although it could have easily accommodated three times as many as who were there, it didn't feel as though we were rolling around in a vast empty space. Deborah Franks and Marloesje Valkenburg entertained us with one of Emily's poems, where Marloesje read the poem and Deborah sang it in the manner of a "blues singer".

But the highlight of the year was surely our weekend away. About twenty of us stayed at the La Maison Guesthouse, near the Three Sisters in Katoomba and it was an excellent opportunity for us to get to know each other better. Those of us who arrived on the Friday night checked out the food at the local R.S.L. club and found it to be excellent value. Many of us enjoyed taking part in the unrehearsed play reading, including some who don't normally volunteer for this sort of thing and who

surprised themselves at how much they enjoyed it.

Susannah gave a talk, and Christine conducted a workshop, both of which were very enjoyable. Christine's workshop on *The Poetaster* gave us further opportunity to display our dramatic talents, even if we did get a little carried away with putting our own slant on it. I think she wouldn't have minded our enthusiastic *ad libbing*.

There were over thirty of us at the special dinner at The Poachers Café on the Saturday evening. I still don't know how I got the numbers wrong, resulting in two of the group having to wander through the gallery attached to the café until a table became free. I was never much good at counting!

Our intention is to hold such a weekend in odd years, alternating with the Jane Austen Society's weekend conference.

But although we have no weekend away in 2002 we do have a very full program. In fact after we had thought we'd finalized the program we suddenly got the opportunity of having Mardi McConnochie speak to us about her novel *Coldwater*, so we slipped that in as well.

I first became aware of this fresh slant on the Brontës through an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and I naturally thought, "I'll have to track her down to see if she would be prepared to speak to us. The novel has attracted a lot of international interest, especially in the United States, and the fact that Mardi lived in Sydney was too good an opportunity to miss. But how best to contact her?"



Through the *Herald* perhaps, or through the publisher? But I am inexperienced in such matters and it seemed like it could result in a time-consuming trail of referrals. The article

did say she lived in a Paddington terrace and had a photograph of her looking over her balcony.

Now, that wrought iron work on the balcony provided a good clue. Being somewhat of an amateur detective, like Mr Ellin, I thought "all I have to do was to walk around the streets of Paddington until I find that exact pattern"! (Actually I found an easier way, but I did use the wrought iron to check that it was the right address.)

Finally, let me thank the association for the gift that was presented to me at the Christmas Lunch. It was a reproduction of a sampler worked by Emily when she was 10 years old. Anne Lock worked the reproduction in exquisite cross stitch and presented to me on behalf of the ABA. You can see a picture of it, and some information from Ann, on page 8. The kit is by Moira Blackburn and the original is in the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

I hope you are able to attend many, if not all, of our 2002 events. I look forward to seeing you there.

*Christopher Cooper*

## BOOK REVIEW

***The Bronte Myth* by Lucasta Miller (Jonathan Cape 2001).**

**Reviewed by Annette Harman**

The cover announces, "this book has as its subject the manipulation of a reputation". I must confess that I am a Cover, Preface and Acknowledgements reader, and this book appears to have it all. Published in 2001, by a self-confessed literary critic, emotionally nourished on the Brontës and personally committed to answering Terry Eagleton's remarks in *Myths of Power: a Marxist Study of the Brontës*.

"The Brontës, like Shakespeare, are a literary industry as well as a collection of literary texts, and it would have been worth asking why this should be so and how it came about"(Miller, 2001, p vlv)

Literary industry and literary texts are not normally the way we approach the Brontës, often our approach stems from our childhood reading of the Brontës where we identify with the characters' emotional extremes or adolescent sense of justice, or the writers' presentation of absolute immediacy. But "manipulating reputations" and "literary industry and texts"

pinpoints the mechanism of conscious distortion that readers of the Brontës experienced, as early as the 1850s.

Owing to the availability of documents written by, or about Charlotte, naturally she becomes the main focus of *The Bronte Myth*. Charlotte's ambitious intention to become famous by her writings is given a detailed feminist analysis in the opening chapter, entitled, "To be for ever known". The conscious construction of myths is firstly discussed by Charlotte's own myth-making and in the second chapter, entitled "Poor Miss Bronte" led off by Charles Kingsley's responses to Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*. Charlotte quickly becomes a vehicle for other people's myth-making and Lucasta Miller documents the myth-making process with scholarly gusto, traversing not only documents, but buildings, shops, institutions, literary figures, Yorkshire men and women, virtually anyone on both sides of the Atlantic with a Bronte interest.

Lucasta Miller experienced many difficulties in her personal life when writing this book, for example, four years of debilitating illness. Be prepared potential, and perhaps, tantalized reader, this is an exhaustive and exhausting book to



read. Miller claims, in the Preface, "This book, therefore, is not so much a biography of the Brontës but a book about biography, a metabiography. Occasionally, when focusing on the sentimental excesses of the Bronte cult, it may even read more like an autobiography" (Miller, 2001,p x). I do recommend this interesting book to you.

## ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE THREE SISTERS WEEKEND



# EMMA

## A Detective Story, begun by Charlotte Brontë, continued by Simone Cooper, and hopefully to be continued further by ... you.

Charlotte Brontë started to write a detective story at about the same time that Wilkie Collins completed the very first novel of this popular genre. Unfortunately she died before she could complete it. It has been completed by "Another Lady" in 1980 (published by Dent) but we are inviting our readers to come up with our own continuation, chapter by chapter. We include here a cut-down version of Charlotte's two chapters followed by a Chapter 3 by Simone Cooper. We invite you to take the story a step further by submitting a chapter 4, which would appear in a later issue.

### CHAPTER I

My name is Mrs. Chalfont. I am a widow. About a mile from my house there is a ladies' school. The conductresses of this school were of my acquaintances, the Misses Wilcox. About a year after they opened their school, when the number of their pupils was as yet exceedingly limited the entrance-gate to their little drive was one day thrown back to admit a very handsome, fashionable carriage drawn by a pair of really splendid horses.

Miss Wilcox repaired to the reception-room and found a gentleman seated on the sofa, who, as he rose up, appeared a tall, fine-looking personage. He introduced himself as Mr. Fitzgibbon, inquired if Miss Wilcox had a vacancy, and intimated that he wished to intrust to her care a new pupil in the shape of his daughter.

This was welcome news, for there was many a vacancy in Miss Wilcox's school-room; indeed, her establishment was as yet limited to the select number of three.

It was admitted that there were vacancies in Fuchsia Lodge; that Miss Fitzgibbon could be received at once; that she was to learn all that the school prospectus proposed to teach; to be liable to every extra; in short, to be as expensive, and consequently as profitable a pupil, as any directress's heart could wish. Mr. Fitzgibbon showed in the transaction none of the hardness of the bargain-making man of business, and as little of the penurious anxiety of the straitened professional man. On taking his leave he left the

address left written on a card – Conway Fitzgibbon, Esq., May Park, Midland County.

Miss Fitzgibbon's trunks, when opened, disclosed a splendid wardrobe. Miss Wilcox's soon considered her as her favourite pupil, especially so on learning that the little girl was the inheritress of her father's estates.

The undue favours showered on little Miss Fitzgibbon brought their object no real benefit. Unfitted for the character of playfellow by her position of favourite, her fellow-pupils rejected her company as decidedly as they dared. Active rejection was not long necessary; it was soon seen that passive avoidance would suffice; the pet was not social.

The observation of a gentleman, who about this time called at the Lodge was, "That child looks consummately unhappy".

### CHAPTER II

MR. ELLIN – the gentleman mentioned in the last chapter – was a man who went where he liked, and being a gossiping, leisurely person, he liked to go almost anywhere. He could not be rich, he lived so quietly; and yet he must have had some money, for, without apparent profession, he continued to keep a house and a servant. On the whole he might be called a fair man, of average height, rather thin and rather wiry. Some people dubbed him "a character," and fancied him "eccentric".

Mr. Ellin often called on the Misses Wilcox; he appeared to like tea and muffins, and not to dislike the kind of conversation which usually accompanies that refreshment.

One clear winter morning, as Mr. Ellin was seated at breakfast, enjoying his bachelor's easy chair and damp, fresh London newspaper, a note was bought to him marked "private," and "in haste." The last injunction was vain, for William Ellin did nothing in haste. He took out a morocco case, selected from a variety of little instruments a pair of tiny scissors, cut round the seal, and read: "Miss Wilcox's compliments to Mr. Ellin, and she should be truly glad to see him for a few minutes. Miss W. requires a little advice. She will reserve explanations till she sees Mr. E."

Mr. Ellin very quietly finished his breakfast; then, as it was a very fine December day he carefully prepared himself for the cold, took his cane, and set out. He made his journey as long as he could by going round through many fields, and through winding, unfrequented lanes. When there was a tree in the way conveniently placed for support, he would sometimes stop, lean his back against the trunk, fold his arms, and muse.

At last he stands at the door and rings the bell; he is admitted, and shown into the parlour. Miss Wilcox occupies it.

"What can I do for you, Miss Wilcox?" says Mr. Ellin, approaching the writing-table, and taking a chair beside it.

"I feel so thoroughly puzzled, and really fear all is not right. About a fortnight since, I wrote to the friends of my pupils, notifying the day when we break up, and requesting that, if it was desired that any girl should stay the vacation, intimation should be sent accordingly. Satisfactory and prompt answers came to all the notes except one – that addressed to Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire, May Park, Midland County. This very morning what do you think the post brought me? My own letter returned from the post-office."

She handed to Mr. Ellin an envelope with a paper. It said, in brief terms, that there was no such place in Midland County as May Park, and that no such person had ever been heard of there as Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire.

On reading this, Mr. Ellin slightly opened his eyes. "How very odd, no such place as May Park! The grand mansion, the grounds, the oaks, the deer, vanished clean away. And then Fitzgibbon himself!

"Do you think, after all, there is some mistake?"

"Certainly, a mistake; but when it is rectified I don't think Fitzgibbon or May Park will be forthcoming. Shall I run down to Midland County and look after these two precious objects?"

"Oh! would you be so good, Mr. Ellin? I knew you would be so kind."

Mr. Ellin "ran down" as he said, to Midland County. It was an errand that seemed to suit him; for he had curious predilections as well as peculiar methods of his own. Any secret quest was to his taste; perhaps there was something of the amateur detective in him. He could conduct an inquiry and draw no attention. His quiet face never looked inquisitive, nor did his sleepless eye betray vigilance.

He was away about a week. The day after his return, he appeared in

Miss Wilcox's presence as cool as if he had seen her but yesterday. Conway Fitzgibbon was a man of straw; May Park a house of cards. There was no vestige of such man or mansion in Midland County, or in any other shire in England. Tradition herself had nothing to say about either the name or the place. The Oracle of old deeds and registers, when consulted, had not responded.

"A quarter's board and education owing, and masters' terms besides," pursued Miss Wilcox. "How infamous! I can't afford the loss."

"And if we were only in the good old times," said Mr. Ellin, "you might just send Miss Matilda out to the plantations in Virginia, sell her for what she is worth, and pay yourself."

"Matilda, indeed, and Fitzgibbon! A little impostor! I wonder what her real name is?"

"Betty Hodge? Poll Smith? Hannah Jones?" suggested Mr. Ellin. "Now," cried Miss Wilcox, "give me credit for sagacity! It's very odd, but try as I would I never could really like that child. Her game is up now, however: and time it was."

"Have her in whilst I am here," said Mr. Ellin. "Has she known of this business? Is she in the secret? Is she herself an accomplice, or a mere tool? Have her in."

Miss Wilcox rang the bell and demanded that Matilda Fitzgibbon be brought to her. The false heiress soon appeared, in her ringlets and sash.

"Stand there!" said Miss Wilcox, sternly, checking her as she approached the hearth. "Stand there on the farther side of the table. I have a few questions to put to you, and your business will be to answer them. And mind – let us have the truth. We will not endure lies."

"Who are you?" demanded Miss Wilcox. "What do you know about yourself?"

A sort of half interjection escaped the girl's lips; it was a sound

expressing partly fear, and partly the shock the nerves feel when an evil, very long expected, at last and suddenly arrives.

"Keep yourself still, and reply, if you please," said Miss Wilcox, "What is your name? We know you have no right to that of Matilda Fitzgibbon." She gave no answer.

Miss Wilcox did not fly into a passion, but she grew very stern and urgent; spoke a little loud; and there was a dry clamour in her raised voice which seemed to beat upon the ear and bewilder the brain.

At last the culprit spoke. A low voice escaped her lips. "Oh, my head!" she cried, lifting her hands to her forehead. She staggered, but caught the door. "Oh, Mr. Ellin!" The child dropped as she spoke. A curious voice – not like Mr. Ellin's, though it came from his lips – asked Miss Wilcox to cease speaking, and say no more. He gathered from the floor what had fallen on it. She seemed overcome, but unconscious. Resting beside Mr. Ellin, in a few minutes she again drew breath. She raised her eyes to him.

"Come, my little one; have no fear," said he. Reposing her head against him, she gradually became reassured.

He told Miss Wilcox that the little girl must be put to bed. He carried her upstairs, and saw her laid there himself. Returning to Miss Wilcox, he said:

"Say no more to her. Beware, or you will do more mischief than you think or wish. That kind of nature is very different from yours. It is not possible that you should like it; but let it alone. We will talk more on the subject to-morrow. Let me question her."

## Chapter Three of EMMA by Simone Cooper

With that, Mr Ellin took his leave. Miss Wilcox followed suit, as if in blind obedience at least to the naked eye, but it was her duty, as school governess, to see all her guests to the front door.

“You’ve been most gracious Mr Ellin. Tomorrow then,” and Miss Wilcox shook his hand.

Miss Wilcox closed the door behind him and decided to pop in on the little lady known as Matilda Fitzgibbon. She walked up the stairs towards the little girl’s room. The door was slightly ajar; it took no effort to push it further open, but the slight creak in the door as it moved, was enough to signify alert. Alas, the little girl awoke. She sat timidly up in the bed, hugging the bed sheets for dear life and trembling. Miss Wilcox’s voice travelled the length of the room to the little girl’s bed.

“It’s only me, Matilda,” she announced, her face still expressionless, but a slight warmth in her voice could be discerned as she spoke. “Are you well my child?” she asked.

The little one nodded meekly, but in the dim light coming into her room from the hallway and shining on her bed, the girl’s face was still etched in fright.

“Everything’s all right,” Miss Wilcox soothed. “I’ll let you sleep,” and she closed the door.

The following day little Miss Fitzgibbon, with the same reserved and unyielding persona, walked in to the drawing room at Miss Wilcox’s request. Mr Ellin, having partaken breakfast earlier still had the same serious air that had gripped him during the dramas of the previous day.

“You’re looking much better Matilda,” Mr Ellin commented.

Matilda glanced meekly from Mr Ellin to Miss Wilcox and just stood transfixed, one end of her little blue sash held precariously in her tiny hand.

Mr Ellin approached her mindfully. Miss Wilcox was standing to one side, playing the casual observer.

She had conversed earlier with Mr Ellin and in spite of her exasperation at the non-committal responses of her little charge, decided to leave the situation in Mr Ellin’s capable hands.

“So then Matilda, why don’t you take a seat by the open window. Come, come, the fresh air will do you good.”

Miss Fitzgibbon obeyed, keeping her gaze to the floor. Miss Wilcox moved silently to the side near the window, a false impression of her concern could have easily been foreseen, had one looked closely at her stoic demeanour. That child would just have to speak. Miss Wilcox’s reputation, not to mention that of her boarding school, was at stake.

“Now then Matilda,” began Mr Ellin, “do you remember what we spoke about yesterday?”

A slow nod was the only reward for their efforts. A different approach would be deemed necessary. The child seemed switched of to talk, much to Miss Wilcox’s annoyance.

The paleness had returned on Matilda’s face. Subtlety and reassurance must be the key.

“Are you happy here Matilda?” Mr Ellin asked dutifully. At that Matilda raised her head and nodded vaguely.

“Well I’m glad to hear that. Is everyone treating you well here?” No reply. A direct and authoritative approach if adopted, could bring about faster results, if one knew the right words to say with the right amount of due feeling.

“I think she’s referring to the other little girls in the school,” Miss Wilcox interjected, her voice controlled and contained but underneath the surface, her great consternation at such self-perceived insubordination and insolence was running rampant.

Mr Ellin approached Miss Wilcox, who had edged ever slightly forward, her thin lips pursed together, her arms folded across her chest.

“Would you mind if I take her out on a little excursion?”

“But what good would that do?” whispered Miss Wilcox.

Mr Ellin remained thoughtful. “A change of environment might very well be the answer to our problems.”

“Well if you think it’s best.”

“I do.”

Mr Ellin returned to his little project who had turned her head to gaze outside the open window. It was quite pleasant and mild in spite of the winter season.

Mr Ellin took hold of her clammy hands.

“You should keep your hands in your muff Matilda. It can get very cold outside.”

Matilda regarded him curiously. “Outside?” she breathed.

“Yes. We’re going to go for a little trip. Just you and me.” A touch of pink seemed to return to her cheeks.

“How about you run along and fetch your coat,” instructed Mr Ellin. The little girl obeyed.

“How do you propose to get to the truth Mr Ellin?” inquired Miss Wilcox.

“Subtlety may prevail. I’m hoping, though, that by taking an interest in her; showing her a little bit of joy which she otherwise would not have, may bring her out of her shell and make her more willing to tell us what exactly is going on.”

The little girl returned, wearing such a pretty little bonnet, the same little golden ringlets, her winter coat, muff and lace up boots and if one looked close enough, there was a faint stirring of light within her eyes. A positive and reassuring sign, one would hope.

Mr Ellin led Matilda out of the drawing room and into the crisp winter air. He turned back to Miss Wilcox.

“I’ll have her home before tea.”

Miss Wilcox nodded her head in understanding and closed the door.

Mr Ellin had come by horse and carriage this morning, a very appropriate way indeed, given the nature of his outing. Walking long

distances as he liked to do, was hardly appropriate for a little girl.

Mr Ellin lifted Matilda into the front of the carriage, next to the driver's seat. "I bet your father has an equally handsome carriage, if its anything like what was described."

Matilda looked up.

"I guess," she replied meekly.

Mr Ellin hopped in the other side and instructed the horses to giddy up.

"So then Matilda, where would you like to go? A trip into town? A trip to the lake?"

Matilda regarded him curiously. "I ... I don't know."

"Well how about a trip to town then? We can have some hot bread or scones and tea if you like."

Matilda nodded her head. "Why are you taking such an interest in me sir?" she asked suddenly.

Mr Ellin barely stirred at her confronting question. Suffice to say that he gave her a slight smile and glanced her way.

"I've noticed you for a while now Matilda," he said with effectual candour, "somewhat withdrawn and forlorn. I wanted to cheer you up and I thought, please correct me if I'm wrong, that a nice trip to town could be just what you need. I'm sure if your father was here, he'd want to do the same thing for you."

Carefully put, but it roused apprehension and self doubt within Matilda because she turned away and stared down at the ground.

"That's okay. We don't have to talk about your father." Although it limits the possibilities of conversation.

Mr Ellin led the horses into town and stopped in front of a shop. He helped Matilda to the ground and then led her inside.

"O I just need to buy some more sugar and flour Matilda. I won't be long."

Matilda glanced around her nervously. Mr Ellin wondered why,

Surely she had been inside a shop before.

After Mr Ellin had purchased the goods, he led Matilda back outside.

"Come on Matilda, let's go and have some lunch."

Matilda followed, slightly behind him, still under the same silent cloud that seemed to forever hover over her. On one occasion, as Mr Ellin glanced briefly towards her, he noticed her eyes narrowing apprehensively. It again intrigued him. Should he ask a sympathetic question in order to somehow evoke more of a lively response? Would he be successful anyway? The natural curiosity and amusement that often preoccupied little girls at Matilda's age had been silenced, either willingly or otherwise. Needless to say, the little girl's lack of appreciation at having been taken into town by a kindly stranger was starting to displease Mr Ellin. He would have much preferred for her to enjoy herself. Alas, it seems even the best of intentions can fail.

Then something very unexpected happened. As Mr Ellin and Matilda were about to enter the local tea-house, a stout, middle aged woman came rushing up to them in the opposite direction.

"Ah Matilda," she cried joyously, "Matilda Fitzgibbon!" The woman stopped short in front of the man and the little girl. Mr Ellin's suddenly felt that the mystery was just a misunderstanding after all. At last there was somebody who recognised Matilda. So, she is who she says she is.

"Good day to you sir," greeted the woman cheerily to Mr Ellin.

"Good day to you Ma'am," he replied ostentatiously.

Mr Ellin then regarded Matilda. Her face was stony pale, her eyes widened with terror. She stood perfectly still.

"So Matilda, what do you say to Mrs ... ?" Mr Ellin glanced at the woman.

"Mrs Parsons," she replied. "How are you Matilda?"

There was silence again. Mr Ellin became curiously concerned. Why was Matilda so afraid to speak? Then a most confounding and extraordinary thing happened, again more intriguing this time though.

Matilda opened her mouth and said, her voice quavering slightly.

"I ... I'm not Matilda Fitzgibbon, Ma'am. You must be mistaken."

The woman narrowed her eyes carefully, studying the little girl closely.

"Well you're exactly the way I remembered you to be," she said. "I'm sure I'm not mistaken."

"You are!" the little girl cried and ran off down the street.

Mr Ellin stood stunned. He was in a total state of shock. Just when he thought he was making progress – actually meeting someone who knew the little girl, somebody who could perhaps shed light on the strange circumstances surrounding her life, the little progress was turned into more of a confusing and intriguing riddle than ever before.

## **CATHY & HEATHCLIFF AT PILBARO OPEN-CUT MINE**

On ABC TV Dimensions program on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2001 Kay and Doug are interviewed. at a Pilbaro open cut mine. Kay operates a massive digging-machine while her husband operates a huge truck.

*'What would Cathy & Heathcliff have done if Wuthering Heights had been set in the middle of the world's biggest open cut mine?'*

*'They would have made do, that's what.'*

We then see Kay and Doug calling to each other and running in slow motion into each other's arms.

**Contributed by Ann Lock**

# BRONTË SAMPLERS

by Ann Lock

There are fifteen samplers in the Brontë Parsonage Museum. Three of these were worked by Charlotte, two by Emily and two by Anne. Mrs Brontë, Aunt Branwell, Elizabeth and Maria Brontë worked one each. In addition there is one each worked by Ann Branwell and Margaret Branwell (possibly sisters of Mrs Brontë) and Nellie Earnshaw. There is an unfinished sampler with a doubtful attribution to Emily.<sup>1</sup>

The word 'sampler' is derived from the French 'exemplair', meaning a model or pattern to copy. The first sampler worked by a child in the early nineteenth century was mainly the making of a reference of patterns (not stiches) for later sewing. The worker needed the patterns of letters, numbers and owner's initials (because of servants) and working decorative borders. The order of the content varied slightly with each worker. Usually the order of the content was arranged so that the work progressed in difficulty. Working the border patterns first enabled the worker to practise the stitches in a simple form. The upper case letters came before the lower case ones as they were the ones worked on the household linen. The religious texts allowed the worker to consolidate the learning and show virtue. The name and age of the worker also

allowed for this consolidation and proved ownership of this reference.

The sampler was also used to introduce the rudiments of sewing and to allow for the practising of cross stitch and marking (cross) stitch. Cross stitch was probably the easiest, most mathematical and consistent way of reproducing letters and numbers for creating patterns and symbols.

Marking stitch was the stitch used to mark the household linen and differed from cross stitch in that on the back of the work a neat square

was built up. The back of the work had to look as neat as the front. On the front, marking stitch looked like ordinary cross stitch. This stitch required logical thinking. 'On the old samplers the signatures and dates are often worked in this stitch.'<sup>2</sup> Marking stitch was included as one of the basic stitches taught at school in the early nineteenth century. Mrs Gaskell in her novel *North And South* described the task of marking household linen.

The Brontë girls worked samplers because of their gender, the time and place they lived,



tradition, the family's economic situation, their place in society and their religious beliefs.

'For the Brontës, sewing was as much a practical necessity as a ladylike pursuit.'<sup>3</sup>

Household arts and crafts, cooking and housekeeping duties were handed down from generation to generation through the female members in the early nineteenth century. This was the

'She made her nieces sew with purpose or without, and as far as possible, discouraged any other culture. She used to keep them sewing charity clothes and maintained to me that it was not for the good of the recipients, but of the sewers. "It was proper for them to do it." she said.'<sup>5</sup>

In 1822 in Haworth, Maria Brontë (aged 8), Elizabeth Brontë (aged 7) and Charlotte

reference to use when marking household linen and for later sewing. The content of the samplers is very similar to that of their mother's except that none of the girls reproduced her lovely gold and pink chevron border (probably because of Aunt Branwell's influence – she had not used such a border in her own work).

In 1822 Elizabeth, Maria



woman's role.

'I do not know whether Miss Branwell taught her nieces anything besides sewing, and the household arts in which Charlotte afterwards was such an adept. Their regular lessons were said to their father.'<sup>4</sup>

Aunt Branwell and Mrs Brontë would have been taught the household arts by their mother. Because of the early death of Mrs Brontë it fell to Aunt Branwell to teach the Brontë girls the household arts. She taught them sewing in her stuffy bedroom.

Brontë (aged 6) finished their first samplers. These samplers are very similar to Aunt Branwell's. Both Emily and Anne were too young.

In 1824 Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily went to Cowan Bridge School. In 1825 Maria and Elizabeth died at home. In 1826 Charlotte completed her second sampler. This was very similar to her first.

Charlotte's, Emily's and Anne's first samplers are typical of the day and reflect very much the Branwell female tradition of handing down the household arts. The girls now had a

and Charlotte all used brown cotton thread on linen. In 1828 Emily and Anne used dark green silk on linen. This suggests working together and sharing the materials.

The samplers show that Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily and Anne all worked the same five pattern lines – the same upper and lower case letters, the same numbers and the two forms of 'S'. There is an example of the two forms of 'S' in the words 'quietne[s]' and 'transgre[s]ion' in Charlotte's religious text sampler.

A certain degree of individuality is evident in the choice of religious text, the order of the pattern lines, the numbers and the patterns at the end. Emily asserted her individuality by not having a religious text and by adding the dieresis to the 'e' in Brontë and the <sup>nd</sup> to 22 in 22<sup>nd</sup>. She would have had to work out for herself how to do these. Apart from Charlotte they all had V before U.

Usually the sampler was not framed, but was rolled up so that it could be carried with the worker in her work bag to refer to. These samplers could also have been used as a reference for school entrance and when applying for a position as a teacher or governess. Also the Brontë girls could have used their samplers as teaching aids when governessing or teaching.

Charlotte completed a religious text sampler in 1828, Emily in 1829 and Anne in 1830. All three girls used black silk on

linen. They all used the Greek Key Border.



Charlotte used her knowledge of working samplers in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. Anne, on her second sampler, used a long passage from the *Book of Proverbs* 'extolling the virtues of begetting wisdom and understading'. She used these ideas in her novel *Agnes Grey*. Most of the main female characters in the novels of Charlotte and Anne sew. But Emily, though the neatest worker, mentions sewing very little, and then only as an occupation for Nelly Dean. Neither Catherine nor Cathy sew.

I do not think that the Brontë girls enjoyed working their samplers. But to work a first sampler was traditional and essential for young girls in the nineteenth century. The girls would have had needed infinite patience, perseverance and

application when leaning the household arts and crafts. Perhaps learning some of these practical household arts and crafts might have been beneficial for Branwell!

The samplers are not joyful, colourful, spontaneous or creative. They are plain and practical and definitely reflect their mother's and Aunt Branwell's family tradition as well as their father's occupation.

**NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Brontë Parsonage Museum: Information supplied by the curator, Rachel Terry 19.7.99.

<sup>2</sup> CHRISTIE, Mrs Archibold *Samplers and Stitches*, P.T. Batsford Ltd 1950.

<sup>3</sup> ALEXANDER, Christine and SELLARS, Jane *The Art of The Brontës*, Cambridge University Press 1995, p50.

<sup>4</sup> GASKELL, Elizabeth *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Penguin 1893, p97.

<sup>5</sup> GERIN, Winifred *Emily Brontë*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p20 (Mary Taylor to Mrs Gaskell).



*Relaxing at the Cocktail Hour, and Dinner, at the Three Sisters Weekend*

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**COLDWATER by Mardi McConnochie**  
**Flamingo (Harper Collins) 2001**

**Reviewed by Christopher Cooper**

I finished reading *Coldwater* within about 48 hours of buying a copy at the book-launch – a tribute to the fact that it held my attention and to the *pellucid* nature of the writing. (We'll get back to that word later.)

*Coldwater* is fabulous – not “absolutely fabulous” as in the TV series but “relatively fabulous”. I am no longer passing judgement on the book's merit but I am using these words purely descriptively to describing the genre. *Coldwater* is a “relative fable”.

It is fable, not simply because it changes the historical facts, but because it has an air of unreality. You are expected to suspend disbelief, and if you keep saying “but that couldn't have happened” you are missing the point. It is a “relative fable” because it runs parallel to the true story of the Brontës.

*Coldwater* is a novel in which the Brontë family is transported to an island prison off the coast of N.S.W. Father is the governor and Charlotte, Emily and Anne live with him there, apparently the only females on the island. (Branwell died as a youngster before he could get into too much trouble!) The remoteness and isolation of

their situation inspire the girls to write.

At the Sydney book-launch the publisher's representative introduced it as one of the great “what-if” novels. I think this is somewhat misleading, because it suggests the idea of changing one



circumstance of the Brontë story and following it through to its logical consequences.

*Coldwater* doesn't do that – instead it turns everything upside down. Yes it does run parallel to the story of the historical Brontës but only in the sense that when you turn something upside down it runs not only parallel but in the opposite direction.

I think Mardi is having fun with the reader, particularly the reader with some knowledge of the Brontës. At first I kept thinking “she's got that wrong – that's not what would have happened”. But I soon realised that the game she is playing is to

turn everything upside down and back-to-front.

Well, not quite everything. Most of the names are there. We have Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell – though the surname is changed to Wolf. And before coming to the island they did lived at Haworth – but not the Yorkshire village. Haworth here is a remote property in the N.S.W bush. The girls write about Gondal, their imaginary country – but it was in the unexplored centre of Australia. And they write under the pseudonyms Acton, Curren and Ellis.

Here, Mardi has Emily writing *Wuthering Heights* but how the pages ever reach a publisher is a miracle. In a very dramatic scene Emily stood with Anne at the top of a cliff and the “wind ripped their hair back from their faces and sent it streaming out in a straight line behind them ... she began a kind of mad dance, peeling off sheets of paper and letting them fly where they would ... scattering her words to the winds.”

Upside-down and back-to-front references abound. Charlotte is the only one of the three sisters not to find fulfilment with a man. Anne is described as “lazy”. Emily is frequently sick in bed. The

father dies before his daughters. These are not acts of carelessness by the author – they are deliberate inversions. It’s as if everything is inverted by bringing the family down under.

A particularly amusing inversion concerns the numerous boxes of books that were shipped out from London. Instead of coming the usual route via South Africa the supply ship goes west via Rio de Janeiro and around the treacherous Cape Horn.

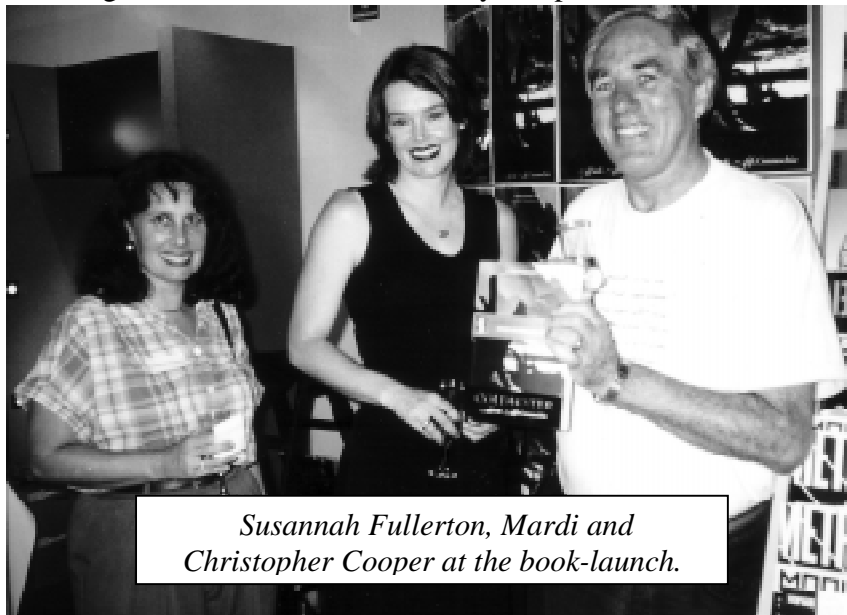
Mardi teases the reader by giving a certain impression and then apparently contradicting herself. On several occasions I found myself re-reading certain sections to catch her out only to find that she wasn’t really guilty of a contradiction. “I didn’t exactly say that” I could here her saying to me.

One of these concerns the remoteness of Coldwater itself. At the beginning of the book we learn that it lies a long way off the coast and its supplies come infrequently from Sydney, three days by ship (except for newspapers and books which come directly from London via Rio de Janeiro). But by the end it seems to have got mysteriously closer to the mainland when Anne’s friend, Diver, swims over to the island every Thursday afternoon and where the lights of the mainland can be seen across the water. Yet re-reading the earlier passage I found that I had missed the fact that she had said that a determined swimmer

might make it to shore. Why had I missed that?

I was reminded that Charlotte played games with the remoteness of the Haworth Parsonage and the isolation of

The island is very suitable as a prison. The buildings are at the top of sheer cliffs of volcanic rock that rise straight out the water. There’s only one place to land, and then



*Susannah Fullerton, Mardi and Christopher Cooper at the book-launch.*

the sisters has become part of the mythology of the family story. Even today, looking out from the parsonage over the moors, you get the feeling of remoteness. But turn around and, even in the Brontës’ day, you would have seen that you were on the edge of a large industrial village.

The mysterious swimmer who has come ashore is plotting an escape for his brother, a prisoner on the island. On their first meeting, as Diver climbs out of the sea, he chats to Anne. She tells him that she is a daughter of the governor and he tells her of his plot – but don’t tell daddy! This occurs towards the end of the book, by which time you have learnt not to say, “but this wouldn’t have really happened”.

only at high tide. The only way to the settlement is a by a long hard climb. I felt sorry for the poor convicts who must have had to haul the sisters’ piano up the cliffs as in the film *The Piano*. And since the fresh milk does not appear to come from the mainland (all supplies are from Sydney) they must have had to haul a cow or two up these steep cliffs at some stage!

Now don’t get the idea that I’m poking fun at these logical oddities. They added to my enjoyment in reading the book and I am sure that the vast majority of them were supposed to be there to tease the reader. I am simply trying to describe the somewhat surreal flavour of the book.

Above all, the writing is *pellucid*. If you have never come across the word let me tell you that until the book-launch I hadn't either.

Mardi asked Don Anderson, Sydney academic and columnist for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, to speak at the launch in the Ariel Bookshop in Paddington. He gave a most witty and amusing speech in which he said many witty things about the literary world. He remarked that this was going to be a "Gough Whitlam" speech – one where you talk about yourself and make only passing reference to the subject in hand. The joke was that he did just that!.

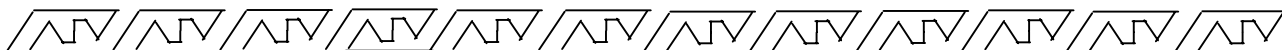
But one thing I did learn from him about Mardi's novel (and this proves he had actually

read it) was that the writing was "pellucid". Each time he used the word there was a slight twinkle in his eye as if to say "I bet you don't know what the word means". As far as I was concerned he was right but fortunately, when I looked puzzled, Susannah whispered the meaning. You probably know what it means too, but if not I'll make you look it up!

This was just the Sydney launch. The book had already been published in the U.S.A. and it seems to be selling well there. Mardi told me that not all the reviews there were positive and, though I personally enjoyed the book, I think I know why. It is a strange book that would not appeal to someone with a conservative or literal mind.

Mardi has yet to find an English publisher. "I think there is quite a bit of prickliness about appropriating the Brontës", she said in her interview in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. But it is being published in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

She was born in Armidale, grew up in Adelaide, and now lives in Sydney. She has written for such television shows as *Home and Away* and *Always Greener* and has just been awarded a PhD from Sydney University for a thesis on the feminist writer Angela Carter. She has been a Brontë fan from way-back and still keeps up with much of the recently published Brontë material. I am delighted that she has kindly agreed to give a talk to the ABA on 4<sup>th</sup> May.



## CHRISTMAS LUNCH December 2001 ULTIMO COMMUNITY CENTRE



# DETAILS OF OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2002

We have such a full program lined up for 2002 that we can't fit all we want to say on the back page.

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 usually available near the college entrance in Anzac Parade. Ticket parking is available in the university grounds, entering from Barker St. Frequent buses from Central Railway and Circular Quay pass the university. These meetings conclude with afternoon tea. The cost is \$5.

## **Friday FEB 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30pm at Borders Bookshop, Macquarie Centre**

Level 4 Macquarie Centre NORTH RYDE (corner of Herring Rd and Waterloo Road). Cost \$5 to cover the wine and cheese.

### **MY DEAR SAUCY PAT**

A dramatic presentation of a selection of Brontë Letters, coordinated by **Annette Harman**.

## **Saturday MARCH 9<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at New College**

### **CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND D.H. LAWRENCE**

This talk by **Alison Hoddinott** from the University of New England is a paper that Alison prepared for a conference in Bingley in October 2001. It is due to appear in the *Brontë Studies* journal in April 2002.

Although both Charlotte Brontë and D.H. Lawrence were influential novelists they have rarely been considered together. This talk looks at Lawrence's underestimated indebtedness to Charlotte Brontë, whose *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* he once claimed were two of his favourite English books. In particular, the links between *Shirley* and *Women in Love* will be examined.

## **Saturday MAY 4<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at New College**

### **COLDWATER**

A talk by the author, **Mardi McConnochie**, of this recent novel that places the Brontë family in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century penal colony on an island off the coast of Australia.

## **Saturday JUNE 29<sup>th</sup> at 2pm Meeting Room at New College.**

### **UNIQUE WOMAN – INIMITABLE NOVEL:**

#### **Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights***

Some new insights by **Dr Jack Nelson**, former Senior Lecturer in the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies at the University of New South Wales. Jack will cover the known biographical details of Emily Brontë and will summarise contemporary and current critical work on *Wuthering Heights*, offering his own personal interpretation.

**Friday AUGUST 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30 pm.**

**FROM PAPYRUS TO e-BOOK: The Book through History**

**Reserve a place with Christopher Cooper (9804-7473 home or 9850-8920 work).**

This informal workshop, presented by our President **Dr Christopher Cooper**, will mainly focus on the development of the printed book to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Participants will be able to handle many old books from the president's own collection, including a page from *The Nuremburg Chronicles* of 1492 and *The Gentleman's Recreation* of 1686 which summarises various categories of useful knowledge from Astronomy and Rhetoric to Hawking and Hunting.

**Saturday SEPTEMBER 14<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at New College**

**THE CULTURE OF ALBUMS**

A talk by **Professor Christine Alexander** from the University of New South Wales. Through a recently discovered album, Christine will explore Charlotte and her schoolfellows at Roe Head School.

**Sunday NOVEMBER 10<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at Ebenezer Church**

Coramandel Rd, Ebenezer, north of Windsor.

**CHURCH AND CHAPEL**

**A short service of thanksgiving for the lives of the Brontës followed by some dramatic readings suitable for the ambiance of this 1809 church.**

The afternoon will commence with a short service of thanksgiving for the lives of the Brontës (such as is done in Haworth each year) conducted by **Rev Grant Bilbey**. This will be followed by some dramatic readings suitable for the ambiance of an 1809 church. Lockwood will again suffer the Rev Branderham's *First of the Seventy First* and poor Jane Eyre will once again have her wedding to Rochester so rudely interrupted. Later, we'll take tea in the old schoolroom attached to the church.

This church, Australia's oldest church and school building, was established in 1809 (three years before Patrick Brontë married).

Why not make a day of it. There are a several interesting things to do in and around Windsor. If the weather is suitable some of us may bring a picnic lunch to eat on the nearby banks of the Hawksbury.

**Saturday DECEMBER 7th**

**CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

The venue, time and cost will be announced in the next newsletter.

# ABA CALENDAR FOR 2002

See pages 14 and 15 for further details.

**New College meetings are held in the Meeting Room of New College, University of New South Wales, Anzac Parade Kensington NSW.**

For the convenience of our members who also belong to the Jane Austen Society of Australia we include the JASA dates. Their normal JASA meetings are at 2pm in the Uniting Church Hall, 7 Lord St Roseville NSW.

<p><b>JAN</b></p>	<p><b>FEBRUARY</b></p> <p>Sat 16<sup>th</sup> JASA: Heroes, Hornblower and Captain Wentworth (Dennis Nutt)</p> <p><b>FRI 22<sup>nd</sup> 6:30 pm Borders Bookshop, Macquarie Centre:</b> <b>MY DEAR SAUCY PAT</b> Readings of Brontë Letters coordinated by <b>Annette Harman.</b></p>	<p><b>MARCH</b></p> <p><b>SAT 9<sup>th</sup> 2pm New College:</b> <b>CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND D.H. LAWRENCE</b> (Alison Hoddinott)</p> <p>15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> JASA Country Weekend at Mittagong: Jane Austen and the Seaside</p>
<p><b>APRIL</b></p> <p>Sat 20<sup>th</sup> JASA: Jane Austen's <i>Jack and Alice</i> (Professor Joe Wiesenfarth)</p>	<p><b>MAY</b></p> <p><b>SAT 4<sup>th</sup> 2pm New College:</b> <b>COLDWATER</b> (Dr Mardi McConnochie)</p> <p>Sat 18<sup>th</sup> JASA Study Day: Pride and Prejudice and the regiment of Women</p>	<p><b>JUNE</b></p> <p>Sat 15<sup>th</sup> JASA: Translation, imitation and intertextuality in Jane Austen on screen (Professor Jocelyn Harris)</p> <p><b>Sat 29<sup>th</sup> 2pm New College: NEW THOUGHTS ON WUTHERING HEIGHTS</b> (Dr Jack Nelson)</p>
<p><b>JULY</b></p> <p>19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> JASA Weekend Conference in Maitland: Jane Austen "with regard to education"</p>	<p><b>AUGUST</b></p> <p><b>FRI 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30 pm</b> (registration essential) <b>FROM PAPYRUS TO e-BOOK: THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK</b> Workshop conducted by <b>Dr Christopher Cooper</b></p> <p>Sat 17<sup>th</sup> JASA: "They only serve who stand and wait" (Pamela Whalan)</p>	<p><b>SEPTEMBER</b></p> <p><b>SAT 14<sup>th</sup> 2pm New College: THE CULTURE OF ALBUMS</b> (Professor Christine Alexander)</p>
<p><b>OCTOBER</b></p> <p><b>SAT 19<sup>th</sup> JASA:</b> Teaching Jane Austen in Communist China (Val Horniman)</p>	<p><b>NOVEMBER</b></p> <p><b>SUN 10<sup>th</sup> 2pm</b> at Ebenezer Uniting Church, Coramandel Rd, north of Windsor <b>CHURCH AND CHAPEL</b> Service of thanksgiving for the lives of the Brontës conducted by Rev Grant Bilbey, followed by dramatic Brontë readings appropriate to this 1809 church, coordinated by <b>Dr Christopher Cooper.</b></p>	<p><b>DECEMBER</b></p> <p><b>SAT 7<sup>th</sup></b> <b>CHRISTMAS LUNCH</b> The venue, time and cost will be announced in the next newsletter.</p> <p>Sat 14<sup>th</sup> JASA: Jane Austen's Birthday and Christmas Lunch</p>

TENTATIVE ABA COMMITTEE MEETINGS Feb 18<sup>th</sup>, Apr 29<sup>th</sup>, Jun 17<sup>th</sup>, Sep 9<sup>th</sup>, Nov 25<sup>th</sup>