



# *The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter*

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## **KATE BUSH TO WRITE A NEW TRIBUTE TO EMILY BRONTË**



Kate Bush is to make her second tribute to Emily Brontë, providing words for a permanent art installation on the wiley, windy moors that inspired *Wuthering Heights*. Bush will join the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, the Scottish makar, or national poet, Jackie Kay and the novelist Jeanette Winterson in a summer project celebrating the Brontë sisters. All four have been commissioned to write a piece of poetry or prose which will then be engraved on stones positioned over the eight-mile

route between the sisters' birthplace and the family parsonage.

Winterson will celebrate the Brontë legacy as a whole, Duffy will celebrate Charlotte, Kay has Anne and Bush has Emily. The Brontë stones project takes place in the bicentenary year of Emily's birth and, appropriately, the 40th anniversary year of Bush's *Wuthering Heights*, the mindblowing song she released when she was just 18 years old.

Bush said she was delighted to be involved in the project. "Each sister being remembered by a stone in the enigmatic landscape where they lived and worked is a striking idea. "Emily only wrote the one novel – an extraordinary work of art that has truly left its mark. To be asked to write a piece for Emily's stone is an honour and, in a way, a chance to say thank you to her." The writers have been commissioned by Bradford literature festival, which will unveil the stones in July.

The festival's director, Syima Aslam, said Bush had been approached with a degree of trepidation. "We saw it as such a good fit, but equally we were, 'she might just say no'. But you won't know unless you ask ... and she said yes, which was tremendously exciting." The stones project is the only way Bush will be marking the 40th anniversary of her song.

Aslam said the Charlotte stone will be at the house where the Brontës, including their wayward brother Branwell, were born in the village of Thornton, Anne's stone will be in a meadow beside the Haworth parsonage. The Emily and Brontë legacy stones will be in the landscape.

Putting the Emily stone on the wild and exposed moors was not a difficult decision to take. "There was no other way of doing it," said Aslam. "I remember a long time ago being laughed at by a friend as we were driving through the moors and I said, 'It's all so bleak, it reminds me of *Wuthering Heights*'. She just looked at me and laughed."

# SUPERSTITIONS AND FOLKLORE

Adapted from an appendix to Lectures in America by F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis (Pantheon, 1969).

In the first half of chapter 12 of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine explains herself, partly in delirium and partly conscious. She refers to Yorkshire superstitions and folklore that were once general knowledge in northern England. Ripping open the pillow in her fever she says:

Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows – no wonder I couldn't die. Let me take care to throw it on the floor, when I lie down.

It was widely believed that dying persons could not be released from their sufferings and die a peaceful death if there were any pigeons' feathers, or feathers from other game-birds, in the pillow or feather-mattress on which they lay. Only domestic poultry feathers normally went into bedding. In chapter 36 of Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, a novel set in Lancashire, we have the following dialogue:

"Did he die easy?"

"He was restless all night long."

"And in course thou plucked the pillow away? Thou didst not! Well! with thy bringing up and thy learning, thou mightst have known that were the only help in such a case. There were pigeons' feathers in the pillow, depend on't. To think of two grown-up folk like you and Mary, not knowing death could never come easy to a person lying on a pillow with pigeons' feathers in!"

Probably Cathy's pillow did not contain pigeon feathers. Her soliloquy is an expression of her longing to be released from Thrushcross Grange and to fly across the moor, and her sense of being

prevented. She identifies herself with the lapwing.

Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. Then follows the obscure but unforgettable image of the lapwings' nest over which



"I don't believe any of this nonsense, do you?"

Heathcliff set a trap for the parents, so starving the nestlings, which she and Heathcliff had seen in the winter as skeletons trapped in the nest.

Nelly takes the pillow from her and Cathy's attention is next caught by the mirror. She thinks it is the black clothes-press of her childhood bedroom at the Heights and that her face reflected in the

mirror is due to candle-light on that piece of furniture. Nelly covers the mirror with a shawl so that she will not see her reflection. Nelly does this to convince Cathy that it was a mirror, because mirrors were always covered or turned face to the wall when death had taken place so that the reflection of the dead spirit might not, as superstition feared, be seen in the glass. Nelly cannot persuade Cathy that it was her own face she saw reflected.

“Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh Nelly, the room is haunted!”

Then Nelly again reassures her. “There’s nobody there! It was yourself, Mrs Linton.” “Myself!” she gasped, “and the clock is striking twelve! It’s true then! That’s dreadful!”

Her fear of a ghost is replaced by a worse fear, that it was her own reflection she saw. Sick people, it was held, should not see themselves in a mirror because the soul might take flight from the weak body by being projected into the mirror and so bring about the sick person’s death.

So Cathy, having seen herself in the mirror and hearing the clock strike the ghostly hour of midnight, thinks that she is about to die. She does not want to die and is dwelling on death as a way of getting out on the moor and being united with Heathcliff instead of being Mrs Linton. The dream in which she thinks she is back in the oak-panelled bed is broken by her waking to find herself stretched out on the carpet, having fallen in her fit or swoon. But this gave her a dreadful shock. It was the practice for those on the very point of death to be removed from the bed and placed on the floor, so Cathy really thought she was about to die. The premonitions of death in this scene prepare Catherine to accept it with relief so that she thinks she sees a candle in her window on the Heights to guide her home. We now recall Lockwood’s dream of the pathetic child-ghost, calling itself Catherine Linton, trying to get back into

its oak-panelled bed. However she knows that ‘we must pass Gimmerton Kirk, to go that journey!’

Her wrestling to hang out of the window and her commands to Nelly to ‘Open the window: throw it wide open!’ is not only so that she may breathe the air from the hills but would be readily understood as another anticipation of death. It was the custom, when the moment of death was unmistakably at hand, to throw open all doors and windows so that nothing should hinder the flight of the spirit. In *Rustic Speech and Folklore* (Oxford 1914) E. M. Wright writes: In Yorkshire there exists an idea that the door must not be locked for seven years after a death in the house.

Cathy’s boast that as children she and Heathcliff had often stood in the churchyard defying the ghosts of the dead by inviting them to come, establishes the impious pride which will bring about Heathcliff’s death, obsessed by her ghostly presence – ‘intolerable torture’ – until he can no longer remember to eat or even breathe. There is a suggestion that Heathcliff has been dragged away to hell. Joseph says, “The devil’s harried off his soul”. At the end of the novel we hear that the country folks believe he walks – an unquiet soul.

The little boy herding sheep actually sees the ghosts of ‘Heathcliff and a woman’, and though Nelly dismisses it as imagination fed on gossip she also notes that sheep won’t pass the spot. This impartial treatment of belief in the supernatural, the evocation of a whole pagan mode of thought about life and death, was then and there still current. It gave dignity and meaning to a hard and narrow existence. It has nothing to do with the Gothic tradition. Rather, it is a mark of the creative artist’s respect for an essential element in the culture she values but sees disappearing.

Another parallel mark of respect for that local culture is the novelist’s

concern to do justice to the local country speech. The dialect, whether undiluted as spoken by Joseph, or in modified forms such as Zillah's and Hareton's, is full of life, not only in idiom but in intonation and vocabulary. Above all it is notable for the independent and sensible attitudes it expresses so forcefully. The common people's speech here is so much more lively in general than that of the educated (just as in Walter Scott) that it makes one feel that there is some justice in Max Müller's dictum that 'The real and natural life of language is in its dialects.' It's odd that Emily Brontë's ear should be so much better for uneducated than for educated speech, where she is liable to use stilted or literary phrases whenever her imagination had no pressure behind it. It was difficult for her, it seems, to find a staple style (Dickens and other early Victorian writers betray the same difficulty).

This is a specimen of her writing on her twenty-third birthday (three years before writing *Wuthering Heights*):

It will be a fine warm summer evening, very different from this bleak look-out, and Anne and I will perchance slip out into the garden for a few minutes and peruse our papers.

Literary words like 'peruse' and 'perchance' incongruously mixed with the idiomatic 'slip-out' and 'look-out' betray an uncertain taste, and similarly uneasy oscillations can be noticed in the novel – but not often where they matter. This is, however, the literary style used by Cathy in the journal Lockwood reads while trying to get to sleep in the panelled bed at the Heights, a very improbable style for a country child. Along with some puerilities and long-winded episodes such as the sermon part of Lockwood's nightmare, bear out the supposition that the first three chapters contain some unregenerate writing from an earlier attempt at a novel or this novel.

# MY PLAIN JANE

New novel by Cynthia Hand, Brodi Ashton and Jodi Meadows

Move over, Charlotte Brontë. The authors of the *New York Times* bestselling *My Lady Jane* are back with an irreverent spin on *Jane Eyre* — a tale of mischief, romance, and supernatural mayhem perfect for fans of *The Princess Bride* or *A Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue*.

You may think you know the story. Penniless orphan Jane Eyre begins a new life as a governess at Thornfield Hall, where she meets one dark, brooding Mr. Rochester—and, Reader, she marries him. Or does she?



Prepare for an adventure of Gothic proportions, in which all is not as it seems, a certain gentleman is hiding more than skeletons in his closets, and one orphan Jane Eyre, aspiring author Charlotte Bronte, and supernatural investigator Alexander Blackwood are about to be drawn together on the most epic ghost hunt this side of *Wuthering Heights*.

# CHARLOTTE'S NOVEL, *JANE HAIR*

If Charlotte Brontë had lived today she would have had a much greater choice of occupation than she did in her day, not least that of being a hairdresser. She noticed hair and in *Jane Eyre* she refers to hair no less than 62 times.

Several are purely passing references, such as smoothing one's hair as part of making oneself presentable.

Other references are to the colour of hair as part of Charlotte's description of the appearance of one of the characters. Bessie, Miss Scatherd, Rochester and Miss Ingram and Bertha Mason had black hair. Even Mrs Ingram had black hair, at least as far as one could tell by candle light. Lady Lynn had dark hair. Diana's hair was darker than her sister's. Mrs Colonel Dent and St John Rivers had fair hair, while Mr Eshton's hair was quite white, in contrast to his dark eyebrows and whiskers. Mrs Reed's hair is described as 'nearly flaxen'. Julia Severn, a fellow pupil of Jane's, has red hair. According to Rochester, Jane's hair was hazel. But Rochester was by then besotted with his 'little mustard seed' and he also describes Jane's eyes as 'hazel', whereas she insists that they were green.

Long, grizzled and unkempt hair is a symbol of madness, as in the case of Bertha, or extreme despair, as in the case of Rochester when he let himself go after his maiming. Jane also notes a picture of St John – the disciple, not Rivers – where his long hair waved. One wonders whether she was thinking of John the Baptist instead.

It is interesting the contrast between the physical appearances of Rochester (dark and brooding) and St John Rivers (fair and like a Greek Adonis).



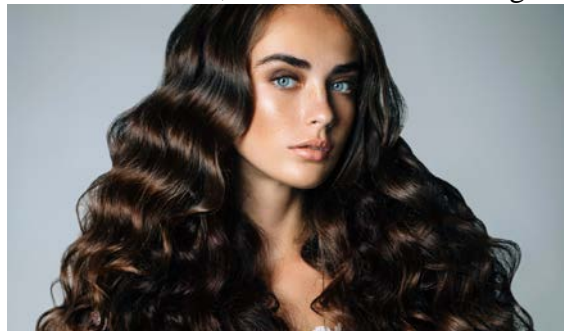
Curls are symbolic of decadence. In chapter 4, Eliza and Georgina Reed are described as having hair 'elaborately ringletted'. Mr Brocklehurst considers curls to be entirely inappropriate for those under his care at Lowood for curls can tempt girls into the mortal sin of vanity. Fortunately his own daughters are immune to this temptation.

Julia Severn's luxuriant curls are ordered to be cut off and 'arranged closely, modestly, plainly'.

It is interesting that he also supports the principle of short hair by appealing to economy. Short hair means less brushing and combing. Mr Brocklehurst is eager to embrace any measure that might save money. It is therefore surprising that he orders a barber to attend to take off Julia's locks – it would be cheaper to order one of the teachers to do it.

Apart from decoration, hair is very suitable for grabbing. In chapter 1, John Reed grasps Jane's hair and throws her to the floor.

Smoothing the hair of another is a sign of affection. In chapter 24, following the aborted wedding, not only does Rochester stroke Jane's hair, but just before she leaves him Jane 'kissed his cheek and smoothed his hair with her hand.'



Perhaps the most significant reference to hair in the novel is the reference to the Biblical story of Samson with its references to strength and blindness. In chapter 24, just after he proposes to Jane, Rochester wonders about their relative strengths of will as he plays with her hair.

stopped, as if suddenly rooted to one spot. He looked at me long and hard: I turned my eyes from him, fixed them on the fire, and tried to assume and maintain a quiet, collected aspect.

“Now for the hitch in Jane's character,” he



“I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me – you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced – conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane? What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?”

“I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers.”

“You were, you little elfish--”

I shook my head: it required a degree of courage, excited as he was becoming, even to risk that mute sign of dissent. He had been walking fast about the room, and he

said at last, speaking more calmly than from his look I had expected him to speak. “The reel of silk has run smoothly enough so far; but I always knew there would come a knot and a puzzle: here it is. Now for vexation, and exasperation, and endless trouble! By God! I long to exert a fraction of Samson's strength, and break the entanglement like tow!”

It seems that Rochester considered Jane his equal as far as power was concerned. He was the one with the money, and she was financially dependent on him. And yet he felt that she had the upper hand when it came to personality and inner strength. A year later and all had changed. She was now the one with money and he was now physically disabled.

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor

were his features altered or sunk: not in one year's space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled or his vigorous prime blighted. But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding – that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson.

“It is time some one undertook to rehumanise you,” said I, parting his thick and long uncut locks; “for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort. You have a ‘faux air’ of Nebuchadnezzar in the fields about you, that is certain: your hair reminds me of eagles' feathers; whether your nails are grown like birds' claws or not, I have not yet noticed.”

## Program for the rest of 2018

**This year is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Emily’s birth. She was born on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1818 and died on 19<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> September**

*Emily Brontë and Romanticism – Christine Alexander*

### **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

# EMILY BRONTË AND TADPOLES

Ellen Nussey recalled times when she visited Charlotte in her youth and when they would go for walks across the moors.

In fine, suitable weather delightful rambles were made over the moors, and down into glens and ravines that here and there broke the monotony of the moorland. The rugged bank and rippling brook were treasures of delight to Emily and Anne. There was always a lingering delight in these sports ... Emily especially had a gleesome delight in these nooks of beauty – her reserve for the time vanished.

One long ramble in those early days had brought the party to a remote spot familiar to Emily and Anne, which they called the Meeting of the Waters.

Seated here, we were hidden from all the world, nothing appearing in view but miles and miles of heather, a glorious blue sky, and brightening sun. A fresh breeze wafted on us its exhilarating radiance; we

laughed, and made mirth of each other, and settled we would call ourselves the quartet.

Emily, half reclining on a slab of stone, played like a young child with the tadpoles in the water, making them swim about, and then fell to moralizing on the



strong and the weak, the brave and the cowardly, as she chased them with her hand. No serious cloud of sorrow had so far cast its gloom on nature's youth and buoyancy, and nature's simplest offerings were fountains of pleasure and enjoyment.



The Meeting of the Waters and the Brontë Bridge, Haworth Moor