



The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

Issue No 42

Dec 2018

Website: www.ausbronte.net

Email: info@ausbronte.net

MEMORIES FROM 21 YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN BRONTË ASSOCIATION

by Catherine Barker

I recently came across my invitation to attend the inaugural meeting of the Australian Brontë Association dated March 1998 and realised that this year marks the twenty-first anniversary of our Society. So I thought it would be interesting to look back and select various highlights from a personal viewpoint of some of our activities over the past twenty-one years.

It was Dr Christopher Cooper's idea [actually I was one of several to come up

with this idea – CC] to set up an independent local Australian Society as opposed to merely being an outpost of the Brontë Association in the UK.

The programme for 1998 commenced at that first meeting held at the University of New South Wales under the auspices of our Patron Professor Christine Alexander.

Though a most pleasant venue, it was soon decided that a city location would be more practical, and so rooms at both the



ABA members in the garden of La Maison Guest House at the Three Sisters Weekend 2003

Pymont and Ultimo Community Centres were trialled for Saturday afternoon meetings over the next couple of years.

By 2003 a central city venue had been discovered by Christopher at the Sydney Mechanics Institute in Pitt Street, a location which was to remain 'home' for the next ten years. As well as the change of location, there was also a new meeting time. Due to the fact that the building was unstaffed on Saturday afternoons, the meetings were moved to a morning timeslot – quite an innovation, but a successful one.

What a lot of different topics have been covered at our meetings! Apart of course from talks on the lives of the individual Brontës and their books in some depth, we have heard about the Brontës in relation to such diverse subjects as Art, Christianity, the Seaside, Music and Food. Other topics I recall examined the Yorkshire dialect, Bewick's Birds, Adele's Dolls, the Mechanics Institutes and the Brontë Juvenilia.

As well as listening to a variety of speakers, members have enjoyed taking part themselves in several of the meetings, whether reading excerpts from one of the novels, answering quizzes, relating Brontë travel experiences, or playing dramatic roles acting out scenes from the books.

Over the years therefore we have listened, learned and participated, enjoying discussions as to the merits (or otherwise!) of various prequels and sequels of the novels. We have watched stage, cinematic

and television adaptations and heard about the influence of the Brontës on other writers such as Daphne du Maurier. At one meeting we listened to musical excerpts from the opera '*Wuthering Heights*' by Bernard

Hermann as well as Cliff Richard's '*Heathcliff*'. A special event in 2005 was a one woman show about Charlotte called '*Reader I Married Him*', whilst another meeting saw scenes from '*Shirley*' performed by actors from a Newcastle



ABA members at a picnic in the churchyard of Ebenezer Church in 2002

theatre group.

Some evening meetings were held, such as those at the Collins Bookshop at Broadway and Borders Bookshop at the Macquarie Centre where Brontë readings were interspersed by wine and cheese. Another memorable event took place in 2002 when an excursion was made out to the Windsor district for a picnic in the grounds of the Ebenezer Church where a thanksgiving service was held for the lives of the Brontës followed by some dramatic readings staged in the church and completed by afternoon tea in the old schoolroom there.

The world of the Brontës was



Event at Borders Bookshop in 2001

explored at weekend conferences away from Sydney. The first took place in 2001 at Katoomba – the Three Sisters Weekend. What fun it was! Such was the success of this venture that two more such weekends were spent in the Blue Mountains in 2003 and 2005, the last one of which took the Brontës and Architecture as its theme. Ranelagh House at Robertson in the Southern Highlands was the venue for two further weekends away, the first with the



Colonial Banquet at the joint weekend conference with Dickens in 2009

theme A Highlands Weekend in 2007 whilst the second in 2011 looked at the Brontës and Education when guests were invited to attend the ‘Miss Brontës Academy for Refined Ladies and Distinguished Gentlemen’.

In 2009 a combined country weekend conference was held with the New South Wales Dickens Society taking the theme of The Colonial Connection and located on the Coolangatta Estate at Shoalhaven on the South Coast. Following this success, a further combined country weekend was held at Leura in 2014 with a North and South theme, the Brontës representing the north of England with Dickens as the man of the south and Mrs Gaskell being the link between these literary figures.

A Christmas Lunch to complete the year has been a feature from the very beginning of the ABA when a Brontë Brunch was held at the Cooper’s house at Eastwood with Elisabeth and her sister

Marloesje organising the catering. Several venues were selected over the next few years including an Indian restaurant in Hunter’s Hill and the Belgian Beer Café in the Rocks. Then in 2008 the ABA joined with the New South Wales Dickens Society to hold a joint event at the Hughenden Hotel in Woollahra. Such combined Christmas Lunches have been held since then at Cello’s Restaurant.

The first ABA newsletter was published in May 1998 with the fortieth edition being printed in December 2017, and 2004 saw the birth of an annual journal, ‘*The Thunderer*’, which meant that talks from the meetings could be published as well as longer articles.

With increasing difficulties experienced at the Mechanics Institute such as frequent changes of rooms as well as catering problems, 2012 saw a new venue with a move to the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel where the ABA continues to meet. There was a change of President then too, with Vice President Sarah Burns taking up the role of President when Christopher Cooper stepped down for a well-deserved break after fifteen years at the helm.

From 2016 a series of bicentenaries



Relaxing at the Coolangatta Conference in 2009

commenced with the 200th anniversaries of the births of the Brontës. Beginning with Charlotte that year, Branwell was commemorated in 2017 and this year it is Emily’s turn. To celebrate Charlotte’s anniversary Sarah organised a most

successful day conference at the State Library of New South Wales where the speakers included author David Malouf who gave the audience an insight into his role in writing the libretto for the opera 'Jane Eyre'.

At the end of 2016 Sarah stepped down as President during which she oversaw the birth of the ABA website and the Facebook page and Christopher has now resumed the role - at least for the next few

years. What a debt the ABA owes these two marvellous Presidents!

So this year, 2018, marks the twenty-first anniversary of our Society. Members have enjoyed twenty years of meeting together to learn about the lives and works of the Brontës. Learning much about them in a fun and friendly atmosphere, we look forward to the ABA continuing to educate and entertain us long into the future.

MEMORIES OF THE ABA

by Christopher Cooper

Inspired by Catherine Barker's reminiscences of the ABA I have looked back on the 21 years with some of my own memories. We began, as Catherine has said, in 1998. Prior to that, there was an Australian representative of the UK Brontë Society, Fergus McClorey, who organised one or two meetings a year in the chapter house of St Andrew's Cathedral. You had to be a member of that society to attend, and we had about a dozen attend each meeting.

Fergus was enthusiastic about the Brontës, especially because he believed that he had an Irish ancestor who was related to Patrick Brontë. The problem was that there was no committee and no local funds for things like advertising. Expenses could be recouped from the Brontë Society but every decision had to get their prior approval.

In 1997, a few of us lobbied Fergus to see if we could get some sort of independence from Haworth. He asked the Brontë Society but was not able to persuade them to allow us to raise our own funds. We felt that if we became independent, and set up a committee, we could have many more meetings, and could attract many more members. We felt, too, that local members should not have to be members of the UK society.

Fergus felt that we should abide by Haworth's wishes and was not keen to make the break. So the great coup of 1997 took place. At a meeting in Susannah Fullerton's home, we decided to set up an Australian Brontë Association. According to my imperfect memory, those present were Susannah Fullerton, Christine Alexander, Kate Newey (who later returned to the UK) and Annette Harman. Fergus was overseas at the time. When he returned we delivered the ultimatum. We had formed an independent organisation, but we really wanted Fergus to be part of the committee.

Unfortunately Fergus declined the invitation and resigned as the Australian Representative of the Brontë Society. That was the last we saw of him. However, when the Brontë Society asked Fergus if he could recommend a new Australian Representative, he suggested they contact the ABA.

Since then we have had a good



**Brontës in the Dungeon (Pymont 2007)
Marloesje Valkenburg reading one of Anne
Brontë's poems about imprisonment**

relationship with the Brontë Society, and each year in their annual report when they publish the activities of the overseas branches, they are happy to report on the ABA activities as representing the Brontë Society in Australia!

Early on we appointed Christine Alexander, now Scientia Emeritus Professor at the University of New South Wales, as our Patron. We are happy to have such an eminent Brontë scholar as our patron. We are also pleased that she is not merely a figure-head. Christine has assisted the ABA in many practical ways.

In 1998 we met in a classroom of UNSW, thanks to Christine. At the beginning of 1999 we moved to the Pyrmont Neighbourhood Centre, but later that year we began to meet in a room at New College at UNSW. We met there three or four times a year until 2002. Our secretary at the time, Geraldine Rawlings, then suggested meeting at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts. We were excited to move there, partly because it was in the CBD and partly because of its name and its long history. The Brontës attended events at the Keighley Mechanics Institute and borrowed books from their library.

We continued meeting at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts till 2011. In that year the NSW Dickens Society, which also met there, moved to the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel. We liked that venue and have met there ever since. Meanwhile, the Dickens Society grew too big for the meeting room there and has since moved to City Tattersalls.

We have often wondered why Dickens, which is somewhat younger than the ABA, has increased its membership to the extent that it is now much bigger than the ABA. I'm sure it has a lot to do with the leadership skills of the respective Presidents, but I also believe that Dickens has a wider appeal. Many people, when invited to join

the ABA, have said they felt that the Brontës were too gloomy.



ABA Highland Conference

Ranelagh House, Robertson 2007

In addition to the regular meetings we have had many extra events and conferences. Each year we have had a Christmas function, usually a lunch. These have been held at a wide variety of venues. In our first year, when we were still small, it was a brunch at my home in Eastwood. John Spence spoke about his experiences of teaching literature in Japan. Then in 1999 and 2000 we had a Christmas lunch at St Judes in Randwick. Here the entertainment consisted of some little plays, based on scenes from the novels. The 1999 performance was *The Three Curates*, from Shirley, and in 2000 we had *The Christmas Rose* from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Shirley* and *Her Uncle* from Shirley.

In 2001 we had Christmas lunch in the Ultimo Community Centre and in 2002 we were guests of one of our members, Deborah Franko, in Westmead. In 2003 it was a brunch at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and in 2004 and 2005 we had Christmas lunch at the Belgian Beer Café in the Rocks, remembering the time Charlotte and Emily spent at the Pensionnat in Brussels.

Then in 2006 we went to the Indian Horizon Restaurant and in 2007 the 10th Anniversary Christmas Lunch was held at the Forbes Hotel. From 2008 onwards we have combined with the NSW Dickens Society for the Christmas Lunch. In 2008 it

was at the Hughenden Boutique Hotel and in 2009, 2010 and 2011 we held the Christmas Lunch in the Adams Room of the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel. This began to get too small so in 2012 we held it in the City Tattersalls Club. But finally in 2013 we were able to hold it in Cellos in the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, where we have been ever since.

Other events over the years have included readings in bookshops. In 2000 we were in the Collins Bookshop in Broadway and in 2001 we featured the Brontë Sisters' Wicked Men in Borders Bookshop at Macquarie Centre. There have been a number of film nights at my home, a special presentation of Adel's Dolls at the home of Marloesje Valkenburg. We had a memorable evening with dungeon related readings from the Brontë poetry in the basement of a house in Pymont. And in 2002 we had a picnic lunch in the grounds of the historic Ebenezer Church, followed by a re-enactment of the aborted Jane Eyre wedding in the church itself.



Weekend Conference in Robertson, 2007

At our regular meetings we have had talks on a wide variety of topics. Our

Patron, Christine Alexander, has spoken more than any other person and we have felt the excitement of hearing cutting edge material of such an eminent Brontë scholar. There have been a few times when she has given us tasty morsels of scholarship that had not yet appeared in the academic journals.

Christine has spoken to us on the Art of the Brontës, the Culture of Albums, Reading the Brontës Home, Charlotte Brontë's Engagement Ring and Newly Found Brontë Memorabilia (these were items that Christine had personally tracked down in private collections), Charlotte's Christianity, The Brontës and Bewick's History of English Birds, Charlotte Brontë and 'The Treasures of the Bible' and The Life and Art of Branwell Brontë. As well as these major talks, Christine will often give a short report in a meeting about some Brontë news that she has become aware of through her many contacts.

Many speakers have been contemporary authors who have either written a book with Brontë connections or who have given us an author's perspective of one of the Brontë novels. We have had Mardi McConnichie speak about her novel Coldwater, where Patrick is imagined to be a prison warden in a remote part of Tasmania and his Emily loves the wild Australian landscape with the same intensity that the real Emily loved the moors. Edwin Wilson spoke about his Cedar House, which runs parallel to Wuthering Heights but is set in colonial New South Wales. Other authors who have given a fresh perspective on the Brontë writings have been Emily McGuire, Rowan McAuley and Debra Adelaide.

NO THUNDERER IN 2018

Due to the lack of items submitted for publication there will be no issue of the Thunderer for 2018.

CANDLES IN THE BRONTË NOVELS

by Christopher Cooper, based on an article by Clifford Jones in *Brontë Studies*, October 2018

One benefit of studying authors from previous times is that you can gain an insight into the history of those times and into the details of the way of life of the people of those times.



So, in reading Dickens, we might learn of debtors' prisons and hackney carriages and learn how common it was for a gentleman

to lose a handkerchief through pick-pocketing.

When we read a Victorian novel for example, the references to some item of daily life might be hardly noticed. It is only when some scholar writes a paper on the subject that we realise how many references are made to it in the novel.

In the latest issue of *Brontë Studies* there's an article by an Australian author, Clifford Jones, on Candles and the Brontës. Now we all know that before electricity, and before gas was used for lighting, candles were the standard form of illumination. So any scene that took place after dark is necessarily by candle light.

Of course we all know that. But it is easy to overlook the implications of that fact. While we just switch on a light, candles had to be lit and attended to, and portable candles had to be handled carefully.

Then there are the many types of candles. And what is the difference between

“snuffing a candle” and “snuffing out a candle”?

In his *Brontë Studies* article, Jones estimates that there are about 180 references to candles in the Brontë novels. In chapter 17 of *Wuthering Heights* we read of the “click of my snuffers as I removed at intervals the long wick of the candle”.

The modern reader might wonder at this because we think of snuffing a candle as meaning that we put it out. But why would one need to do this “at intervals”? You've all probably seen the device with a little bell-shaped piece on the end of a long handle. These are used to put out the candle by holding the bell over the flame to stop the supply of oxygen. These are often called “candle snuffers” but the correct name is “candle extinguisher”.



Candle Extinguisher

Now to snuff out a candle meant, as it does today, to extinguish it altogether. What are some of the ways a candle can be extinguished?

You can blow out a candle. This is OK for small birthday cake candles, but it can be messy with normal size candles, with hot wax getting blown onto the table cloth. You can moisten your fingers and pinch the wick. This has obvious disadvantages. You can let it go out by itself when it has burnt right down. This is usually preceded by a flickering of the flame and is often used as a metaphor for death. But this is uneconomical and in most cases it is

inconvenient, though occasionally there might be an advantage of this last method.

I recently read *The Mystery of 31 New Inn* by Austin Freeman in which a man had been presumed to be living at a certain address for several months because a light would be seen burning in his window every night till about 1am. But in fact his brother, who had him imprisoned elsewhere and who eventually murdered him, would make a brief 'visit' every evening. He set alight a candle of a certain size that would burn for exactly 6 hours. So while the premises were unoccupied, the neighbours believed that they were inhabited. Clearly the occupant extinguished his candle every night at 1am as he went to bed.

But the most convenient method of putting out a candle is to use a candle extinguisher. But "snuffing" the candle meant removing the black part of the wick so that the candle would burn more brightly. With a tallow candle, the most widely used type, the tallow doesn't burn completely and in time it leaves behind a solid char. The top of the wick goes black and this restricts the fuel supply to the wick. This results in the flame burning less brightly.

So snuffing a candle means to trim the wick to remove the charred part of the wick so that the candle burns more brightly.



Candle Snuffer

The snuffer was developed in England in 1776 by Christopher Pinchbeck the Younger. A snuffer is basically a pair of scissors but includes a small container, attached to one of the blades, so that the cut piece of wick would be captured instead of dropping onto the table. The Brontë

Parsonage Museum has one of these a scissor type of candle snuffer in its collection. And, surprisingly, they were manufactured right up until the 1970s.

Now a wax candle doesn't need snuffing because the beeswax burns completely and leaves no charring of the wick. That would clearly be an advantage. However they were more expensive.

In chapter 31 of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* we read the following piece of dialogue:

"You are pouring the cream into your saucer, Mr Grimsby."

"Ah! yes, I see, but we're almost in darkness here, Hargraves, snuff those candles, will you?"

"They're wax; they don't require snuffing", said I.

In chapter 9 of *Jane Eyre*, in the description of Mrs Temple's bedroom at Lowood, we read that "an unsnuffed candle burnt dimly on the table". In chapter 20, where Jane is attending to the injured Mr Mason before the surgeon arrives, she says, "I must see the light of the unsnuffed candle wane on my employment". Presumably this meant that she was so busy attending to Mr Mason that she had no opportunity to snuff the candle and its light was waning.

In chapter 33, when Jane is living with St John Rivers and his sisters, she says "So I snuffed the candle and resumed the perusal of *Marmion*."

In chapter 16 of *The Professor*, we read "I snuffed the candle and addressed myself to the perusal of the poor teacher's manuscript". So here again snuffing a candle revives it.

In Dickens' *Oliver Twist* we read that Oliver "with a heavy sigh, snuffed the candle, and, taking up the book which the Jew had left with him, began to read." Here, as in the Brontës' works, "snuffing a candle meant trimming it to restore illumination.

So snuffing a candle was one of the repetitive tasks that people took for granted in former times, like “mending pens”. Of course those who could afford it would use candles made from beeswax. But even in affluent homes, the servants usually had to use tallow candles for their own use. But, of course, wax candles would have been used in the candelabra of the drawing rooms and ballrooms.

Wax candles were used in Thornfield Hall. In chapter 13 of *Jane Eyre* we read, “two wax candles stood lighted on the mantelpiece. In chapter 17 we read “wax candles shining in bright solitude” and in chapter 18 “the wax candles being all extinguished”.

In chapter 16 of *Villette* we read “and so he kindly led me to the door, and holding a wax candle, lighted me up the one flight of stairs”. This presumably meant that Lucy Snowe was not permitted to have her own candle.

From the 18th century, as well as tallow and wax candles, candles made from oil from the sperm whale were available. These “sperm candles” burnt more brightly than beeswax candles but were more expensive. And just before the publication of *Jane Eyre*, candles made from palm oil became available. However these get no mention in the Brontë novels.

In chapter 33 of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* we read of a candle being lit “by the rushlight that was still burning”. A rushlight is made by dipping plant tissue into fat. The fat consolidates the very fragile column of plant tissue. The advantage of rushlights was that they were not subject to candle tax.

Candle tax was introduced in 1709 and was paid for by candle manufacturers. The making of candles by private citizens was forbidden. However this was a difficult law to enforce and home-made candle making was wide spread. The tax was repealed in 1831.

In chapter 17 of *Wuthering Heights* there is an admonition to “mind the sparks”

of a candle. The sparks would have been traces of wick left behind after snuffing. These might be still glowing and could fall off.

In chapter 12 we read “Joseph issued out to receive us by the light of a dip candle. A dip candle was made by repeatedly dipping a wick in a bowl of molten tallow. Each time a thin layer of the molten tallow would form and, removing it, the tallow hardened quite quickly. So once again it could be dipped into the molten tallow. The process was continued until the required diameter was reached. Surprisingly these candles were less expensive than moulded ones.

It’s interesting that about the time that the Brontë novels were appearing there was a widespread interest in the scientific aspects of candles. The Royal Institution lectures of 1848 were given by Michael Faraday and were entitled *The Chemical History of a Candle*, later published as a book. Perhaps Charlotte was aware of this discussion.

BOOKS THAT CHANGED ME

In a *Books that Changed Me* piece in the *Sun-Herald*, earlier in the year, Lynne Vincent McCathy – a graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School who works as a screenwriter and story developer in the film industry – chose Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. “This gothic tale of tortured love and festering hate had everything I wanted in a reading experience as a young person who spent too much time silently brooding. Strong on atmosphere and a wonderful evocation of place, it gave me the emotionally cathartic experience I craved and ignited my lifelong fascination with flawed characters. What can I say? I fall in love with characters some readers find unlikeable. I read it again and again.”

THE BRONTË SISTERS' WICKED MEN

In 2001 in Borders Bookshop, in Macquarie Centre, we staged a dramatic performance about the wicked men in some of the Brontë novels. This is an abridged version.

Narrator: We are in the dining room of the Brontë Parsonage where Emily, Anne and Charlotte are working on their novels. Emily is putting the finishing touches to *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte is polishing *Jane Eyre* while Anne is working on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. We have taken a little chronological licence here because, in fact, *Wildfell Hall* was written a little later than the other two, but the sisters don't seem to notice.

In a moment their father will pop his head through the door on his way to bed, reminding them not to stay up too late. And then, as was their practice, they will begin to pace around the table reading to each other passages from the novels.

Patrick: (*putting his head through the door*) Good night girls, I think I'll be off to bed now. Don't stay up too late, now. (*He goes out.*)

Emily: Come on Anne. Read me something of your Mr Huntingdon. From what I've heard he's really quite wicked.

Anne: Sadly, he is what you'd call a wicked man. But despite this, right up to his death he could have trusted in the Lord and found Salvation. It's what Helen wanted so desperately.

Charlotte: Helen?

Anne: She was his wife. She knew that he had grave faults when she married him but she fancied that she could mend his ways. She would have done better to have listened to her aunt before she married him and left his reform to somebody else. Let me read you this

passage. Helen, in her diary, is describing her growing friendship with Mr Huntingdon.

Anne gets up and begins to walk around the table, reading from her manuscript.

Mr. Huntingdon came suddenly upon me. I felt his strong arm round my waist and his warm kiss on my cheek, while his keen and gleeful salutation, "My own Helen!" was ringing in my ear.

"Not yours yet!" said I, hastily swerving aside from this too presumptuous greeting. "You will not easily obtain my aunt's consent. Don't you see she is prejudiced against you?"

"I do, dearest; and you must tell me why, that I may best know how to combat her objections. I suppose she thinks I am a prodigal. You must tell her that my property is mostly entailed, and I cannot get rid of it. There may be a few mortgages on the rest – a few trifling debts here and there, but we could manage pretty comfortably on what's left. And the very idea of having you to care for under my roof would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian.

"But it is not money my aunt thinks about. She knows better than to value worldly wealth above its price. She wishes me to marry none but a really good man."

"What, a pious man. Well I'll manage that too! It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? I'll go to church morning, afternoon, and evening, and comport myself in such a godly sort that she shall regard me with admiration and sisterly love, as a brand plucked from the burning after hearing Mr Leighton's sermon."

"He is a good man, Mr. Huntingdon. I wish I could say half as much for you."

“Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too. I crave your pardon, dearest – but don't call me Mr. Huntingdon; my name is Arthur.”

“I'll call you nothing – for I'll have nothing at all to do with you if you talk in that way any more. If you really mean to deceive my aunt as you say, you are very wicked; and if not, you are very wrong to jest on such a subject.”

Emily: I see what you mean. He lacked seriousness about the more important things of life. But I'm not sure I'd call him wicked.

Charlotte: I agree. He wouldn't have won my heart, but if he did I'm sure that I could have walked with him in the proper way. The love of a good woman can rescue a weak man.

Anne: Helen thought she could make a silk purse of him. And by the Grace of God he could have become a good man if he had so chosen, even on his death bed. But it was necessary for him to choose. Helen could not do it for him. Her aunt could see that Helen's goodness did not have the strength for both of them and that such a match would lead her to grief. Listen to Helen's response to her aunt's advice.

“But when we are married, he won't have many opportunities of consorting with his bachelor friends; – and the worse they are, the more I long to deliver him from them.”

“To be sure, my dear; and the worse he is, I suppose, the more you long to deliver him from himself.”

“He had a bad, selfish, miserly father and a foolish mother who indulged him and did her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress.”

“Poor man!” said the aunt with sarcasm, “his kind have greatly wronged him!”

“They have!” cried I “and they shall wrong him no more: his wife shall undo what his mother did!”

Charlotte: I think the aunt was a little hard on him. Huntingdon was perhaps weak and thoughtless and selfish, but he wasn't exactly a *bad* man.

Anne: Helen would have agreed with you. She says:

Arthur is not what is commonly called a bad man: he has many good qualities; but he is a man without self-restraint or lofty aspirations, a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments: he is not a bad husband, but his notions of matrimonial duties are not mine. His idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly, and to stay at home to wait upon her husband and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return, no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime.

Emily: So was he absent much?

Anne: Oh yes. Poor Helen would have borne his insults while he was with her if he didn't neglect her for weeks or months on end pursuing his pleasures, in the name of attending to urgent business. And he was always particularly bad when he returned from his time of dissipation. She writes in her diary about one such homecoming.

He did come the next week, but in a condition of body and mind even worse than before. I did not, however, intend to pass over his derelictions this time without a remark; I found it would not do. But the first day he was weary with his journey, and I was glad to get him back and the next morning he was weary still. But at dinner he was finding fault with everything on

the table, and declaring we must change our cook, I thought the time was come.

“It is the same cook as we had before you went, Arthur,” said I.

“You must have been letting her get into slovenly habits, then, while I was away. It is enough to poison one, eating such a disgusting mess!”

At that moment the butler entered and began to take away the things.

“Be quick, Benson; do have done with that infernal clatter!” cried his master. “And don't bring the cheese, unless you want to make me sick outright!”

Benson, in some surprise, removed the cheese, and did his best to effect a quiet and speedy clearance of the rest; but, unfortunately, there was a rumple in the carpet, caused by the hasty pushing back of his master's chair, at which he tripped and stumbled, causing a rather alarming concussion with the trayful of crockery in his hands. Arthur turned furiously around upon him, and swore at him with savage coarseness.

“He couldn't help it, Arthur,” said I; “the carpet caught his foot, and there's no great harm done. Never mind the pieces now, Benson; you can clear them away afterwards.” Glad to be released, Benson expeditiously set out the dessert and withdrew.

With an elbow on each side of it, and my hands clasped before my eyes, I delivered myself up to silent weeping. “What are you crying for, Helen? What the deuce is the matter now?”

“I'm crying for you, Arthur,” I replied, speedily drying my tears. “Don't you know that you are a part of myself? And do you think you can injure and degrade yourself, and I not feel it?”

“Degrade myself, Helen?”

“Yes, degrade! What have you been doing all this time?”

“You'd better not ask,” said he, with a faint smile.

Emily: It seems to me that Mr Huntingdon was a weak man on the inside. I should never call a weak man ‘wicked’.

Charlotte: But think of the suffering he inflicted on his poor wife. And their children too, if they had any.

Anne: There was a son, also called Arthur. Helen suffered particularly because she was afraid that the boy might inherit his father's weaknesses. She records these fears in her diary as she forms a plan of running away, taking young Arthur with her.

It was only this morning that he was sitting at my feet. He looked up wistfully in my face, and gravely asked, “Mamma, why are you wicked?”

“Who told you I was wicked, love?”

“It was papa,” he replied. Then, after a reflective pause, he added, “At least, I'll tell you how it was I got to know: when I'm with papa, if I say mamma wants me, or mamma says I'm not to do something that he tells me to do, he always says, ‘Mamma be damned,’ and it's only wicked people that are damned. So, mamma, that's why I think you must be wicked: and I wish you wouldn't.”

“My dear child, I am not. Those are bad words, and wicked people often say them of others better than themselves. Those words cannot make people be damned, nor show that they deserve it. God will judge us by our own thoughts and deeds, not by what others say about us.”

“Then it's papa that's wicked,” said he, ruefully.

“Papa is wrong to say such things, and you will be very wrong to imitate him now that you know better.”

"I'm sorry papa's wicked," said he mournfully, at length, "for I don't want him to go to hell." And so saying he burst into tears.

I consoled him with the hope that perhaps his papa would alter and become good before he died but is it not time to deliver him from such a parent?

Emily: And so she runs away?

Anne: Yes she does.

Charlotte: And lives happily ever after?

Anne: Some time later Huntingdon becomes mortally ill and Helen goes back to him as he lays dying.

Charlotte: And he doesn't find peace at last?

Anne: Regrettably not. It might have been so. It is never too late to repent. But Huntingdon had hardened his heart.

Charlotte: And so he died in his sins, I guess. But my dear Anne, isn't it a bit gloomy to write about a wicked man who could have become good but didn't? Where's the good in that?

Anne: But there are wicked men who die in their wickedness. That is the truth, and the truth ought not to be concealed. Others might see fit to represent a bad thing in its least offensive light, but I believe in representing the truth. Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller, or to cover them with branches and flowers? When I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I *will* speak it.

Emily: So does the story end on Huntingdon's death bed. Poor Helen.

Anne: Well obviously I could not let Helen's goodness go unrewarded. She ends up marrying good old faithful Gilbert who has been her constant friend.

Emily: So love is rewarded in the end. What about your wicked man, Charlotte? Does he die a wicked man?

Charlotte: No, Rochester does not die in his wickedness. He is redeemed by Jane's love. Like you Anne, I reveal the snares and pitfalls of life. But I also show that though a man fall into a snake-pit, a woman's love can bring him out. Don't you think it better to bring one's tale out into the sunshine at the end.

Anne: My story end happily enough, Charlotte, it's just not happy for Huntingdon. What about your Rochester and his Jane. Do they marry and live happily ever after?

Charlotte: They do, at the second attempt.

Emily: What do you mean?

Charlotte: Ah, that's awakened your interest. Listen while I tell you, in Jane's words, of the first attempt.

Our place was taken at the communion rails. Hearing a cautious step behind me, I glanced over my shoulder: one of the strangers was advancing up the chancel. The service began. The explanation of the intent of matrimony was gone through; and then the clergyman came a step further forward, and, bending slightly towards Mr. Rochester, went on.

"I require and charge you both (as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed), that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined

together in matrimony, ye do now confess it; for be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful.”

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding when a distinct voice said:

“The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment.”

Anne: So what was the impediment?

Charlotte: He was already married, to a mad woman he had kept, locked in the attic.

Emily: Well he really was a wicked man to have done that!

Charlotte: He certainly had done a very wicked thing. Not by locking up his wife in the attic. Bertha received very good treatment – much better than if he had put her in an asylum. But to deceive Jane like that was certainly a wicked thing to do. But he wasn't a wicked person. Jane felt that deep down he was a good man and that it was possible for him to be redeemed. Though of course after the aborted wedding she could no longer stay under his roof and she ran away.

Anne: So they don't live happily ever after?

Charlotte: Well the mad wife burns down Thornfield Hall and dies in the process. Rochester is badly injured from trying to rescue his mad wife and Jane goes to him to care for him. They do marry in the end.

Anne: So Emily dear, who is your wicked man? Does the love of a good woman redeem him?

Emily: No, for my Heathcliff was the very devil himself! Your wicked man, Charlotte, was a good man gone astray. And your wicked man, Anne, was not so much wicked as weak. He soaked up the wickedness around him. But my wicked man had a strong will. Had he chosen goodness he would have been a veritable saint. But he chose evil.

Now it is true that he was badly treated as a child, and one could have fashioned a defence of his behaviour on those grounds. But Heathcliff would have been evil even if he had been brought up in an affluent house like Thrushcross Grange.

Charlotte: So he never had the benefit of the love of a good woman to save him?

Emily: He loved a girl, Cathy, with whom he had grown up. But his love was a selfish love. In some ways it was indistinguishable from hate. When Cathy died young he cursed her for leaving him alone.

Anne: So he never married?

Emily: Well, he did, but as a husband he was even more cruel to Isabella than Arthur Huntingdon was to Helen.

Charlotte: Emily, aren't you afraid that if and when your book is published, you will be criticised for writing about evil personified? They will say that you are glorifying evil.

Emily: But didn't the great Dante write about Satan and the Inferno? Too many books these days beat around the bush when it comes to evil. Let's face it. Wickedness has many faces. There is the wickedness of weakness, like that of brother Branwell. He doesn't intend to be wicked but he finds it easier than being good.

And there is the wickedness of a man who seeks after good but chooses the wrong way of reaching it. I suspect that your Rochester, Charlotte, sought a love that would make him a better person, but was saddled with a mad wife. He thought that tricking Jane into a bigamous marriage was a case of the ends justifying the means. But there is out and out evil that goes out of its way to do wicked things and to corrupt others. Why my Heathcliff once hung a dog for no good reason, and he brought up Cathy's nephew, Hareton, in such a way that was designed to maximize his ungodliness.

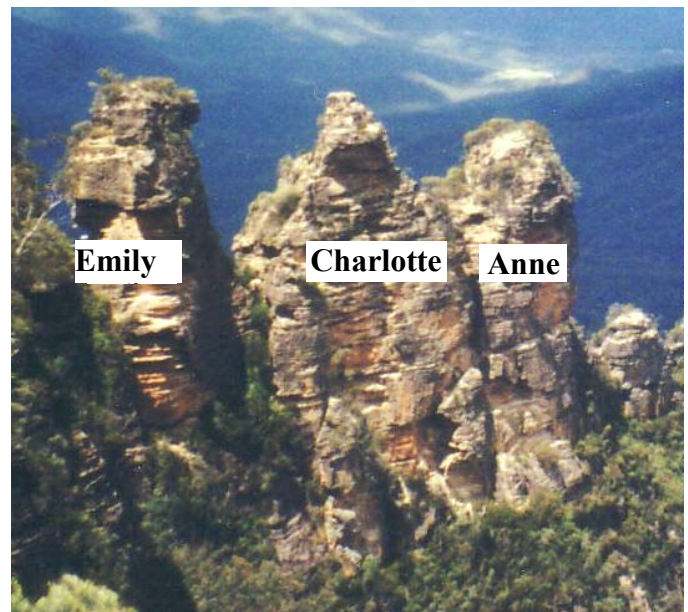
Charlotte: So in your story there is no redemption that arises from the love of a good woman?

Emily: Well, Heathcliff does die in his sins. But in the latter part of the book, Hareton, despite his satanic upbringing, is redeemed through the love of the Cathy's daughter. So from the sound of it, all our three novels, in very different ways, show that love is stronger than wickedness.

A MEMORY FROM 2003: THE RENAMING OF THE THREE SISTERS

Traditionally the Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains are connected with an aboriginal legend and go by the names "Meenhi", "Weemala" and "Gunnedoo". But, as a result of a renaming ceremony conducted by our members in October 2003, they were renamed Emily, Charlotte and Anne. In doing this we wish no disrespect to aboriginal culture, and acknowledge that these rocks had a deep significance for the aboriginal people long before the three Brontë sisters were born. Nevertheless when attending a Brontë dinner a few years ago at the Three Sisters Restaurant, with views across to the village of Haworth, it occurred to me that it would be fun to pretend that our Australian landmarks might represent our three favourite writers.

We assembled at the Echo Point lookout and discussed which rock should represent which sister. Though the decision wasn't unanimous, the majority decided that Emily should be the one on the left, because it's a little bit away from the others, Charlotte should be the one in the middle, and Anne should be the "other one", reflecting the fact she has always been regarded as less important than her older sisters. There are, in fact, a couple of smaller rocks off to the right and these might represent the other sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who died while still at school.



ABA members at Echo Point after having renamed the Three Sisters

Program for 2019

The Australian Brontë Association meets in Sydney five times a year. Meetings are held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169 Castlereagh Street (near Park Street) 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 9th March Walter Mason

“Fairy-born and human-bred” – the Brontës and Nineteenth century Fairy Lore

The nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in traditional mythology around fairies and all kinds of mythical little-people. Walter Mason will talk about the times that fairies and nature spirits pop up in the writings of the Brontës and how these mentions might relate to the broader social history of the fairy folk. From Oscar Wilde's father through W. B. Yeats and the Celtic revival and on to Conan Doyle, sprites, pixies, brownies and elves have proven remarkably resilient presences in the world of literature.

Saturday 11th May Christopher Cooper

The Churchmen of Haworth

On 2nd June 1819, Patrick Brontë was appointed perpetual curate of Haworth by the Vicar of Bradford. On 21st October of that same year, he resigned because of a bitter dispute between the Vicar of Bradford and the trustees of the Haworth church. As we all know he eventually took up the incumbency of Haworth where he served for many years. We will discuss the dramatic events surrounding his appointment, as well as the style his ministry. We will also discuss some of the other incumbents and curates of Haworth as well as the churchmen in the Brontë novels.

Saturday 13th July Michelle Cavanagh

Literary Fathers and Fathers in the Brontë Novels

What sort of father was Patrick Brontë? Mrs Gaskell did not paint him in a very favourable light. He certainly seems to have been a strange mixture of being very supportive to his children as well as being remote from them. To what extent did their experience of their own father colour the Brontës' descriptions of the fathers in their novels?

Saturday 14th September Annette & Graham Harman and Mandy Swann

Shores, Moors and Indoors

Location, location, location. The Bells (Acton, Curren and Ellis) were writers who continue to surprise us with their individual presentations of areas they knew well.

Saturday 9th November Patrick Morris

Trauma in the Brontë Novels

The talk involves an analysis from a modern psychiatric perspective and comparison of the description of family violence and its effects in the three novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë.

Christmas Lunch with the NSW Dickens Society

Date and Venue to be announced.