



The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter

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BOOK REVIEW

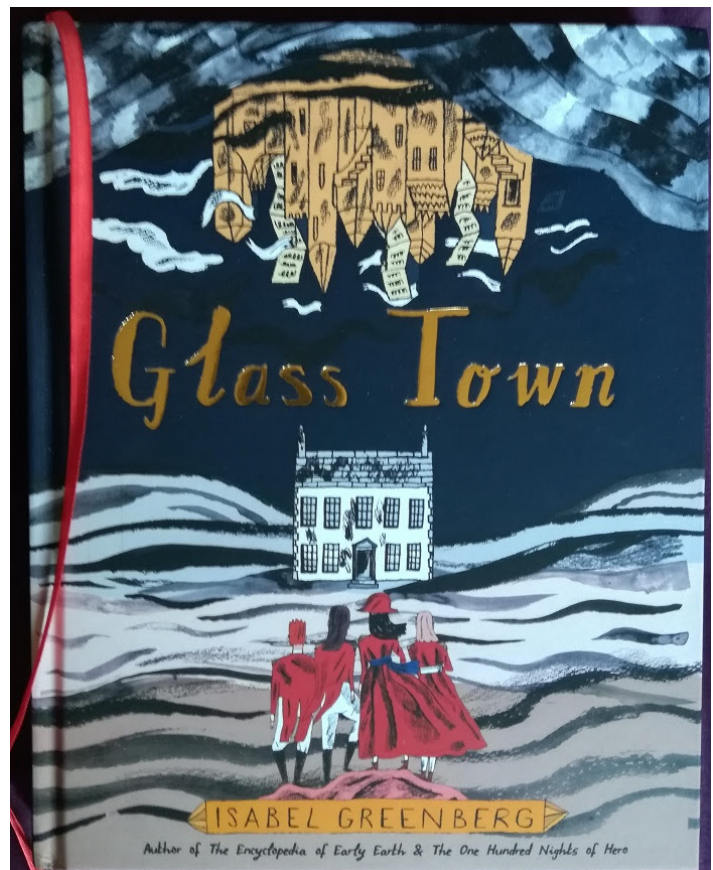
GLASS TOWN

by Isabel Greenberg

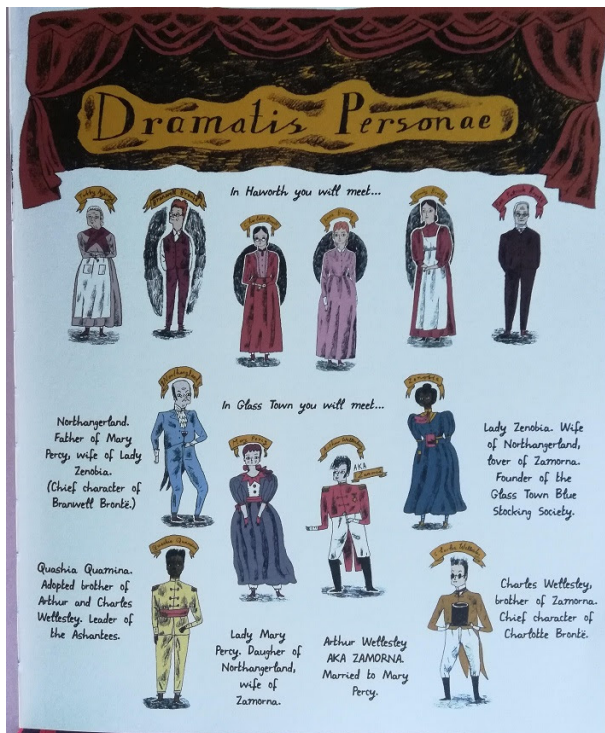
REVIEW by insearchofannebronte@hotmail.com

Today I'm going to be reviewing a new Brontë book – *Glass Town* by Isabel Greenberg. As the name suggests it tells the story of the Brontë juvenilia, but it does so much more than this too. Before I begin my review it's only fair to say that I was sent a copy of this book free of charge by the publisher Jonathan Cape – but regardless of that fact I'm going to give my honest and full opinion of this book.

I've read many books on the Brontës, from the sublime, such as the weighty fact filled biography by Juliet Barker and the series of books by Winifred Gerin, to the ridiculous where pages are spent describing the author's car problems. Nevertheless, I've never before read a Brontë related book like *Glass Town*. In part that's because of the format – this is a graphic novel; not a format I'm overly familiar with, but I know they're very popular, and to be frank if they're all up to this standard I can see why.



I don't want to give too much of the plot, or the ending, away, but the title places this firmly in the early days of the Brontë writing – the days when the 'scribblemania', as Charlotte called it, took hold, resulting in the tiny little books that we can still marvel at within the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth.



The earliest incarnation of the, by then, four Brontë siblings' creative world was Glass Town, which later expanded into the world of Angria. At this point the writing was carried out by Charlotte and Branwell Brontë only. It took Charlotte's voyage to Roe Head School in Mirfield to liberate Emily and Anne Brontë, at which point they created their own fictional world of Gaaldine – one that Emily in particular found solace within throughout her life.

The action takes place in both Haworth and Glass Town

This is all contained within this marvellous book. I said 'by then' in the preceding paragraph because the eldest Brontë sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, had tragically died from tuberculosis before the writing adventures had begun. I was pleased to see that this was referenced by the author, and emphasis was placed upon how the eldest sisters were always remembered.

We also see the catalyst for this early creativity – the present of twelve toy soldiers that Patrick Brontë made to Branwell Brontë in July 1826, and which he then shared with

his sisters. I found it very moving how reference is also made to Anne's soldier being named 'waiting boy', as we learnt from Charlotte's later account of this incident – in this year especially, Anne need wait no longer for the love and acclaim she deserves.

This is a large, thick book that is an absolute pleasure to look upon and hold, with a beautiful red ribbon incorporated as a page marker. Each page turn is a sheer delight, and I love the way that each pair of pages are different – some are monochrome, some bold and colourful; some consist of a single image, some of many individual boxes. It is simply beautiful, and I found that it had a very cinematic quality too, particularly when Greenberg utilises moments of silence, and lets the emotion so inherent in the pictures do the talking.

Is this then simply a telling of how the Brontë children became such powerful and proficient writers? In fact, it's far more than this. It is three stories in one novel. Yes, we



see the young Brontës as they grow up, and there's a lot of biographic information included – the author is clearly a Brontë enthusiast who has revelled in her research. We also see a telling of these early writings themselves, so we enter Glass Town and see how the devilish Zamorna becomes locked in a deadly power struggle with Northangerland and others. We also see Charlotte herself dragged by Zamorna into Glass Town – she is not only the writer, she has become a character.



I found this particularly magical – it is a look at the power of the creative process, and how Charlotte in particular as a youth, and Emily in adulthood, became obsessed by the worlds and people they created. In this, it has almost a Magic Realism touch to it, as the lines between reality and the imagination become blurred. *Glass Town* asks us which are more real, our day to day lives, or the words we speak and the ideas we conjure up? Can Charlotte ever escape her Glass Town world – does she even want to? Is it better sometimes to live in our own imaginary kingdoms rather than face what can be sad, painful realities? This is a deep

question that this book addresses, but I will leave you to discover the answer for yourself.

Glass Town asks what is more important - dreams or reality?

It is clear that Isabel Greenberg is a master of this genre; an excellent artist, a wonderful wordsmith, and, above all, this is a book with a mighty soul. I found it incredibly moving in places, and it has certainly brought me solace when I needed it. In short, I can't recommend this book highly enough. It could be a quick read, but I found myself lingering over each page – it's certainly an object of beauty as well, that would enliven any shelf or coffee table. If I was giving marks I would have no hesitation in giving this ten out of ten. If you want an in depth look at the large and varied juvenile output of the Brontës I would always recommend Nicola Friar's remarkable blog on that matter – but this serves as a fascinating introduction to what can be a complex subject. Is it a graphic novel, a biography, a work of fiction? It's all three, and it's also a book that I have no hesitation in recommending. I found it a very worthy addition to the canon of Brontë related books in Anne's special year.

Glass Town by Isabel Greenberg is available in hard back and Kindle editions, and is published by Jonathan Cape on 6th February.



BOOK REVIEW

CRAVE THE ROSE: ANNE BRONTË AT 200

A novel by Nick Holland

Reviewed by Sabine Klust

Nick Holland's latest biography was published in January 2020 and is a wonderful way of being reminded of details in Anne Brontë's life. I already read his "In Search for Anne Brontë" and knew that I would enjoy his engaging writing style. But there is more than that.

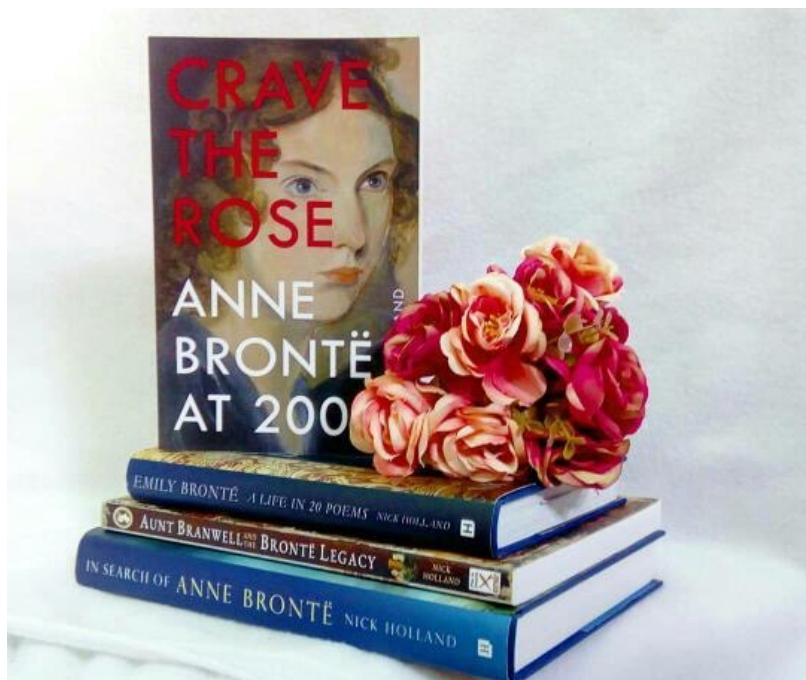
In 2017 Nick visited Leeds University to examine a notebook which contains poems by Charlotte in her husband's handwriting followed by various blank pages. But if you turn this notebook around and transform the back into the front, you get ten pages in a different handwriting. To look at these pages, he had made the journey.

Nick had seen this handwriting previously and was excited to recognise this – so far called unknown one – as Anne's hand writing of an unpublished text. He submitted pages from the unknown script together with verified samples from each of the Brontë sisters to a hand writing analyst without mentioning the names. The analyst confirmed that they match Anne's writing without a doubt.

You can read more about this and the essay itself in this book. The only missing thing in my humble opinion is a photo of this exciting find. I would love to see it.

The final section of the book is filled with first-person encounters of the Brontës by everyday people and I enjoyed reading through them very much as well.

I am now waiting for Nick's next book about Charlotte Brontë & Ellen Nussey which will be published next year. It will be his 5th Brontë biography.



EMILY BIOPIC TO BE RELEASED IN 2022

A new film about Emily Brontë's life will star Emma Mackey as Emily, Emily Beecham as Charlotte, Fionn Whitehead as Branwell and Joe Alwyn as Emily's love interest. The script has been written by Frances O'Connor and she will also direct the film.

O'Connor says that the film will portray Emily as a rebel and a misfit, She says "Emily Brontë's work and words are full of passion, feeling, violence and fierce intelligence. Her story is about a young woman daring to form herself, to embrace her true nature, despite the consequences.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PLAY THE LOST VOICE OF ANNE BRONTË

by Cate Whittaker

I viewed the play *The Lost Voice of Anne Brontë*, by Cate Whittaker, at the Tom Mann Theatre on 31st January 2020. This is not so much a review as some personal reflections from one who has had a long association with the Brontës.

I have often been asked which of the Brontë sisters was my favourite. My favourite author is certainly Emily and the one who led the most interesting life was Charlotte. But if I somehow had the opportunity of taking one of them out to dinner I would certainly have chosen Anne.

Conversation with Charlotte would have been awkward and prickly and Emily would hardly have said anything at all. But I feel that I would have felt very comfortable with Anne and we would have had many things in common. Her gentle personality would have meant that our conversation would have focused on ideas rather than being dominated by the extremely overpowering personalities of her sisters.

Cate Whittaker set out to find the 'lost voice of Anne Brontë'. I'm not sure that she found it – that is if it indeed was lost. It is well known that Anne has been, for nearly two hundred years, overshadowed by her older sisters. It is a shame that she was also the 'other one' in this play. I think the only way to have allowed the subtleties of Anne's personality to be seen clearly would have been to focus on scenes where Anne was the main player.

Two such possible themes come to mind – her love for Willie Weightman and her time at the Robinsons. Anne was the sister most interested in theology and I am quite sure that she must have engaged in theological discussions with Willie. I'm sure that had Cate decided to feature this relationship she could have written some passionate dialogue between them – for Anne was passionate about her beliefs.

We don't know how much Anne knew, at the time, of Branwell's misbehaviour at the Robinsons. But if she even suspected what was going on I can imagine her having earnest talks with Branwell. Yes, Anne *was* passionate. You only have to read *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to see this. But she was passionate in a different way to her sisters.

Sacrificing historical accuracy for dramatic power is all very well but should be used sparingly. The letter from George Smith addressed to her as 'Miss E.J. Brontë' gave Emily, in the play, the opportunity to show her outrage at Charlotte's insensitivity in revealing her identity. However this scene took place as her sisters were preparing to set off for London to explain who the Bells were and, at the time, George Smith had never heard of Emily Brontë.

I was really concerned at the portrayal of Patrick both as a vindictive father and as a hell-fire parson. Patrick, certainly, was a strange man. Mrs Gaskell played up his eccentricities but modern biographers have shown him to have been a kind, though aloof, father. To have him stamp on Charlotte's novel was most uncharacteristic of him. In fact he expressed pleasure in hearing that she had been published. As for anyone even to suspect him of having murdered Bobby Clayton ... It reminds me of the novel *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* in which, hopefully somewhat tongue in cheek, James Tully claims that she poisoned her sisters!

I'm not sure where Bobby Clayton comes from. Is it based on the fallacy that for Emily to have written about passionate love she must have had a passionate lover. I doubt that if there really was a Bobby Clayton, the son of a weaver, he would have been anything like Heathcliff.

The acting was competent, and the Yorkshire accents were maintained most of the time. Though, having been educated at

home, and not mixing much with the locals as children, it is likely that the girls would have acquired some of their father's Irish accent.

I felt that the second half was better than the first, so those who didn't come back after interval missed out on the final dramatic scenes. It was good to see Anne stand up to Charlotte who was portrayed as being so over protective. But I doubt if Anne would have confronted Charlotte so openly – she was, after all, 'gentle Anne'. Not that she

was weak, but she realised that being openly confrontational rarely works in changing minds.

Then there was Charlotte's extreme sadness at being alone among her siblings, despite being the eldest (if you don't count Maria and Elizabeth). I remember my wife, Elisabeth, feeling the same emotions after her three younger sisters died one after the other. For me, this was the high point of the play – the trouble was that it wasn't about Anne.

Christopher Cooper

THEATRE REVIEW

THE LOST VOICE OF ANNE BRONTË

by Cate Whittaker

Although not usually given to superlatives, we can unhesitatingly assert that Cate Whittaker's "The Lost Voice of Anne Brontë", performed at the Tom Mann Theatre in Sydney Jan 31- Feb 2, is without exception the worst play that these reviewers have ever witnessed. This is a silly, trite pastiche of Brontë-lore commonplaces and of Brontë quotations, as though "Poems, by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell" had been fed into a paper-shredder in company with Elizabeth Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë", and the resulting disconnected textual fragments then randomly assigned to characters without regard to their original sources.

We would not go so far as to brand the work a total failure – in its stated objective of "sacrificing historical accuracy for dramatic power", this play was undoubtedly half-successful – but overall shape and form were dismayingly absent. The play was not noticeably about "The Lost Voice of Anne Brontë", apart from a sententious soliloquy by Anne in the second act; and the ending was poor, with a long, tedious, and largely out-of-character declamation by Charlotte. From an historical perspective Tabby, the servant, was notably present when she was absent and Arthur Bell Nicholls absent, when he was present. The reviewers, however, were not merely

disquieted by a pervasive sense of unease and of historical disorientation; they were also continually lacerated by violations of Brontë detail.

The flyer generally spelled "Brontë", as "Brontë", but not in the title of the play, where it was spelled "Bronte"; in the dialogue of the play, the playwright seemed confused as to whether Patrick was a 'priest', a 'curate', or a 'minister'; and the *Writers Notes* (no possessive), as provided by the Author, cited the "Tennant of Wildfell Hall". Maybe it's just us, but if we were setting ourselves up to rescue the 'lost' works of Anne Brontë from supposed oblivion, via the elevating influence of our own literary efforts, we would first invest 20 bucks in a dictionary, and check how many 'n's there are, in 'tenant'.

So much for the script – if 'script', is not too strong a term. We rated (spoiler alert!) the overall performance 'half a star', but that rating is entirely attributable to a decent effort by the cast, to do the best that they could, with the very little that they were given to work with. Cathy Friend, playing the servant, Tabby, was solid throughout, and elicited 100% of the laughs over the course of the play (two). Rose Treloar, as Emily, was a standout amongst the sisters (albeit marring her performance somewhat by visibly chomping on her chewing gum,

during the curtain-call). Given that the ostensible aim of the play was to draw Anne (played by Bedelia Lawrence) out from the shadows, we found the portrayal of her did not do justice either to Anne's character or to her authorial voice.

The entire cast did well to sustain their northern accents for the whole two hours, without any noticeable lapses into Austrine. As with the play itself however, there were some slip-ups in the delivery – two of the cast managed to mispronounce the name of the then-household-name Poet

Laureate, Robert Southey; and, closer to home, two of the siblings managed to mispronounce the name of their own dead sister – “Maria”.

All in all, the exodus of patrons that departed at interval, missed absolutely nothing in the second half; and if you missed the entire play, you can consider yourself better off still.

Our rating: ½ star.

Annette and Graham Harman

REVIEW OF CATE WHITTAKER'S PLAY *THE LOST VOICE OF ANNE BRONTË*

From the online review site NIGHT WRITES

Night Writes (www.nightwrites.com) is an initiative to reinvigorate the Sydney theatre review scene with a fresh perspective that isn't risking future collaborative and professional opportunities with criticism. I'm a young writer and blogger with theatre-making experience who has never shied when a friend asked, "What did you think?" The added distance of not making a living through theatre-making lends my reviews a freedom of consideration and discussion that audiences, especially young audiences, crave.

Anne Brontë is often most remembered as the youngest of the Brontë sisters with the publication of her controversial novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* struggling to shift focus away from her older sisters Emily and Charlotte. In honour of the Anne Brontë Bicentenary celebrations this year, writer Cate Whittaker hopes to awaken a new love for Anne's work with this biographical play.

The Brontës were not a wealthy family and, after the deaths of their mother and two oldest sisters, the children lived in relative isolation under the care of their curate father (Marlon Lawrence) and aunt (Gabrielle Green). The siblings, including brother Branwell (Jeremy Lawrence), were close but difficulties with finding work drove Branwell to drinking and gambling which threatened the family's security. From here the sisters began publishing poetry under pseudonyms and eventually moved on to

novels for which they are largely known today.

Whittaker's script pays close biographical attention to the Brontë family from the early 1840s until after Emily (Rose Treloar) and Anne's (Bedelia Lawrence) deaths in 1848 and 1849 respectively. Whittaker imagines grand conversations the sisters would have had about love, marriage, fate, religion, and life's purpose but also the minutiae of dog fights and bookkeeping. While the intention of the production is to spotlight Anne's voice, the scope of the script is quite broad, encompassing the general atmosphere of the Brontës' parlour room.

More than exploring Anne's unique early feminism, the script tends to focus on Emily's tumultuous life including the mysterious death of her young lover, her rivalry both personal and literary with Charlotte (Heather Tleige), and her complex relationship with Branwell. While Anne is afforded a moment to stand-up to Charlotte's belittling, she spends the majority of the production huddled next to housemaid Tabby (Cathy Friend) and offering up her assistance to her sisters' troubles, very much mirroring the historical sidelining of Anne that this production hoped to rectify.

Otherwise, direction from Elizabeth Lowrencev uncovers the tensions underpinning the famous literary family with the group regularly gathered under each others' feet in the parlour. The particular strain of family life was aptly demonstrated in Charlotte's petty cruelty towards Tabby but her absolute fear of being left alone. Tleige plays a harsh older sister who redirects the pressure of her position into bossiness and severity. Treloar as Emily is much more energetic and free-willed, desiring freedom above all other things. With Lowrencev's gentle Anne, the two perform an easy kinship that is more in-tune with what audiences imagine of the sisters than perhaps what was the reality.

Set and costume design are simple period pieces that emphasise the family's humble social position but also focuses attention on the conversations as representative of the characters' imaginative and inquisitive minds; minds that resonated widely during their lifetimes but even further after the sisters' deaths. Particularly with Anne's interest in women's rights and their autonomy after marriage as explored in her one novel, the Brontës were influential voices in early feminist thought, telling stories that many others were unwilling to acknowledge.

The Lost Voice of Anne Brontë ran at Tom Mann Theatre from January 31st – February 2nd. Later this year the production will tour to the UK for Brontë 200 celebrations.

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD'S REVIEW OF *THE LOST VOICE OF ANNE BRONTË*

John Shand, of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, gives the play 3 stars. You can access the review at:

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/theatre/sibling-rivalries-bronte-style-20200202-p53wya.html>

Note that the theatre is the Tom Mann Theatre, not Manne.

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *JANE EYRE*

Broadcast by the BBC in April 2020

Oh dear. As soon as I saw the set of this production, I knew I was in for a big disappointment. A climbing platform, voluminous white curtains and several ladders set the scene for the disastrous few hours to follow.

I assume that it was thought that such an innovative staging would add interest to yet another adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's novel. For me it was an irritating distraction and totally unsympathetic to the ethos of the book.

A band of musicians sat behind this adventure playground setting, their presence on stage, as well as their discordant music, adding a further distraction and did nothing to enhance the performance.

The actors shouted and screeched their way through the script when not leaping up ladders and draping themselves over beams. As a gymnastic performance it was creditable, but *Jane Eyre* it was not. And was it really necessary to have an actor play Rochester's dog?

I have seen several stage performances of *Jane Eyre*, including some excellent amateur ones, and this latest was easily the worst. I could not imagine that anyone who had not read the book would be tempted to do so after viewing this performance.

Catherine Barker

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The year 2020 will be one which we will all remember; it certainly hasn't turned out as we expected it would. Despite the fact that what we now know as COVID-19 began in China in late 2019, life didn't immediately change for us here in Australia until some time later.

COVID-19 notwithstanding, sadly on 2 January our longstanding member Elisabeth Cooper died. Elisabeth's funeral, which was held eleven days later, was attended by many relatives and friends including members of various literary societies; Australian Brontë Association, NSW Dickens Society and the Jane Austen Society of Australia. Sincere condolences to Christopher Cooper on the loss of his wife of almost 55 years.

With still no idea how our lives were to be turned upside down, our first ABA meeting took place on Saturday 14 March, beginning with the AGM at which I took over as President, Annette Harman became Vice President, Michael Links was again voted in as Treasurer as was Carmel Nestor as Secretary, Catherine Barker became our new Membership Secretary and Immediate Past President Christopher Cooper became Publications Editor while Cindy Broadbent, Jan Roden and Patrick Morris were voted in as committee members without portfolio.

I have every confidence that we'll all work together for the good of the Society and I look forward to the challenge.

The AGM was followed by a very interesting talk entitled *A Possible Life with Rochester or Heathcliff: The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by award winning biographer Jacqueline Kent. A very fitting start to the year since 2020 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Anne Brontë.

Following the meeting, around 25 of us retired to the newly refurbished Castlereagh Lounge Bar which was to prove the last time we enjoyed each other's company in the flesh, for who knows how long.

By the time the date for our next meeting neared (9th May) the ABA committee decided to hold a virtual meeting on Zoom. Around one third of our members decided to join us which proved to be a great success. A first for members of one of Sydney's literary societies.

COVID-19 has also meant that the Seventh International Juvenilia Conference has had to be postponed until next year. Looking on the bright side this means something more to look forward to in 2021.

Another full and exciting time looms for the remainder of 2020 although at this point in time we're not quite sure what form it will take.

Michelle Cavanagh ABA President

INTRODUCTION TO *JANE EYRE*

Talk by Sara Collins

Broadcast by the BBC on 14th May 2020

I first read *Jane Eyre* in my early teens after receiving a copy as a gift in a boxed set of Brontës.

"There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." it began. As opening lines went, I did not find this one promising. I had been told this was a romance, yet here it was,

introducing itself with a kind of fussing about weather, you would expect from an elderly aunty rather than the most radical female protagonist of all time. But luckily Jane's initial feelings of confinement arose only so they can be rebelled against.

That first sentence puts us right there. That day, in a kind of present tense, working to build a sense of intimacy which the entire novel sustains. It sets us down beside a remarkable young woman who is determined to make her own way in a world where all the odds are against her.

There's no shortage of plot in Brontë's novel, which after all involves Jane in a twisted love-triangle with a brooding would-be bigamist and the mad woman hidden in his attic. Yet the deceptively unremarkable opening line foreshadows that its main concern will be interior rather than exterior. The novel documents an extraordinary process of self reflection.

It's not what happens that matters but how Jane feels about it. Therefore it's no accident that she's cooped up inside when we first meet her.

I can't think of any novel I've read since, that matched the sheer rhetorical power of this one. Jane speaks with the syntax of persuasion.

"I care for myself." she says. "The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself." The word 'more' rings out emphatically throughout that famous declaration as does the word 'I'. As fine an example of anaphora^[1] as you might find in the speeches of Winston Churchill, or Martin Luther King Junior.

This novel centres the idea of creation of the self, not only for Jane but also for the reader. Even when Jane is addressing Rochester she apostrophises. At all times it is as if she is speaking directly to us, encouraging us to feel the same fever pitch of righteous anger that *she* does, often in a series of questions or exclamations.

"Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain and little I am soul-less and heartless," she asks. "You ... think ... wrong."

Language like this has an almost hypnotic effect. It feels immediate, and passionate. It sways us into identifying so closely with Jane that when, near the end, we come upon another of the novel's most famous lines, "Reader I married him!", it is as if we have turned and caught sight of each other, the reader and Jane – joined in a kind of linguistic matrimony, at the very moment when Jane and Rochester are wed.

Being young, also, when I first read *Jane Eyre*, and female, not to mention black, I felt an electric connection with the rebellious spirit that runs through this novel. It works as an antidote to the frustration of always being told that your options are limited, simply because of who you are. I've come to believe that it is this, the creative or destructive power of woman's anger. More than love that forges the novel's most symbolic link, not I would argue, between Jane and Rochester, but between orphaned, rebellious, Jane and raging, imprisoned, Bertha.

It is impossible to overstate just how revolutionary this was in 1847 when the novel was published. Women did not have the right to vote. They weren't free to seek professional qualifications, or opportunities, or fulfilment. The only avenues open to them were marriage or servitude. But it seems hardly less radical nowadays. Not when we could still find ample cause to linger over these lines, and utter them now, with the same conviction as Jane would have uttered them then.

Women are supposed to be very calm, generally, but women feel just as men feel. They need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do. They suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged, fellow creatures to say they ought to confine themselves to making puddings, and knitting stockings – to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.

If Jane were a modern day woman she would be someone like Malala Yousufzai^[2], or Greta Thunberg,^[3] encouraging us to

reach beyond our circumstances, to carve our own path out, into the world.

[1] Anaphora is a figure of speech in which words repeat at the beginning of successive clauses, phrases or sentences. The Psalms, in the Bible, contain many examples of anaphora and this influenced many writers who were steeped in the rhythms of the Bible.

[2] Malala Yousufzai is the Pakistani activist and advocate for the education of women. She became the youngest Nobel Prize winner.

[3] Greta Thunberg is the Swedish advocate for the environment.

THREE CHRISTMAS WEDDINGS

This is taken from one of the Brontë Blogs but I can't remember which. Apologies to the author for not giving a reference.

On Christmas day in 1812, six people were certainly having a happy, if perhaps a little nerve-jangling, time. They are at two separate locations exactly 400 miles apart, but they have a timeless connection. What could it be? Let's take a look at these six individuals, put our little grey cells to use, and then read an account that reveals the truth about the extraordinary events.

Let us begin in Guiseley, where standing nervously in the cold air outside St. Oswald's Church is **William Morgan**. It is a cold Tuesday morning, and perhaps Morgan



Reverend William Morgan

is waiting to greet his congregation for a week day service, for he is a minister in the Church of England. This, however, is not his church, and he is far from his Welsh homeland. Morgan was at the time a 30 year old curate in the diocese of Bierley near Bradford, whereas Guiseley was a larger parish situated between Bradford and Leeds.

Perhaps Morgan's eyes sparkle as he thinks of a woman who is making her way to St. Oswald's at this very moment, one who he first met three years earlier in Shropshire and whom fate brought into his path again here in the West Riding of Yorkshire? Jane Fennell is her name; she is 21 years old, and has travelled extensively throughout her

young life, although she still bears traces of her original Cornish accent.

The reason for her peripatetic life up to this point is that her parents are ardent followers of Wesleyanism, what we now know as Methodism. Following the examples of its founder John Wesley they have travelled to spread his message of love and salvation for all, and after a sojourn in the town of Wellington in Shropshire, they have formed a Wesleyan School at Woodhouse Grove in Apperley Bridge, five miles from Bradford and eight from Leeds. Jane's father John Fennell is also here in Guiseley, glancing often towards Morgan, a man whom he has recently employed in his school.

Jane's mother is here too, another Jane Fennell although her maiden name was Jane Branwell. She will be casting appreciative, if teary, eyes not only at her daughter but at her niece who will arrive at the church with Jane – Maria Branwell, who left Cornwall just half a year earlier.

The Fennells had made Maria an offer of employment at their new school in Yorkshire. Jane Fennell senior had been sister to Maria's father Thomas. Following the death of Thomas Branwell in 1809, Jane knew that her niece Maria



Elizabeth Branwell painted by James Tonkins in 1799

was looking for a new start, and a chance to make her own way in life. She also knew of Maria's intelligence and practical nature, so it seemed a good move for all to invite her to help in the running of the school.

Perhaps Maria is in Guiseley today as bridesmaid to her cousin Jane Fennell, for when Jane arrives we can see that she is attired in a bride's white ensemble? Maria, too, is all in white.

Maria Branwell's glance turns sideways to another man waiting by the altar of St. Oswald's Church. He is an Irishman in his 36th year, and he too is a new arrival in this area of Yorkshire. Patrick Brontë is curate at St. Peter's Church in Hartshead-cum-Clifton, but in the summer he had also accepted the post of Classics Examiner at Woodhouse Grove School.

Patrick had met the head of the school John Fennell during a stint as curate in Wellington, Shropshire in 1809. It was in Wellington also that he had first met William Morgan, also a Shropshire curate at the time. Three men who met in Shropshire in 1809 now standing in a church in Yorkshire three years later. Patrick began his duties at Woodhouse Grove just as John Fennell's niece Maria arrived from Cornwall. Fate will always work her magic, but sometimes she has fun adding a few twists and turns along the way.

It is to Cornwall that our gaze turns now, and we see a very different church – St. Maddern's at Madron, the official parish church of the growing town of Penzance. Standing outside the church is a 35 year old woman dressed in fine silk, as she loved to do – she was always one for the fun and gaieties of her native town.

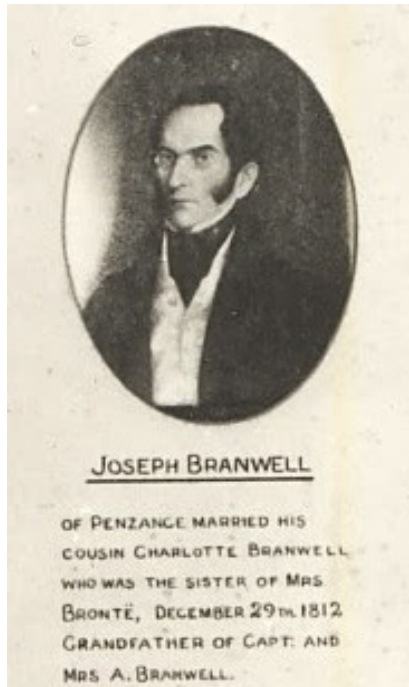
Her name is Elizabeth Branwell, she is the eldest surviving sister of Maria who at that same moment walks down the aisle in Guiseley, 400 miles to the north. Elizabeth is happy on this day, she likes to organise things, and through a series of letters relayed from south to north and from north to south, she has helped to bring off a rather unique, and uniquely happy, event.

The Branwells are a leading merchant and political family in this south western tip of England, and the crowd of people gathered outside shows that a marriage is to take place. Elizabeth is not the bride – she will

never play that role, although her name is found time and time again as witness to the marriages of her siblings. Perhaps her love had died many years ago in the icy waters of Scandinavia?

There will be nobody else for Elizabeth, but today, as always, she will be there for her family, and it is her youngest sister that she is now acting as bridesmaid for.

Elizabeth has long been familiar with the man who is the centre of attention on this day, for he is her cousin Joseph Branwell. Originally a teacher, he has recently changed course and commenced a career as a banker at Bolitho's Bank. He is a man with seemingly a sound future ahead of him, and he has eyes only for the blonde haired woman, all in white, by his side – his cousin Charlotte. Twenty year old Charlotte Branwell is the youngest of the Branwell family, the last of twelve children born to Thomas Branwell and Anne Carne. She and Joseph will go on to have ten children of their own; they are deeply in love. Charlotte's thoughts on this day are on her husband, of course, and on her family



Joseph Branwell wed his cousin Charlotte

alongside her, but also on that church in Guiseley that first caught our attention.

So, there we have a cast of characters who, despite a separation of 400 miles, all seem to be connected to each other. As the wedding bells ring out in Yorkshire and Cornwall,



and six names complete the registers of marriage.

Three loving couples have married each other: William Morgan and Jane Fennell, Joseph Branwell and Charlotte Branwell, and, of most interest to us, Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell. They have married each other at the same time, despite the distances between them, not by chance, but

by design. We have proof of this in a letter published by The Cornish Telegraph on Christmas Day 1884. It was written, just to make things even clearer, by another Charlotte Branwell – the by then 59 year old daughter of Charlotte and Joseph who we encountered above.

It was arranged that the two marriages [Patrick and Maria and William and Jane] should be solemnized on the same day as that of Miss Charlotte Branwell's mother, fixed for 29th December in far off Penzance. And so, whilst the youngest sister of Mrs. Brontë was being married to her cousin, the late Mr Joseph Branwell, the double marriage, as already noted was taking place in Yorkshire. Miss Charlotte Branwell also adds that at Guiseley not only did the Rev. Mr Brontë and the Rev. Mr Morgan perform the marriage ceremony for one another, but the brides acted as bridesmaids for each other.

Mr Fennell, who was a clergyman of the Church of England, would have united the young people, but he had to give both brides away. Miss Branwell notes these facts to prove that the arrangement for the three marriages on the same day was no caprice or eccentricity on the part of Mr Brontë, but was made entirely by the brides. She has many a time heard her mother speak of the circumstances.

“It is but seldom,” continues Miss Branwell, “that two sisters and four cousins are united in holy matrimony on the same day.”

VALE ELISABETH COOPER



I met Elisabeth Cooper on 2nd July 1988 after being invited by Marloesje to a champagne breakfast at the Cooper's home in Eastwood. It was Marloesje's 41st birthday the previous day.

Elisabeth loved giving formal dinners and was expert at preparing them. My mother was present at one of their dinners on 24th May 1997. We were presented with a menu and proceeded through all the courses,



accompanied by fine wine in the best glassware.

Bastille Day was celebrated at Bernard's of Eastwood as was Melbourne Cup Day on several occasions.



Another function that was in line with Elisabeth's literary interests was the Festival of the East Wood. Storytellers from various places would meet at the Church to hear Celtic music, eat and listen to original stories.

In July 1993, there was a dinner to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Brontë Society (in England) with a dinner at Café Troppo in Glebe. We all dressed in period costume. It was attended by the Alexanders, the Fullertons and the Harmans among others; a party of 18 in all. Maria Louise wore a black bonnet with a pink dress. Elisabeth wore a white bonnet and a blue dress with white lace and Christopher wore a black suit with a top hat. I was seated next to Collette McGowan. I think it was a matchmaking attempt by Marloesje & Elisabeth.

Elisabeth's 58th birthday, on 9/9/99, was celebrated with 50 guests on board the Olympic Spirit for dinner and a harbour cruise. The Italians even postponed their fireworks display so they could set them off as we passed. Elisabeth knew how to celebrate in style.



I joined the Australian Brontë Association after attending their Christmas lunch at St Jude's Church Randwick in 2000. It was also the day that the church replaced the peal of bells which dated back to 1865. They had the Town Crier there too. Christopher and Marloesje performed a short literary sketch. Marloesje was very theatrical. It was an enjoyable performance.

For her 60th birthday, the Coopers booked a suite at Quay West and hosted a cocktail party. It has spectacular views of Sydney Harbour. Marloesje, resplendent in a white vintage outfit and purple feathers was heard to say "I don't know whether to look at myself or the view".

Prior to our present meeting place, the Association would meet at The Mechanic's Institute in Pitt Street. The lecture rooms were good, but morning tea was not provided. Elisabeth would always bring coffee, tea and biscuits/cake to cater for our morning tea. It was a job that she performed with distinction but it was a relief for her when we moved to the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, where it is provided.

Elisabeth was well known for her unique dress sense. She always dressed well and with plenty of colour. She had a fondness for hats. She had a straw boater with a hat band

that would match the colour of her dress. She had some unusual hats too. One had things hanging off the rim. I think that each hat had a story. Even in casual dress she looked good.

Elisabeth and Chris loved to travel. Elisabeth once took a 3 month cruise on her own aboard a cargo ship with just a couple of other passengers.

As well as preparing dinners, she loved to make guests tea and coffee with a treat. A glass of wine would also be offered. She loved to talk to people over a cuppa and took a keen interest in many diverse topics and entertained some very interesting people.

She is sadly missed by her family and friends and will be fondly remembered by her friends in the Australian Brontë Association.

Michael Links

[**A few biographical details:** Elisabeth was born in the Dutch East Indies, and as a toddler, she was interned in a Japanese prisoner of war camp with her mother and new-born sister, Betsy. After the war the family went to Holland, and then came to Australia in 1951, living in Kogarah. She became a registered nurse and trained as a midwife. She later became a renal dialysis specialist (kidney machines). She loved the sea and went on many cruises, as well as a couple of trips on her own on cargo ships. Together we had four children, Chris, Tim, Louise and Simone, and eight grandchildren. CC]

VALE PATRICIA STEBBINGS-MOORE



Patricia Stebbings-Moore was one of the ABA's longest standing members. She passed away just before Christmas, two days short of her 92nd birthday.

Patricia was born in England and spent most of her life there, training as a teacher in London, and before her retirement, acting as head teacher of a primary school in Sussex near the South Coast.

She came to Australia in the early 1990s to live with her only daughter in Roseville and very soon became involved in several local community organisations such as Probus and WEA.

Always an avid reader, Patricia was very interested in the literary societies of Sydney, and was delighted to join the Australian Brontë Association at its inception and so she was very proud of being a founder member.

She always enjoyed meetings, the Christmas lunches and participating in several weekend conferences away with the Association in the Blue Mountains and at Robertson in the Southern Highlands.

During one of Susannah Fullerton's Literary tours of England in 2009, Patricia appreciated being able to return to several places remembered from her youth, and particularly relished the day in Yorkshire devoted to the Brontës, revisiting Haworth which she had not seen for many years.

Although ill health prevented her from attending meetings in recent years, she still enjoyed reading the ABA publications and hearing news of its activities.

Her company is missed. Vale Patricia.

Catherine Barker

ANNE BRONTË'S TIME HAS COME

by Jane Sullivan, in the *Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum*

8-9 Feb 2020 (Noted by Michelle Cavanagh)

Anne Brontë's time has finally arrived. Poor Anne Brontë has always been the third wheel in the famous trio of sister writers. In the introduction to my edition of her novel *Agnes Grey*, Anita Desai says that Anne is "the youngest, the palest, the most elusive and the most easily overlooked."

I cannot understand how that can be claimed after reading *Agnes Grey*, a tale of a governess that "far outstrips the relatively mild experiences of Jane Eyre with Adele..." An article in *The Times Literary Supplement* by Samantha Ellis argues that "Agnes Grey could have been a piece of consciousness-raising for oppressed governesses to show them they were not alone and to encourage them to push for change. But not a single critic saw the novel that way."

Following Anne's death Charlotte Brontë blocked reprints of Anne's second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Charlotte thought the novel was an "entire mistake" as the heroine Helen is raped by her violent husband and then ran away from the marriage with her son - an unheard of solution at the time. Coming to Anne's rescue, Tracy Chevalier, in her introduction to the Folio Society edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* argues that Anne was the equal of Charlotte and Emily in her writing and that she wrote fearlessly and honestly, and we should celebrate that. Yes, Anne Brontë's time certainly has finally arrived.

Program for the End of 2020

Saturday 12th September Carolynn Everett

The Temperance Movement in Victorian England

In November 1834 Branwell Brontë was a founding member of the Haworth Temperance Society and at this meeting he was appointed secretary. However after the break-up of his affair with Mrs Robinson he became heavily dependent on alcohol and this contributed to his early death. Carolyn, a senior member of the Salvation Army, will give a brief history of the 'Salvos' and will explain where this organisation fitted into the Temperance movement in Victorian England.

Saturday 14th November Cindy Broadbent

The Birth of Childhood and "Agnes Grey"

Prior to the nineteenth century, children were considered to be half-formed adults rather than as comprising a separate section of society. Indeed many children had to grow up quickly when they were sent out to work as young as seven. The abolition of child workers, and the rise in the middle class, led to an increasing focus on the years of childhood. Commercially produced toys, and books written especially for children, began to be produced. In this talk, Cindy will discuss this change, and will relate it to Agnes's dealings with the children in *Agnes Grey*.

Saturday 5th December Christmas Lunch 11.30am for 12 noon

Cellos Restaurant, Castlereagh Boutique Hotel