

## PROGRAM FOR 2008

Meetings indicated by  are held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney (just around the corner from Town Hall station), with a meeting charge of \$4.

### Sat 8<sup>th</sup> MARCH Anne Collett – READING INTELLIGENCE

Charlotte Brontë's first novel, *The Professor*, begins with a letter from the narrator, William Crimsworth, to his friend Charles, in which he describes his first sight of his brother's wife and, in contrast, a portrait of his mother. Of Mrs Crimsworth junior, he writes:

“I sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which I could not discern in her face or in her conversation; it was merry, rather small; by turns I saw vivacity, vanity, coquetry, look out through its irid, but I watched in vain for a glimpse of soul.”

and of Mrs Crimsworth senior:

“The face, I remembered, had pleased me as a boy, but then I did not understand it; now I knew how rare that class of face is in the world, and I appreciated keenly its thoughtful, yet gentle expression. The serious grey eye possessed for me a strong charm, as did certain lines in the features indicative of most true and tender feeling.”

The eye it would seem is the window of the soul. Much of Brontë's novel (and those that followed) is concerned with appearance: with looking and seeing, with revelation and concealment, truth and deception. *The Professor* is a book that is interested in the method and mystery of reading – for Brontë suggests that the ability to read with intelligence or indeed to read intelligence, determines the course of a life. This idea of reading, and the extent to which we are enabled or disabled by the measure of skill with which we employ the art and science of reading, is of interest to me because it reveals much about Charlotte Brontë, as a woman and a writer, and the kind of intelligence she expected of her reader.

### **A short AGM will take place at this meeting.**

### Sat 17<sup>th</sup> MAY Sarah Burns – BRANWELL BRONTË – A GIFTED BROTHER

2008 marks the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Patrick Branwell Brontë, the only son and fourth of Patrick and Maria Brontë's six children. Branwell was a promising writer and artist with a rich imagination. Although he was the first of the Brontë siblings to appear in print, he would never gain money or success and was destined to live in the shadow of his three sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne. After attempts at careers as a painter, railway clerk and tutor, Branwell ended his days depressed, ill and addicted to alcohol and opium. His death on 24 September 1848 at the age of 31, from chronic bronchitis and marasmus (wasting of the body), greatly affected his family. In a letter to WS Williams of Smith & Elder on 6 October 1848, Charlotte said: “I ... asked myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course ... He is at rest, and that comforts us all. Long before he quitted this world Life had no happiness for him ...”

### Sat 26<sup>th</sup> JULY Mandy Swann – THE DESTROYING ANGEL OF TEMPEST

The Sea, Imaginative Excess and Extremes of Passion in the Fiction and Poetry of Charlotte and Anne Brontë.

 **Sat 13<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER James Phillips – MARRIAGE IN *JANE EYRE*: FROM CONTRACT TO CONVERSATION**

Charlotte Brontë's first novel contends that marriage is irreducible to a contract; it must be sustained by the conversation of equals. Yet equality cannot survive without legal recognition and, in early nineteenth-century Britain, this means legal reform: Jane cannot be Rochester's equal if she is simply his mistress and she also cannot be his equal if the laws concerning marriage are not reformed. Jane and Rochester come together in conversation, inventing each other for themselves, and reinventing marriage as the social form of such freedom.

 **Sat 8<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER Annette Harman – TRADE AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: SPECULATIONS CONCERNING MR EARNSHAW'S BUSINESS IN LIVERPOOL**

In *Wuthering Heights*, why does Mr Earnshaw travel to Liverpool? What business does a farmer have there? What is he really trading?

**Sat 6<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER JOINT CHRISTMAS LUNCH WITH THE NSW DICKENS SOCIETY**

Details will be announced later.