



ANNE BRONTE PANEL

Cathy Newman: A really warm welcome to a very special discussion about the brilliance of Brontë. Now, this should have happened at the Charleston Festival, but, unfortunately, like so many other literary festivals it was cancelled because of the coronavirus. So we are hosting this this very special online chat today. With me is an absolutely star-studded panel, the Scots Makar, novelist and poet Jackie Kay; award-winning graphic novelist Isabel Greenberg and acclaimed actor and director Adjoa Andoh. Now, I mentioned the brilliance of Brontë, but obviously the question is, which one? It is 200 years after Anne Brontë's birth, and I'm sure everybody watching knows everything there is to know about Charlotte and Emily, but all these centuries on, Anne is still the lesser-known Brontë. And I personally think she deserves better, so we're going to spend the next 45 minutes considering Anne. She is the author of *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Feminist pioneer, nurse to her alcoholic brother, Branwell. And all before her very untimely death of TB at the age of just 29. So, we're going to reappraise Anne and particularly focus on her lesser known work, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. So, Jackie, I'm going to kick off with you. I just wanted to ask, when you remember first coming across Anne Brontë?

Jackie Kay: I first came across her when I was 20 and I was at Stirling University and I had read *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* as part of the course on the 19th century novel. Then we did... we didn't do any Anne and I knew there was another Brontë, so I went and got *The Tenant* myself, and I just thought, why are we not studying this book? Why are we studying *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, because I was really blown away by it. It was obviously one of the first ever feminist novels, it was brave and bold in a very different way to the sisters and I thought she was the better writer.

Newman: And Adjoa, was that the case for you, because it is quite a sort of riproaring yarn, isn't it? Were you blown away by it, too?

Adjoa Andoh: I think I found *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* just profoundly shocking and, in a way, for me, it surpassed *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, although *Jane Eyre* had always



been my mother's absolute favourite and I can think of my mum as a young, lower-middle-class girl from Liverpool who married an African man, who wanted to have a different sort of life, and I think something about *Jane Eyre* really sort of called to her, from about the age of 10. For me, there is something about Anne's striving to realise herself and her sort of loyalty and her faithfulness and her frankness and her ability to stare badness in the face and say, "This is what it looks like and I will stay hopeful that you will find a different way to be in your life," as she does with Mr Huntingdon. I just found it breathtaking. She so funny, as well.

Newman: We're going to come onto a little bit of detail with *Wildfell Hall*, in a minute. But, Isabel, when was the first time that you discovered Anne, and what did you think of her?

Isabel Greenberg: Well, I also didn't read her until quite late. I'd read Emily and Charlotte as a teenager and loved them, but I didn't actually read any Anne until I was researching my graphic novel, which is about the Brontë juvenilia, and I felt that I couldn't research that without knowing all of their work and, yeah, I couldn't believe I hadn't read it before, really.

Newman: Jackie, can you cast any light on why Anne has sort of languished in the other sister's shadows?

Kay: I'm afraid it's a terrible case of sibling rivalry. Charlotte didn't reckon the novel... when *The Tenant* first came out, it created huge furore and sensation, people were deeply shocked at the portrayal of alcoholism and at it staring straight on at these issues of male violence and oppression and the fact that her wonderful heroine manages to run off and escape. These were times when women didn't have any rights, didn't have any property rights. Didn't have any rights at all. In the context of its time when it was first published in 1848, it was deeply shocking. Charlotte and Emily's books had different kinds of heroes and they believed in redemption and there isn't that in Anne's book. She doesn't give us sweet little tablets. Charlotte suppressed the book. When she was asked after Anne died, Charlotte was asked to allow... Because she was the literary executor, she was asked to allow a third edition to be printed and she said it was hardly worth preserving. It was another 10 years before *The Tenant* came out again into its third edition. During that time, Anne lost basically a century,



not just the 10 years, but an awful lot of ground, because it meant that she was treated as the sister that wasn't the genius. "The non-genius of the family," one reviewer even said. And actually, it's really the other way around. She was the genius of the family.

Newman: I'm sure we'll have different views on that later in the discussion, perhaps, but I just want to come back to Isabel, when you were talking about the childhood. And I wondered if you could introduce one of your illustrations here. Your graphic novel, *Glass Town*, tells the story of Anne's childhood, doesn't it? And this imaginary world that the siblings created. Tell us about that and artwork you have chosen for it?

Greenberg: What I'm going to show is actually not an artwork that made it into my graphic novel. My book ended up being - I'm proving you all right here - my book ended up being about Charlotte and Branwell's childhood world, *Glass Town*.

Newman: Missed opportunity!

Greenberg: When we're talking about Charlotte, their legacy, it's hard to avoid the fact that there isn't very much left of Anne and Emily's juvenilia at all. Not any of their prose, the prose work they did about their imaginary world. So I invented a map of how I imagined Gondol, their world, would have looked. That's what you will hopefully see on the screen now. I was... the whole Brontë juvenilia I found incredibly awe-inspiring, the sheer amount that they created as such young children. Emily and Anne had their own world, Gondol, which was separate to Charlotte and Branwell's world, which was *Glass Town*. They broke away from... Initially, they did early on, as a four, they created a lot together earlier on. Now I'm going to show an image of the four of them on the moors, surrounded by giant pots of ink and floating bits of paper. They did create a lot together, at first, but then they split apart. I think a lot of has been made of that rift. Also, having siblings myself, I also think that sometimes there is, if you're four years apart in age, that is a lot when you are a child, and I think it was quite natural that they needed to go their own ways.



Newman: And creative tension, as well. Well, Adjoa, I wanted to ask you to do the first reading, now, which I think focuses on Anne's wit and sense of fun, which perhaps she derived from that relationship with her siblings.

Andoh: Yes, so as you know, with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne does that terrific thing of having two voices. So you have got Gilbert and then later you've got Helen. So, this is Gilbert and his brother coming in from a day's work on the farm, coming in to see their mother.

"On entering the parlour we found that honoured lady seated in her arm-chair at the fireside, working away at her knitting, according to her usual custom, when she had nothing else to do. She had swept the hearth, and made a bright blazing fire for our reception; the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy from the cupboard in the black oak side-board, that shone like polished ebony, in the cheerful parlour twilight.

'Well! here they both are,' cried my mother, looking round upon us without retarding the motion of her nimble fingers and glittering needles. 'Now shut the door, and come to the fire, while Rose gets the tea ready; I'm sure you must be starved; - and tell me what you've been about all day; - I like to know what my children have been about.'

'I've been breaking in the grey colt - no easy business that - directing the ploughing of the last wheat stubble - for the ploughboy has not the sense to direct himself - and carrying out a plan for the extensive and efficient draining of the low meadowlands.'

'That's my brave boy! - and Fergus, what have you been doing?'

'Badger-baiting.'

And here he proceeded to give a particular account of his sport, and the respective traits of prowess evinced by the badger and the dogs; my mother pretending to listen with deep attention, and watching his animated countenance with a degree of maternal admiration I thought highly disproportioned to its object.

'It's time you should be doing something else, Fergus,' said I, as soon as a momentary pause in his narration allowed me to get in a word.

'What can I do?' replied he; 'my mother won't let me go to sea or enter the army; and I'm determined to do nothing else - except make myself such a nuisance to you all, that you will be thankful to get rid of me on any terms.'



Our parent soothingly stroked his stiff, short curls. He growled, and tried to look sulky, and then we all took our seats at the table, in obedience to the thrice-repeated summons of Rose.”

I'll stop there. But you get the... she just paints the character so vividly. And there's just that, “She's no better than she ought to be,” sort of currency going on underneath. I love it.

Newman: The badger baiting line, that's just great.

Andoh: You just get this taciturn, grumpy young man, don't you? It's beautiful.

Newman: I'm going to come onto a more detailed discussion of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall in a second, but before we leave that, before we leave the childhood, really, Isabel, I wanted you to introduce another artwork, which I think sheds some light on Anne's tricky relationship with Charlotte.

Greenberg: Yes. The section of my book that focuses most on their relationship is when they were at school together and Charlotte was Anne's teacher, she was a teacher at Roe Head, and Anne was essentially one of her pupils. It was a very difficult time in their relationship and where I think they probably should have been there for each other, you know, both being away from home, they very much weren't. You can read in Charlotte's diary, during this time, she has, I guess what essentially, is some sort of breakdown. Simultaneously, Anne fell really very ill. And the pair of them were, it sort of makes me really sad that, as I have a sister, and to read this, these two accounts of them both being in the same place and just not being there for each other at all. So, the two slides I'm going to show here are of them at Roe Head school. In the first slide, Anne has arrived at Roe Head, and Charlotte is advising her to try and put her imaginary work to one side. And Anne says, “Are you managing to do that?” And Charlotte says, “I'm trying.” Which is not true at all. She is in fact descending deeper and deeper into her own world at the expense of Anne and everyone around her.

Newman: It is very sad, because as you say, you can see that. The closeness of that bond and how it came asunder and really needn't have done. I just want to move on now, picking up those threads that you have just left dangling there, move on to a slightly more detailed



discussion of *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Jackie, you have already mentioned how Charlotte decided that what we now consider one of Anne's masterpieces was hardly worth preserving. Adjoa, I wanted to ask you, how she got it so wrong, if indeed you think she got it wrong?

Andoh: There is a school of thought that says that when the sisters... When it was just Charlotte and everybody else was gone, and she was republishing their work, when she does that biography that reveals that they are in fact women and she writes the biography and she tries to play down their intelligence and she definitely plays down the intelligence of her two sisters... The sense that she's trying to protect their reputations. I think we have to remember we are in the mid-1800s. I mean, Branwell used to have to go to the library, because women weren't allowed to go to the library to get books. Here you have women who have written these extraordinary books. There's a school of thought that says that Charlotte is trying to do reputation saving. She goes back through, she clarifies some of Joseph's language in *Wuthering Heights*, and they say that there was a second novel coming from Emily that Charlotte ditched completely. That never saw the light of day.

Newman: And maybe it will, one day! Maybe it will!

Andoh: Unless she burnt it. But with *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, there are two things that sort of rang a bit for me. One, that there was something so appalling and shocking about the frankness of the novel that she feared for her sister's reputation and also she was very conscious that it pulled on Branwell's addiction, so that that personal connection was washing the dirty laundry in a way that she couldn't bear. And also that it really spoke into Charlotte's deficiencies as the older sister, who was said not to have spoken to him for two years. When they had been the two of them, in Angria and Glass Town together, she had completely absented herself from that relationship with her brother, as he was falling apart. Whereas Anne had not. As I was saying earlier, you see it with Huntingdon. She is the faithful, loyal person who, although she doesn't agree with the addiction, she can see how appalling it is, she has suffered at the hands of it, she is by the bedside until death. And it sort of throws Charlotte in a really poor light. Rather than it necessarily being about literary rivalry, something about that relational, not direct but some sort of tacit finger wagging.



Newman: It picked at a scab, in some way. I mean, I want to come back to the alcoholism, but before we move off, I wanted to talk about the heroine, Helen Graham. Because she is subjected to this cruel, local gossip because she lives an unusual life, an independent life as a woman. Jackie, I just wondered if you could give your reflection on how that sort of female independence was seen in the 19th century as weird?

Kay: It was seen as completely weird. In fact, female independence is probably, in lots of places in this country and around the world, still seen as deeply weird. If you have a woman turn up in a small, rural community, just on her own with a child, people will talk. And they will wonder what her story is. There are so many myths and novels based on that idea of the lone woman turning up into a rural community, and still in a lot of places around the world women don't have actual independence, they don't have agency, they can't just run away with their kids to get away. In this time that we are living in, particularly under COVID-19, there is a 30% increase in domestic violence, lots of women are not able to leave their homes, they are trapped in their homes and that has been one of the shocking statistics, the rise in domestic violence in this country. All these years later, 200 years later, 150 years since the book came out, we are still living in a society and a world that is very unequal and where women that are independent are seen as mavericks and weirdos and strange and not to be trusted. The thing for me about Anne was that she really wanted to get at the truth and she saw that as her role in life and she said, "Oh, reader, if there was less of this delicate concealment of facts, whispering, peace, peace, peace... When there is no peace. There would be less of sin and misery to both sexes who are left to wring the bitter knowledge from experience." She felt really strongly that we were somehow concealing and masking facts. To me, it is a great irony whether Charlotte did what she did out of wanting to protect her family or not, she made a mistake in the way that Ted Hughes made a mistake with Sylvia Plath, and the way that lots of writers have made similar mistakes for whatever they thought was their motive, she made a big mistake and she concealed the truth. And for Anne, that was her *raison d'être*. Her *raison d'être* there was to try and... she only really had two shots at it with these novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and then she had her poetry, so to have had her own sister bury that book for all those years and her suffer the effects of that for years and years and years, right up until now, people still won't just trip off with Anne Brontë, that to me, it was a wrong and I think she would have felt it to be a wrong. You can



almost imagine her, because she also felt really strongly about how her family patronised her, they saw her as, “Oh, young Anne” and they presented her in a certain way. She used to get so frustrated at the ways that her own family stereotyped and presented her and it was irritating to her.

Newman: When you were talking about the resonances today with women and domestic violence, I found, rereading it now, after many years, I don't know why it's taken me so long to read it again, I found there were so many echoes of the position of women today. That's shocking that there are still so many inequalities persist. Adjoa, I just wondered if you could read for us your second reading on the choices for women in the 19th century and what the book has to say about that.

Andoh: This is after Helen has married Mr Huntingdon. They've got a son called Arthur and she has gone to visit her neighbour, Milicent, and Milicent's mother, Mrs Hargrave, with her houseguest Annabella Pheasant, who we later find out is having an affair with her husband.

“Yesterday morning, one of October's brightest loveliest days, Milicent and I were in the garden enjoying a brief half-hour together with our children, while Annabella was lying on the drawing-room sofa, deep in the last new novel. We had been romping with the little creatures, almost as merry and wild as themselves, and now paused in the shade of the tall copper beech, to recover breath and rectify our hair, disordered by the rough play and the frolicsome breeze - while they toddled together along the broad, sunny walk; my Arthur supporting the feebler steps of her little Helen, and sagaciously pointing out to her the brightest beauties of the border as they passed, with semi-articulate prattle that did as well for her as any other mode of discourse. From laughing at the pretty sight, we began to talk of the children's future life; and that made us thoughtful. We both relapsed into silent musing as we slowly proceeded up the walk; and I suppose Milicent, by a train of associations, was led to think of her sister.

'Helen,' said she, 'you often see Esther, don't you?'

'Not very often.'



'But you have more frequent opportunities of meeting her than I have: and she loves you, I know, and reverences you too: there is nobody's opinion she thinks so much of; and she says you have more sense than mamma.'

'That is because she is self-willed, and my opinions more generally coincide with her own than your mamma's. But what then, Milicent?'

'Well, since you have so much influence with her, I wish you would seriously impress it upon her, never, on any account, or for anybody's persuasion, to marry for the sake of money, or rank, or establishment, or any earthly thing, but true affection and well-grounded esteem.'

'There is no necessity for that,' said I, 'for we have had some discourse on that subject already, and I assure you her ideas of love and matrimony are as romantic as any one could desire.'

But romantic notions will not do: I want her to have true notions.'

'Very right, but in my judgment, what the world stigmatises as romantic, is often more nearly allied to the truth than is commonly supposed; for, if the generous ideas of youth are too often over-clouded by the sordid views of after-life, that scarcely proves them to be false.'

'Well, but if you think her ideas are what they ought to be, strengthen them, will you? and confirm them, as far as you can; for *I* had romantic notions once, and - I don't mean to say that I regret my lot, for I am quite sure I don't - but - '

'I understand you,' said I; 'you are contented for yourself, but you would not have your sister to suffer the same as you.'

'No - or worse. She might have far worse to suffer than I - for I *am really* contented, Helen, though you mayn't think it: I speak the solemn truth in saying that I would not exchange my husband for any man on earth, if I might do it by the plucking of this leaf.'

'Well, I believe you: now that you have him, you would not exchange *him* for another; but then you would gladly exchange some of his qualities for those of better men.'

'Yes; just as I would gladly exchange some of my own qualities for those of better women; for neither he nor I are perfect, and I desire his improvement as earnestly as my own. And he will improve - don't you think so Helen? - he's only six-and-twenty yet.'

'He may,' I answered,

'He will - he WILL!' repeated she.



'Excuse the faintness of my acquiescence, Millicent; I would not discourage your hopes for the world, but mine have been so often disappointed, that I am become as cold and doubtful in my expectations as the flattest of octogenarians.'

'And yet you do hope, still - even for Mr. Huntingdon?'

'I do, I confess - "even" for *him*; for it seems as if life and hope must cease together.'

Newman: Tell us, briefly, if you can, just why you picked that particular excerpt.

Andoh: Because I think it sits on the fault line of understanding what the society is that you are in and even sometimes, like Millicent thinking, "I've made my bed, I've got to lie in it, but for my sister, who I love..." I love that line where she says, "It's truth, you've got to go for truth." Because you hear Anne all the way through that. But also you hear Anne saying, "I still hope for Mr Huntingdon," even though by this book, we all know he is a complete bastard. Do you know what I mean... there's nuance, and I love the nuance of Anne's writing.

Newman: She's delusional for quite a while about Mr Huntingdon, isn't she?

Andoh: But I think that's part of her teaching to us, it's like, "This is what I thought. If you think like this, pull back, think again and really look at the situation with a cold, open, truthful eye." Not the romantic notions that are part of that genteel novelistic tradition. She's saying, "Here's something harder and truer."

Newman: Isabel, we're going to move on to talk about the alcoholism, which is another theme in the book. When you read the account in the book about the devastating toll of alcoholism. You've done these very powerful illustrations of the sibling relationship, the dark side, as well as... In a way, there was a sort of romantic idyll about it, as well. What impact did what you found out about Branwell and his alcoholism have on you, when you were reading about that and drawing those drawings?

Greenberg: I think when I read *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, because I read it after I knew their story, the Brontë's story, I found it incredibly affecting. I think it's impossible to read it and not see her seeing her own brother. It's just so sad. Particularly when you think about what sort of hopeful, bright children they were. When you read the stuff they wrote when



they were children, it is absolutely wild. It's this amazing outpouring of unbelievable creativity. I've been thinking about them a lot, actually, being in lockdown and not being able to go anywhere, and thinking when they were stuck at home on a rainy, Yorkshire Day and they didn't have anywhere to go and they didn't have the Internet or friends to Zoom, they turned inwards and they created the most unbelievable, amazing worlds and then when you think about how sadly it ended, it's terrible. Particularly, Branwell... It really didn't end well for him.

Newman: Have you been creating your own artistic imaginary world during lockdown?

Greenberg: I wish I could say I had. I really, really do. Sadly, my big takeaway has been that I am not a Brontë.

Newman: I'm sure that's the most that's the same for most of us. Me, certainly! Adjoa, you've picked the third reading on the alcoholism depicted in *Wildfell Hall*, so we are braced for it.

Andoh: Just before I do that, just that thing about imagination, there is a lovely poem that Emily wrote called *Imagination* and there's a verse in it that I just... it makes me want to cry, actually, because I just think... Oh, anyway...

*So hopeless is the world without,
The world within I doubly prize;
Thy world where guile and hate and doubt
And cold suspicion never rise;
Where thou and I and Liberty
Have undisputed sovereignty.*

It's like imagination gives her a space in which to reclaim the whole of who she is as a human being. And I think, as artists, that's kind of part of what our duty is, to realise the whole of human being. I love that.

Newman: I was just going to say, that is absolutely beautiful, that verse that you just read, just so relevant now when we are all finding this inner life, and there are lots of frustrations



about that, as well, you're in isolation and you're not necessarily quite comfortable with that. You're not a Brontë. I find it very frustrating, but very interesting to think about exploring your inner life at this time. If you wouldn't mind just going straight on to read for us the reading on alcoholism.

Andoh: My greatest source of uneasiness, in this time of trial, was my son, whom his father and his father's friends delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show, and to instruct in all the evil habits he could acquire - in a word, to 'make a man of him' was one of their staple amusements; and I need say no more to justify my alarm on his account, and my determination to deliver him at any hazard from the hands of such instructors. I first attempted to keep him always with me, or in the nursery, and gave Rachel particular injunctions never to let him come down to dessert as long as these 'gentlemen' stayed; but it was no use: these orders were immediately countermanded and overruled by his father; he was not going to have the little fellow moped to death between an old nurse and a cursed fool of a mother. So the little fellow came down every evening in spite of his cross mamma, and learned to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr. Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sent mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him. To see such things done with the roguish naivete of that pretty little child, and hear such things spoken by that small infantile voice, was as peculiarly piquant and irresistibly droll to them as it was inexpressibly distressing and painful to me; and when he had set the table in a roar he would look round delightedly upon them all, and add his shrill laugh to theirs. But if that beaming blue eye rested on me, its light would vanish for a moment, and he would say, in some concern, 'Mamma, why don't you laugh? Make her laugh, papa - she never will.'

Hence was I obliged to stay among these human brutes, watching an opportunity to get my child away from them instead of leaving them immediately after the removal of the cloth, as I should always otherwise have done. He was never willing to go, and I frequently had to carry him away by force, for which he thought me very cruel and unjust; and sometimes his father would insist upon my letting him remain; and then I would leave him to his kind friends, and retire to indulge my bitterness and despair alone, or to rack my brains for a remedy to this great evil.



Newman: And it's so... What I find about the whole way she talks about Huntingdon's alcoholism, it is so honest and so... I found that unusual for a book of the time and I think the same is true of... There's nothing romanticised about it, is there?

Andoh: No, but what I find really great is that she doesn't just describe alcoholism, she describes her position as the mother, as a woman with no power, how can she protect her child from this drunken man with all the power and his drunken friends, who is making his child an alcoholic, because he thinks it's funny. The only thing she can do is to stay in the middle of it. You can't run away at that point, she has to stay in the middle of it and come up with a plan, for what she can do to protect herself and her son. There is no varnish, there's no romanticism to it. What's exciting about saying, "I just have to stay there night after night watching these drunken men abuse me and getting my kid, who is the reason I am staying, to abuse me, as well." It's horrific.

Newman: I think that lack of varnish that you mentioned there, that's what I find about the way she depicts her men, in contrast to her sisters. Jackie, I just wanted to bring you in here. Because if you look at Anne's Gilbert, versus Emily's Heathcliff, couldn't be more different in terms of a model of masculinity. I just wondered if you could shed some light on how extraordinary that depiction of, I suppose, like a new man, really, Gilbert is. How extraordinary was that at the time?

Kay: Totally and utterly extraordinary, because they were used to having these Heathcliff - type heroes that would behave very badly, but ultimately would be redeemed in the next generation through their children and the same with Mr Rochester. Mr Rochester might go blind and all the rest of it, but ultimately, Jane returns to him, his love, there's redemption there. The madwoman in the attic is burnt right down. These stories are kind of very, very different from Anne Brontë, because Anne Brontë was interested in the truth and she always thought within every single truth there was a moral. She was a very moral writer, and really interested in morality, really interested in issues of truth and justice, and really interested in not turning away from something. She was the one that nursed the alcoholic brother, he probably killed the lot off, because the TB started with him. She was the one that nursed him when everyone else turned against him. She understood him in perhaps a way that the others



didn't. She understood the complexity of alcoholism and for any of us who have alcoholics in their family, and I do, we know how difficult that is, because we love them, but at the same time we have to suffer in lots and lots of ways for their behaviour and if we think we are going to be able to change them, we get so frustrated because that change doesn't really come. I really sympathise with Anne for being able to write about that on the nose and not hiding it in a Heathcliff or a Mr Rochester. And I a few years back got this extraordinary job as a writer in residence at the Parsonage, I had to go in there on a morning, before any tourists came, or stay there at night after they had all left and I had the whole place to myself, which is kind of like... I found it a bit creepy, I really did. Creepy and spooky. I found it amazing, because you see the wee, miniature books, that you've been fascinated by, Isabel. One of the little books was about to come back and there was great excitement in the Parsonage for this book, it had been re-bought and rejoined the collection. Just bigger than a postage stamp. Being in that house, you could really get a sense of their life, of them walking around the oval table at night and saying their prayer together, and then imagine, one by one, them dropping off and less and less of them walking around that table, until it was just Charlotte and her father and Charlotte's husband walking around the table. And I found that to be almost unbearably moving when a tragedy hits an entire family, and in the case of Emily and Anne and Branwell, it was probably his TB that passed on to the sisters. Just to have such terrible tragedy within the whole family. Anne Brontë's death and burial... She died in Scarborough, a place that she had loved going to as a governess, and she's the only one not to be buried there... Her death was almost like a COVID-19 death, she had one person at the funeral apart from Charlotte and that was an old teacher. Charlotte chose to have her buried in Scarborough, rather than bringing her back where her father, Patrick, might have been able to attend and so on. And she chose to have it very quickly after her death, which meant that Patrick didn't have the chance to get to Scarborough, either. So there were only two people at a funeral and then the headstone is full of inaccuracies. So I wrote this poem about that, about Anne's voice coming back in a ghostly presence and still haunting us today.

Newman: Jackie, I want to come back to you on the poem, because we're not quite there yet. I just don't want to leave Anne's men, just yet. I'll come back to you, just very quickly, Isabel, I wanted a quick comment from you on Anne's men. As an artist, is it easier to go with the



traditional romanticism of a Heathcliff, or, because Gilbert is harder to put into artistic form, isn't he? I just wondered what you thought of that.

Greenberg: 100%. I think, of course, there's just something so larger-than-life about Heathcliff and Rochester and all of their dramatics, but, ultimately, you just would not want to be... You would not want to be self isolating with either of them! I mean... Interestingly, Charlotte and Anne's attitude to this sort of thing, you can see from a very young age, how they must have come up against each other. In Charlotte and Branwell's world, people just come back to life all the time, war was glorious and men were all like Byron... And I think Anne, really, she, more than any of them wanted to leave behind those worlds that they created when they were children and in a way, left them, the way I see it, she left that world behind earlier than the rest of them. I think Charlotte also saw that to an extent the imaginary worlds they had when they were children were maybe too all consuming. But she didn't really leave it behind fully, because Rochester is still a Byronic, devilish man who locks his wife in the attic. It's very hard to reconcile that!

Newman: I want to just get to Jackie's poem, and some final thoughts on Anne's impact. Before we do that, Adjoa, I want you to read the excerpt on Anne and her men. I'm hoping it's a fairly short one, because we are running a little bit short of time, now.

Andoh: OK.

Newman: A condensed form!

Andoh: Let me skip to the second page. So, basically Huntingdon is having an affair with Lady Featherington. Now the neighbour, Mr Hargrave, thinks she's fair game. I'll just read a bit from it, and just shut me up when you want me to stop.

“Stand-off, then...” So, he has, Hargrave has come at her, going, ‘Come on, you’re free, now.’ She is holding a palette knife to him.

“Stand-off, then, said I. He stepped back. And listen to me. I don't like you. I continued as deliberately and emphatically as I could to give the greater efficacy to my words. And if I



were divorced from my husband, or if he were dead, I would not marry you. Now, there, I hope you are satisfied.

His face grew blanched with anger.

'I am satisfied,' he replied, with bitter emphasis, 'that you are the most cold-hearted, unnatural, ungrateful woman I ever yet beheld!'

'Ungrateful, sir?'

'Ungrateful.'

'No, Mr. Hargrave, I am not. For all the good you ever did me, or ever wished to do, I most sincerely thank you: for all the evil you have done me, and all you would have done, I pray God to pardon you, and make you of a better mind.' Here the door was thrown open, and Messrs. Huntingdon and Hattersley appeared without. The latter remained in the hall, busy with his ramrod and his gun; the former walked in, and stood with his back to the fire, surveying Mr. Hargrave and me, particularly the former, with a smile of insupportable meaning, accompanied as it was by the impudence of his brazen brow, and the sly, malicious, twinkle of his eye.

'Well, sir?' said Hargrave, interrogatively, and with the air of one prepared to stand on the defensive.

'Well, sir,' returned his host.

'We want to know if you are at liberty to join us in a go at the pheasants, Walter,' interposed Hattersley from without. 'Come! there shall be nothing shot besides, except a puss or two; I'll vouch for that.'

Walter did not answer, but walked to the window to collect his faculties. Arthur uttered a low whistle, and followed him with his eyes. A slight flush of anger rose to Hargrave's cheek; but in a moment he turned calmly round, and said carelessly:

'I came here to bid farewell to Mrs. Huntingdon, and tell her I must go to-morrow.'

'Humph! You're mighty sudden in your resolution. What takes you off so soon, may I ask?'

'Business,' returned he, repelling the other's incredulous sneer with a glance of scornful defiance.

'Very good,' was the reply; and Hargrave walked away. Thereupon Mr. Huntingdon, gathering his coat-laps under his arms, and setting his shoulder against the mantel-piece, turned to me, and, addressing me in a low voice, scarcely above his breath, poured forth a volley of the vilest and grossest abuse it was possible for the imagination to conceive or the



tongue to utter. I did not attempt to interrupt him; but my spirit kindled within me, and when he had done, I replied, 'If your accusation were true, Mr. Huntingdon, how dare you blame me?'"

And she goes on, but I will stop there. It ends with him, Huntingdon, basically saying well, "I've got this one, I don't want that one, do you want her? You can have her, if you want to." Complete prattle.

Newman: So we're sort of back to where we began about a position of women in the choices that women were forced into and the fact that they didn't really have a choice. I suppose that's quite a good moment to bring up Anne's reputation as a feminist pioneer and whether you believe she deserves that. Let me ask that to Jackie and then Adjoa a quick response from you and then Jackie, I will come to your work.

Kay: I think she is a feminist pioneer and I think *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is your first prototype feminist novel. Others followed, but that was 1848 and she was at least 50 years ahead of the next feminist novel. And it's an extraordinary work and it's why I keep returning to it and I hope people keep returning to it over the next 200 years. It's been 200 years since she was born and I'm hoping that her legacy will just gain after that poor start, it will just get stronger and stronger, because time is a fascinating thing and time can redress and correct wrongs.

Newman: I love the quote from the suffragist May Sinclair in 1913 that, "The slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England." This sums it up for me.

Kay: I love that, you can still hear it!

Newman: You can still hear the door slamming, indeed, it is still reverberating. Jackie, you wrote this incredible poem that you're going to read to us. Just set the context of that and why you did that and what it's about.



Kay: Well, I was asked by Michael Stewart, who set up this project called the Brontë's Stones. He decided that not an awful lot of people knew where they were born and where Charlotte had lived some of her life, before they went to the Parsonage, and he wanted to paint a walking map of all the different places of the Brontës and he asked four different people to write and he imagined that everyone would fight over Emily and Charlotte, which people did and I wanted Anne, so that was good. I chose Anne! I wanted to have Anne. It was interesting, so Kate Bush wrote a poem about Emily and Carol Ann Duffy wrote about Charlotte and Jeanette Winterson wrote one about the whole Brontë family and mine was about Anne and mine was the last stone to come, because there was lots and lots of trouble at the Parsonage about where this stone should go, in the meadow just behind the house. All the other stones were up and mine wasn't even ready for the event, which was at the literature festival, and there was meant to be this walk. That seemed to be kind of part of the story of Anne's life. I still haven't actually seen my stone properly in situ, yet, because it was so delayed. It did have a kind of unveiling, I wasn't there because my mum got very ill. So I've still got to go and visit the stone and when I do it will be amazing. But Pip Hall was the artist who worked on the lettering and I thought it would be kind of interesting if I had a poem within a poem. So the slightly different sizes of letterings, so you can read a poem within the poem and it seemed, to me, fitting for the the Brontës and their secret world. Particularly fitting for Anne. I imagine this spoken in her voice.

*These plain dark sober clothes
Are my disguise. No, I was not preparing
For an early death, yours or mine.
You got me all wrong, all the time.
But sisters, I will have the last word,
Write the last line. I am still at sea.
But if I can do some good in this world
I will right the wrong. I am still young.
And the moor's winds lift my light-dark hair.
I am still here when the sun goes up,
Still here when the moon drops down.*



I do not now stand alone.

Newman: I love it. Beautiful. Beautifully read, and a beautiful poem. We're fast running out of time, but Isabel, I just wanted to put to you, the fact that people seem to take sides, they're either a Charlotte person or an Anne person and, you know, Jackie was saying she was thrilled to write her poem about Anne, she picked Anne. Do you feel you take sides in your artwork?

Greenberg: I mean, I very much don't want to say that I am a Charlotte person or an Anne person, because I just like them both so much. Possibly, I might have rather have hung out with Anne. I'm not sure. But I certainly did... My book is centred more around Charlotte. I do think it is possible not to take sides and I think the tragedy is that, when you were talking about them walking around the table, Jackie, that image resonates with me so much, too, and this idea of Charlotte being the last one left and she dealt so badly... She was responsible for their legacy, and she really messed it up and I wonder what would it have been like if Anne had been the last one... How would she have handled their legacy? I think considerably better. But I don't think that makes Charlotte a bad person, I think she was facing a terrible tragedy and history, unfortunately, has revealed, I guess, the truth of what happened afterwards and it is very sad, more than anything else.

Newman: Jackie, obviously your poem references her early death. She died at the age of 29 from TB. Adjoa, what do you think she would have achieved if she had lived longer, what would have happened?

Andoh: She was a woman on a mission, and she wrote this just before she died and I think, yeah. She says, "I wish, if it would please God, to spare me, not only for Papa and Charlotte's sakes, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practice, humble and limited, indeed. Still, I should not like them to come to nothing and myself to have lived to so little purpose. But God's will be done." She was a woman on a mission. She had plans and schemes and dreams of what she wanted to do with her life. To write more, to create more, to elucidate more. She was really into class and wealth and your station in society. I think of her, not just as a feminist, but that being part



of her whole perspective on social reform and equality and justice and I just think that is who she was. And she was right, she died too soon, she could have done lots.

Newman: A woman on a mission, that is a brilliant way to end this discussion, 200 years after her birth. I feel like, you know, we've helped do her justice. From your poem, Jackie, to your wonderful readings, Adjoa, and your amazing artwork, Isabel, thank you all so much for participating. I thoroughly enjoyed listening in and hopefully steering the conversation along, but that is all we have time for. Thank you all at home, very much, for listening to this and hopefully next time we'll be at Charleston. Goodbye.