

UNIT 4-3

1847 - all 3 publish novels

1849 2 dead

I

Jane Eyre
Agnes Grey

Emily

Anne

(Brontë)

THE BRONTËS

'That wind pouring in impetuous current through the air, sounding wildly, unremittingly from hour to hour, deepening its tone as the night advances, coming not in gusts, but with a rapid gathering stormy swell, that wind I know is heard at this moment far away on the moors at Haworth. Branwell and Emily hear it and as it sweeps over our house down the churchyard and round the old church, they think perhaps of me and Anne ...'

Charlotte Brontë. Roe Head Journal

The most surprising thing about the Brontë sisters is that all of them became writers. To cherish such an early dream is common, to realize the dream is rare. What was it that first stimulated, then encouraged and supported the dream? Something in their circumstances fostered a love of words and provided the means whereby ideas could burgeon and flourish. Somewhere an apprenticeship with words was served that gave access to the technical skills necessary for writing lyric poetry and the sustained prose of a novel. That apprenticeship was undertaken in Haworth Parsonage where four children played with literature as others play with toys.

Central features of the circumstances that influenced the Brontës as they matured are the family, the parsonage in its graveyard, the little township of Haworth, the county of Yorkshire, and in a broader sense, England and Europe between 1820 and 1860. From Haworth and the isolated companionship of the parsonage nursery, a path leads to the literary salons of London and the reviews in Parisian literary journals. Yet it is a two-way traffic, for the culture of Europe was flowing into the small house long before the women there had published any books.

To be a member of the Brontë family meant being totally immersed in literature and the interplay of ideas. It meant taking art seriously and seeing the whole of life through the eyes of poets and painters. The mixture was heady and not always beneficial. It proved too rich for the only boy of the house. Whereas it fed the imagination of the girls, in Branwell's case it seems to have resulted in satiation. The close companionship enjoyed by the young women was not enough to sustain him. While the sisters gained increasing mastery over words, the brother gradually lost control altogether; false starts, unfinished pro-

jects, hasty jottings, tormented babbling were the sad outcome of his 'Scribblemania.' Branwell Brontë's failure is a counterpoint to his sisters' success, his apparent self-destruction a response to the same passions and circumstances.

The Rev. Patrick Brontë dominated his family but he was not the tyrannical figure portrayed by popular biography. Above all, it was his love of literature, music and painting, his interest in politics and his zeal for education, that established the workshop for writers in Haworth Parsonage. The children saw his printed works on their shelves and read his articles in the newspapers that they fetched from stationers in nearby towns. Whatever his shortcomings, he imparted a love of learning to each of his children and, more importantly, allowed them space in which to develop and explore their own ideas.

The parsonage home, however, was inevitably isolated from the rest of Haworth. The children's links with the real activities of the parish were restricted to their father's study, his office as chairman of the parish committee and his role of spiritual guide. It was not possible for them to mingle normally with the other children of the township. Haworth was unusually bereft of what we would now call any middle-class people. Almost the entire population was made up of workers, either in wool-processing, in quarries, or in low-level farming. Gentry had no interest in the township; even the mill-owners cared little for the welfare of the parishioners. Conditions in the town while the Brontë sisters lived there were appalling: the sanitation system was primitive and there was no piped water. The now-picturesque Main Street then ran as an open sewer, and local infant mortality was twice the national average. Haworth was a microcosm of the effects of industrial overpopulation and overcrowded housing. The comparatively sheltered and cultured upbringing of the Brontë children set them firmly apart from the people and children of the parish, although they were not oblivious to the conditions of the undernourished, ill-clothed, poorly housed workers who were their near neighbours.

Haworth lies at the edge of a large tract of moorland in Yorkshire, on the borders of Lancashire. It is perched upon the roof of England, high above sea-level, exposed to extremes of weather. In all, a dangerous place. The open moorland, which the Brontë children roamed, and which they made a private paradise, was one of the most powerful shaping forces of their childhood and an enduring delight of their maturity. It can be said without exaggeration that the wild wind off the moor permeated their writing as the rains soak the peatbogs on the moors themselves. In this landscape where nothing obscures a view of the rising and setting sun, the rolling moors became an informing image for their literary works. The seclusion of the parsonage fireside, a haven against the wind, is always set against the threat of an exposed wilderness reminiscent of King Lear.

creatures of nature
& civility via words

Jane ponders her situation and the author draws together the imagery of the book, from Bewick's Norwegian wastes to the charge of 'liar' inflicted upon a little girl at school:

'Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman – almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on hayfield and cornfield lay a frozen shroud; lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow; and the woods, which twelve hours since waved leafy and fragrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild, and white as pine-forests in wintry Norway. My hopes were all dead – struck with a subtle doom, such as, in one night, fell on all the first-born in the land of Egypt. I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing: they lay stark, chill, livid corpses that could never revive. I looked at my love – that feeling which was my master's, which he had created: it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle; sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr Rochester's arms – it could not derive warmth from his breast. Oh, never more could it turn to him; for faith was blighted – confidence destroyed! Mr Rochester was not to me what he had been, for he was not what I had thought him. I would not ascribe vice to him; I would not say he had betrayed me; but the attributes of stainless truth was gone from his idea.'

nature
a metaphor
for
chilled love
The
unsavoury
spirit -
The dark
soul

LINES COMPOSED IN A WOOD ON A
WINDY DAY

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;
For above and around me the wild wind is roaring,
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;
The dead leaves, beneath them, are merrily dancing,
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky.

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray;
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing,
And hear the wild roar of their thunder to-day!

Action (Anne)

'Whether it is right or advisable to create things like Heathcliff, I do not know. I scarcely think it is.'

Charlotte Brontë, Preface to Wuthering Heights, 1850.

Of the three manuscripts despatched to publishers in 1847, one surpasses the others in its evocation of landscape and its deep-rooted attachment to a particular location: Emily Brontë's sole novel *Wuthering Heights*. Throughout the world her name evokes images of moorland, blustering wind, storm and tempest. In fair weather and foul, people of all nationalities walk the moors above the parsonage at Haworth to experience for themselves the setting and inspiration for one of literature's most loved works.

No detail of her home, its immediate and distant surroundings escaped Emily's eye or pen. The fireside, the graveyard view through the window, the distant hills – all provided material for reflection:

'I SEE AROUND ME TOMBSTONES GREY'

I see around me tombstones grey
Stretching their shadows far away.
Beneath the turf my footsteps tread
Lie low and lone the silent dead;
Beneath the turf, beneath the mould –
Forever dark, forever cold,
And my eyes cannot hold the tears
Thay memory hoards from vanished years;
For Time and Death and Mortal pain
Give wounds that will not heal again.

Ellis (Emily)

no hope
or
solace

←
Anne

Wuthering Heights

'I'll walk where my own nature would be leading:
 It vexes me to choose another guide:
 Where the grey flocks in ferny glens are feeding;
 Where the wild wind blows on the mountainside.

It is, however, at the hearthside and the writing table that we find the true Emily Brontë. Here she invokes her muse and summons up the extraordinary visions that give paramount quality to her poetry and her single novel. She alone of the sisters comes near to explaining the mystery and power of their shared achievement, derived from their reading, their inventive games and their zeal for literature:

THE VISIONARY

Silent is the house: all are laid asleep;
 One, alone, looks out o'er the snow-wreaths deep;
 Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze
 That whirls the wildering drift, and bends the groaning
 trees.

Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor;
 Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or door;
 The little lamp burns straight, its rays shoot strong and
 far;
 I trim it well to be the Wanderer's guiding-star.

Frown, my haughty sire; chide, my angry dame;
 Set your slaves to spy, threaten me with shame:
 But neither sire nor dame, nor prying serf shall know
 What angel nightly tracks that waste of frozen snow.

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
 Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;
 Who loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,
 Thou for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay.

Burn then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear –
 Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air:
 He for whom I wait, thus ever comes to me;
 Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my
 constancy.

Of the three girls, Emily felt the most attachment to home, thriving when there, languishing whenever away. Yet her brief sorties laid down rich ore for her writing. Like her sisters, she grew up with the moor as her playground; unlike them, she made it her special world:

THE CAGED BIRD

And like myself lone, wholly lone,
 It sees the day's long sunshine glow;
 And like myself it makes its moan
 In unexhausted woe.

Give we the hills our equal prayer:
 Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea;
 We ask for nothing further here
 But our own hearts and liberty.

Ah! could my hand unlock its chain,
 How gladly would I watch it soar,
 And ne'er regret and ne'er complain
 To see its shining eyes no more.

But let me think that if to-day
 It pines in cold captivity,
 To-morrow both shall soar away
 Eternally, entirely Free.

Ellis (Emily)

Emily is considered to be the finest poet of the Brontë family. It seems that Charlotte's own response to Emily's poems was right: 'a deep conviction that these were not common affusions . . . to my ear they had also a peculiar music'.

female experience

*like Hawthorne's
 protestation of
 nature's religion*

Spirit