

# The Bronte Sisters and Wuthering Heights

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## Abstract

*A noteworthy difference in imaginative quality split up the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë from those of the other great English novelists of the last century.*

*The distinction seems to be certainly considered one among emotional intensity, the made of a completely unique attention upon essential human passions in a kingdom drawing near critical purity. Whether this attention is well matched with the character of the novel - and there was an inclination to treat the paintings of the Brontës as something of a 'sport', a extraordinary oddity in literary history - isn't anyt any doubt open to discussion.*

*Many of the remarkable novelists of the period - Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot - confirmed ethical preoccupations and social hobbies extra express than the ones discovered in Wuthering Heights. We might also additionally without difficulty agree that the variety of those writers is wider, their factors of touch with the human scene extra intensively portrayed; however, whilst this has been allowed, there stays to be taken under consideration an impressive aggregate of romantic common and private inspiration, primitive feeling and non-secular exaltation, which corresponds to possibilities of human nature in any other case unduly hid throughout this period.*

**Keywords:** *Imaginative quality, Emotional intensity, Novels of Charlotte Bronte, Critical moment of transition, Source of inspiration, True spiritual vision*

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A noteworthy difference in imaginative quality separates the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë from those of the other great English novelists of the last century.

The distinction seems to be certainly considered one among emotional intensity, the made of a completely unique attention upon essential human passions in a kingdom drawing near critical purity. Whether this attention is well matched with the character of the novel - and there was an inclination to treat the paintings of the Brontës as something of a 'sport', an extraordinary oddity in literary history - isn't any doubt open to discussion.

Many of the remarkable novelists of the period - Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot - confirmed ethical preoccupations and social hobbies extra express than the ones discovered in Wuthering Heights. We might also additionally without difficulty agree that the variety of those writers is wider, their factors of touch with the human scene extra intensively portrayed; however, whilst this has been allowed, there stays to be taken under consideration an impressive aggregate of romantic common and private inspiration, primitive feeling and non-secular exaltation, which corresponds to possibilities of human nature in any other case unduly hid throughout this period. This statement, supremely true of Wuthering Heights, is only in part applicable to the novels of Charlotte Bronte. No one should be led by their understandable imperfections to under-estimate these novels, which reflect - in their best passageways - the workings of a critical and intensely distinct mind.

In her function as elder sister and, to a massive degree, as replacement for a lifeless mother, Charlotte's contacts with the outdoor global have been extra non-stop and sundry than the ones of her sisters. Her tours into that

global did now no longer quit as with no trouble as did the ones of Emily in deception and retreat; at the contrary, they shaped in recollection the substance of all this is maximum exciting in her writings.

The in advance chapters of *Jane Eyre* (1847) relaxation in large part upon her enjoy of the Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge, and her existence as a governess is likewise meditated there; even as it's miles infamous that the 2 durations which she spent in Brussels on the Pensionnat of M. and Heger supplied the fabric to start with for *The Professor* (1857) (which remained unpublished in her lifetime) and, extra forcibly, for *Villette* (1853).

Finally, her father's memories of the Luddite riots of the early years of the century, supported with the aid of using her personal analyzing withinside the duration and her observations of the fabric enterprise in her personal time, fashioned in *Shirley* (1849) the history to her presentation of the connection among the 2 girls, the heiress Shirley Keeldar and the Rector's negative niece Caroline Helstone, in whom Emily and an idealized photograph of herself are respectively conveyed.

The best pages of these novels are - it is worth repeating - very far from negligible. They are those in which Charlotte is able to remembrance her own experiences most vividly, and in which her own more intimate feelings, her lifelong need for emotional compensation, are least directly involved. The author who could write, in her preface to the subsequent edition of *Jane Eyre*, that 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion.... There is an alteration; and it is a moral, and not a bad action, to mark sketchily and clearly the line of leave-taking between them', was capable at her best of using her firm grasp of observed data to produce a powerful and acute, if somewhat tart and self-righteous, picture of certain aspects of life.

The early pages of the novel, in which the complacency of Mrs. Reed and her children are seen through the eyes of the penniless child whom her deceased uncle has introduced into a house where her presence is entirely unwelcome, recall those which describe the early life of the orphan Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*; and, in their vivid re-creation of real social distinctions, they do not altogether suffer in the comparison.

Both situations are related with a precision, an acute sense of the concrete manifestations of social rank - notable for instance in Jane's account of the 'spare chamber' at Gateshead Hall, with the 'piled-up mattresses and pillows of its bed, reinforced on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask' and standing next to the 'ample, cushioned easy chair ... looking, as I assumed, like a pale throne - which, proceeding from a vivid and oppressive perception of status, reflect a penetrating and original mind. What is true of *Jane Eyre* could equally be said of Charlotte's sureading books. The earlier pages of *Shirley*, those which best answer to her own account of the novel as 'cool, real and solid, ... as romantic as Monday morning', convey an admirably detached and understanding picture of the social stresses undergone, at a critical moment of transition, by the textile districts of Yorkshire. Thorough study and intelligent reflection have gone to their making. The differences of class and education, the various conflicts of interests, are picked out by a writer capable, at her best, of rejecting the tendency to simplify, to identify herself in exclusive sympathy with one or other of the contending factions.

More remarkable still, as combining acute observation with greater intensity of feeling, is the account offered in *Villette* of life in Brussels. Here, and more especially in her portrayal of M. and Mme Beck, it is obvious that Charlotte's own emotions, her feelings towards M. Heger and his wife, are deeply engaged; but, for all her one-sided reading of Mme Beck's character, the obvious impulse to belittle a person of whom she was, in real life, so gratuitously jealous, the conscience of a genuine artist imposes a salutary detachment.

Her picture of the little Bonaparte in a mouse-colored silk gown', of 'a figure rather short and stout, yet still graceful in its own peculiar way', has a sense of solidity and truth which imposes itself as a product of true and intelligent observation. Unfortunately, this self-reliant integrity represents only one side of Charlotte's character.

With the entry of the intimate passion which, in all her work, represents at once a source of inspiration and an ever-present pitfall, a less admirable note, akin to moral melodrama, modifies her judgement of character and her presentation of events. In proportion as her persistent craving for emotional fulfilment is involved, the quality of her vision descends, becoming a prey to grow tissue unreality.

With the appearance of Mr. Rochester and the exploitation of the romantic machinery of his concealed mad wife, the interest of Jane Eyre plunges abysmally into the embarrassing and the absurd. The blind Rochester is presented as a 'sightless Samson, a 'caged Cagle whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished', and Jane, when she ventures at an earlier stage to meet her master's and lover's eye", receives a smile such as a sultan might, in a heavenly and fond moment, bestow on a break one's back his gold and gems had enriched'.

Similarly, the idealization of M. Beck in *Villette* rises to heights of unreality at the decisive moments, and Caroline, in *Shirley*, tells Moore that she has been allowed a glimpse of her companion's 'heart's core', and that it was: Like a shrine, for it was holy: like snow, for it was pure; like flame, for it was warm, like death, for it was strong, Whenever, for intimate reasons, Charlotte's emotions become too directly involved in her creations, the elements of emotional compensation, sour and rather self-righteous in their moralizing attitude towards persons of whom she disapproves, ecstatic to the point of self-indulgence where the objects of her devotion are involved, make their disturbing presence felt to diminish the effect of a able talent.

It is easy to feel at times, in reading Charlotte Brontë, that contact with the external world served only to disperse a gift, the true strength of which lay rather in concentrated vision. In Emily (1818-48), whose excursions into that world were brief and followed invariably by a return to the true sources of her inspiration, that vision was preserved in essential purity. The poems she wrote afford a glimpse into the fiercely maintained integrity of her emotions.

This is not to say that they are lacking in conventional romantic attributes. By-products in great part of the dream world in which the sisters lived, creating in close collaboration the interminable Gondal romances of their unusually protracted adolescence, they came to life whenever Emily's own peculiarly spiritual passion illuminates what would otherwise be commonplace: Jolly 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.

The pleased comforts of the home, related absolute confidence with the lengthy iciness months at Haworth, are visible right here because the history for an expression of strength, of assured adherence to what are felt already to be reasserts of intimate fortitude. The lamp, 'little' aleven though it is, burns straight', its rays are robust and clear'; and, this being so, withinside the final levels of the poem attention is rewarded through proper non secular vision: What I love shall come like a visitant of air, Safe in mystery energy from lurking human snare, what loves me, no phrase of mine shall betray, though for religion unstained my existence should forfeit pay.

Burn, then, little lamp: glimmer immediately and clear - Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air: He for whom I wait, as a consequence ever involves me: Strange Power! I agree with thy might; agree with thou, my constancy. (The Visionary) In verses including these, internal seclusion of spirit, now no longer dissipated through touch with the outer world, will become a real supply of strength.

Traces of an inferior rhetoric survive, no doubt, in 'lurking human snare and even in the 'faith unstained' opposed to it, but the assertion of that faith has a personal force which transcends its literary origin. The visitant from the world of spirit manifests itself intimately in secret power', and rouses a response in equally intimate dedication.

That dedication, like the lamp on the hearth which serves as a focal point for affection and fellowship, burns 'straight and clear', and it felt power, or 'might', evokes in answer a trustful constancy. Here, beneath the

superficial attributes of romantic sentiment, we are in touch with the true sources of strength that determine the Brontë vision.

Only in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) does this strength find complete and consistent expression. To say this is non to deny that there are paragraphs in which the presence of incidental faults makes itself felt in the narration, moments in which the creative impulse, instead of burning clearly, seems to shoulder or die down.

A simple account of the story of the orphan Heathcliff, his love for Catherine Earnshaw, and the revenge which he obtains through his marriage with Isabella Linton upon those who have deprived him of his proper satisfactions in life, would go far to justify a reading of the novel as simply one more example of a familiar romantic type; an example perhaps more coherent in design and execution than most of its kind, but still a mixture of brutal melodrama and exaggerated sentiment.

To trace a literary creation to its formal origins, however, is not necessarily to define its true character. Given the circumstances of Emily Brontë's life, it was natural that the commonplaces of romantic inspiration should play a great part in her novel; but a clear examination of the writing, the treatment of the subjects, proves conclusively that its true significance lies in the transformation of this romanticism through the operation of an intensely personal imaginative power.

No nineteenth-century novel, indeed, is less derivative in its essential content, or answers more fully to an intimate vision. In its fundamental as distinct from its accidental qualities, *Wuthering Heights* is an exploration of human passion at different levels and of the effect exercised by the interplay of these levels upon human life in its individual and social aspects alike.

Creative or unfavorable of their effects, making for lifestyles or death, primary human feelings are supplied in a kingdom of purity and concentration; no different novel of the Victorian length has penetrated to date into the depths of passion, or observed with such unrelenting common sense to their last effects the depth of its operations.

The very novelty of the enterprise accounts for the remoteness of the book, at its most successful moments, from the greater part of the normal devices of the novelist. The novel, as Emily Brontë's great contemporaries conceived it, dealt primarily with the analysis of characters in their mutual relationships and in their attitude to external events, but the beings who dominate *Wuthering Heights* draw their life from sources at once simpler and deeper, more obscure and less differentiated, than those with which the novel is traditionally concerned.

Purged of all accidental qualities, indivisible in essence and too self-consistent to undergo change, their function is that of elements which can only, in their relations with the similar entities around them, destroy or suffer destruction.

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