

**The Power of Memory in the Creation of *Wuthering Heights* by
Emily Brontë: when Transplanted Biographical Details Become Fictionalized**

LAYADI (née MOUFFAK) Khadidja

M.C.A. Department of English

Faculty of Foreign Languages

University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria

Abstract

The role of memory in the imagination and the creation of the art of writing is paramount. The present paper is an attempt to argue that although novels are fictional works, they mirror a great deal of subjectivity; unconsciously, writers implicitly put ahead of their events. Hence, they directly extract from their life story. Moreover, they have been conditioned by their previous works as well as others' books. In this paper, the researcher will select some passages from *Wuthering Heights* (1847) expressing the recollections of the past, which move Emily Brontë (1818-1848) to write her unique novel, where her imagination with its expansive power can "deploy boundless perspectives." The entire plot is set within a story which reflects the unfair decisions that destroy the beautiful meaning of people's life. Besides, some vivid autobiographical elements have been transplanted from her family and her homeland to permeate the atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights*; they also accounted for the stigmas left in her mind and echoed in *Wuthering Heights*. Therefore, the researcher focused on these crucial details, added to the atmosphere of Emily's whole life, which are probably the most critical significance of this analysis. In this respect, the results of this study will perhaps give birth to further researches about the influence of one's memory on their works.

Keywords: background influence, Emily Brontë, imagination vs. reality, memory, *Wuthering Heights*, Yorkshire Moors

Cite as: Mouffak, K. L. (2020). The Power of Memory in the Creation of *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë: when Transplanted Biographical Details Become Fictionalized. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies* 4 (2) 157-166.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol4no2.12>

Introduction

From a logical point of view and following E. Kant (1933, p.77), what characterize these factors 'before, now, after' as notions of time is precisely because they are never given to the consciousness simultaneously, like things of the physical intuition. Thus, the units expressing space such as 'here, there' seem to combine of themselves as a whole, whereas, for factors expressing time, they only exclude one another. So, the evidence of the existence of one specification signifies the non-existence of the other and vice-versa automatically.

The influence of the author's background is so powerful that she succeeded in creating an immense confusion between 'Past' and 'Present'. This fact is also valid for the confusing space, when the reader is unable to detach between 'there' (the fictional space) and 'here' (the real place in Haworth). The restricted landscape in *Wuthering Heights* is just around the heroine's house, where the intrigue is taking place. It results from the social differences which trap the heroes in an atmosphere always at the limits of the mysterious and unnatural; from here, we follow the tragic destiny of a family torn by an impossible love and the violence of the hidden sufferings.

An idea on the novel

This novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is not an autobiography. It is the overthrowing story of Heathcliff's life, an erring boy found in the streets of Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw of *Wuthering Heights* (Haworth, Yorkshire). After the death of the father, during his childhood, he had been frustrated, intimidated, and brutalized by Hindley, Mr. Earnshaw's son. Hence, the latter looked at him as a usurper of his own father's affection and privileges. From here, the ground becomes favorable to an act of posterior revenge. Nelly Dean, the family governess, has felt the presage when she cries out with wisdom by these words: "for shame, Heathcliff! It's for God to punish wicked people; we should learn to forgive" (Brontë, 2012, p. 52).

In *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, the supernatural is emerging from everywhere. Mr. Lockwood goes back to *Wuthering Heights* and arrives there just before a snowstorm; this reminds us of *King Lear*'s storm in the Heath. Besides, in his dream, Lockwood had been so cruel to a little girl. According to Whitley (2000), this fact presents "powerfully the excess of his fear" and the vivid detail "anchors the unreality in reality and reminds the reader, as "does Macbeth; 'supernatural' need not mean 'unnatural,' but rather a nature rendered to a higher and more mysterious degree." (As cited in Brontë, 2000, p. xiii). The researcher may wonder if Man is a prisoner of his past. We are going to see how this past inevitably follows him in his future life. Furthermore, one has to consider the origin and the nature of the impact of social context on writing. The author would like to highlight the relationship between the influence of the places where the writer has lived and those stagnating in her brain and embellished by her imagination. Every detail has been nourished by Emily Brontë's memory and her recollections of the past. In this respect, Gérin (1979) states: "No book was more rooted in its native soil, more conditioned by the local background of its author, than *Wuthering Heights*." (p.225)

Influence of her *Gondal Poems*

Undoubtedly, the children were very interested in the stories told by Daddy, since they rise again at the opportune moment. They resonate in her writing in all the splendor of their original space thanks to the activated memory. The latter works eternally to perpetuate the events, their time, and their space. Thus, Emily Brontë has been able to describe at the same time her beloved desert moors and this fictional world, which sleep in her unconsciousness, where the events manifest themselves according to their circumstances. Besides, Emily Brontë carried out long walks on the moor of heath and fern. Gérin (1979) asserts that “it was as Emily and Anne roamed the moors as growing girls, learning more each day about the natural life about them, that the feeling for *Gondal* was born.” (p.25) Gérin herself asserts that some passages in *Wuthering Heights* are paraphrases of the novelist’s poems. More precisely, *No Coward Soul is Mine*, with its “obvious affinities with *Wuthering Heights*, suggests that the vision which dictated the one must equally have inspired the other. They seem, on the metaphysical plane, at least, the products not only of one mind but of one time.” (p.189). At this point, the researcher becomes aware of the importance of time. Besides, it can serve as a reminder of how crucial and determinant the notion of time in fiction is!

On the other side, in her mind, she did not hesitate to create with her sister Anne this imaginary kingdom which is only the famous Gondal country directed by a woman, Augusta Geraldine Almeda. We may perhaps refer to Gérin’s interpretation:

Emily gave the significant role in her Gondal Saga to a woman; this may well have been due, in the first place, to the idea of Princess Victoria, born on 24 May 1819, who was the first symbol of feminine power she came across (Gérin, 1979, p.25).

All the members of the family as well as the nurses, in addition to Byron, Milton and Shakespeare these authors previously read in childhood, and adolescence, have contributed to conceiving if not to inventing this imaginary space and time, which has made the particularity of Brontë. In her poems, she deals with themes that are very often similar to the strange passion which links Heathcliff to Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*.

Most of the themes existing in *Gondal Poems* come incessantly back, then naturally infiltrate in *Wuthering Heights* added to the contamination of the mentioned above writers’ episodes. Moore’s *Life of Byron* imprint has been for Emily less immediate but more lasting. Therefore, Gérin (1979) does not hesitate to highlight the Byronic impact:

The influence of Byron on the young Brontës was an instant contagion that spread through everything they did and wrote during their formative years. It affected Charlotte and Branwell morally and mentally to such extent that they lost contact with realities, and suffered acutely from the restrictions of their life. (p.44)

With the help of lots of flashbacks and returns in time, travels in the past brilliantly executed, Emily Brontë develops a literary space of revenge, love, hatred, and passion to the point that

Catherine and her daughter Cathy have become among the most famous figures in British Literature. And the intrigue goes on through wide extensiveness of cruelty and bitterness which, however, ends with the ultimate defeat of Heathcliff's destructive efforts and the promise of the union of the two dwellings, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Thrushcross Grange*, which were a long while tormented.

The Influence of her own life

Silently, the brain begins to register everything since the very early childhood to express one's inner feelings at adulthood, when the same circumstances come back, or those who draw nearer appear. The best example will be perhaps that of Emily, who heard her father's lamentations and her brother's and sisters' cries, but she did not understand great matter what was happening. Yet, these details emerged from the abyss of her soul, when she has been confronted with the writing of her poems and her novel. In this case, she was influenced and stigmatized by well precise events thanks to unfailing memory each time that the imaginary space is owing to the real one.

Undoubtedly, these laments for the loss of Maria and Elizabeth, the two eldest sisters who died in a private boarding-school at Cowan Bridge, registered in the little head of the five years old girl, find their loud echoes in *Wuthering Heights*. Mr. Lockwood saw the girl snatched to the window of the mysterious room where he was sleeping; he even heard her shouting and begging him to let her enter, and the choice of language is not fortuitous. Because in reality, Branwell, Brontë's brother, arrived one day out of breath and screaming to have heard Maria's voice, his already dead sister. Besides, Mr. Lockwood had a similar vision: the strange Catherine's sudden appearance at the window. The girl complained and said, having been wandering for twenty years; she was asking if just they let her step in the paternal house. Moreover, in *Wuthering Heights*, once more, the shepherd affirmed he saw Heathcliff and Catherine walking on the Moors. And the superstition went on.

Emily Brontë uses this same room where Mr. Lockwood lived the painful nightmare, to permit by the same circumstance to Heathcliff to express his inner feelings with the help of a monologue deserving a scene from Racine's or Corneille's piece of drama. Here, the writer has succeeded in representing this so precious space, which everyone keeps genuinely in his subconscious. The Past, that lost paradise which even poets from the middle ages evoke and call up from memory. Standing in the heart of the flaming desert, these poets cry on what remains after they have left the spots, i.e., the ruins, those famous 'Al Atlal'. They were immortalized forever in certain minds thanks to Umru Al Qais' a poet from the ante Islamic period. Besides, the researcher has also in mind Ibrahim Nagui's marvelous mournful poem, '*Al-Atlal*', and its resonant repercussion on Um-Keltum's song full of pathos.

The Brontë's imagination had been solicited by her artful work to reproduce forever those fictive spaces which find their echoes again in the novel *Wuthering Heights*. As far as *Gondal* is concerned and although Emily had never visited Scotland, she has succeeded in making it an overthrowing transplantation of the space. The whole motion of the novel takes place around the two neighboring houses located in Yorkshire in England; yet, the influence of Papa and Tabby,

the housekeeper, is going to open other horizons to Emily. When the resemblance with the reality is striking, this writer is allowed to penetrate quietly in these fictive places.

One may wonder why it is that the same place can represent two different spaces according to time. Space has always been seen subjectively. The same dwelling, Wuthering Heights was an area symbolizing tranquillity, happiness and peace. Just after Mr. Earnshaw's disappearance, it becomes a real hell where the inhabitants find themselves in atrocious conditions. Unfortunately, they have no other choice apart from living closer to one another, and to cohabit together. Hence, the adverse situation dominates the atmosphere and engulfs all the characters in its frightful mesh.

The Pathetic fallacy in Brontë's writing.

Youngquist (1989) put it so elegantly in this passage:

Specific post-structural and Marxist methods of interpretation have so diminished the role of the artist in the act of creation. The strange notion has occurred to some that there is no such thing as an author, that language speaks without a mouthpiece, or that when poets compose, history does all the work while it is unquestionably true that history shapes an author's aims and ought, therefore, to be studied; the extent to which history determines a literary activity is a question that requires the most considerable critical tact. We must not discount, for reasons of fashion or convenience, the role that the individual plays in producing a work of art. (p. iiix)

In fact, by restoring the Brontës to the Brontës' studies, we restore the individual to the act of creation, but with the awareness that the biography of the mind cannot be reduced to the historical circumstances. To restore Emily Brontë to Emily Brontë's studies is to consider the character of the writer's own mental life inevitably. But deviating from the human norms demands more attention, since the norm acquires meaning primarily compromised. Put another way, "you never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough", as said in Blake's poems." (SparksNotesEditors.2002). Consequently, one may wonder if it is possible to travel both divergences when Reason and Heart are constantly in conflict.

Like Byron, the Brontës exploited the fascination of the forbidden and the appeal of the terrifying 'satanic hero.' In our opinion, when mentioning forbidden, has Catherine to consider Heathcliff as an adopted brother or as a passionate lover? Here, Emily Brontë was sensitive to the ambivalence of the human nature as well as the human experience. She felt her characters' pleasure and pain at their highest intensity. Besides, she perfectly managed to put on the surface the destructiveness of love and the "erotic quality of the longing for death." These phenomena were crudely explored by 18th Century writers of terror tales and gothic fiction and their picturesque backgrounds of England. Coote (1986) notes that Heathcliff "is both worldly and profoundly romantic." Besides, "the pathos of the orphan", added to "an air of mystery deepens the suspicion that he is connected to the devil." (p.44)

At the same time, he possesses benevolence, humanity, and grandeur of passion - whatever his sins - which echoes Shakespeare. Emily Brontë demonstrates her inner psychological grasp

and her deeply rooted knowledge of the internal side of man thanks to her elevated metaphors. She also uses a lot of terrifying images, and troubling scenes which, as we know, resemble only significant moments in Shakespeare's drama, not to mention Racine's Phaedra or even Sophocles' Antigone.

To put the above quotation in simpler words, our analysis- of the most influential images that emerge from that powerful language-is necessary. The two epithets 'powerful' and 'amoral' have been attributed to both Heathcliff and the 'forces of nature.' Moreover, 'powerful' may suggest that the other even main characters can only be weak and 'amoral.' This paradox conducts us to the extremeness of mastering and managing one's power and will. No moral or even religion can stop this animal-like instinct of destruction.

In addition to this overthrowing comparison, one may wonder which 'nature' does Emily Brontë mention, storm or defeat? And which forces? Here lies all the sweetness of the secret of the particularities of each region, with its so-called particular climate, landscape, and fame, thus specific themes, and choice of words. Heathcliff is both 'worldly' and 'romantic.' The first qualifier may be linked to materialism as opposed to spiritualism, whereas 'romantic' supposes evasion, imagination, and freedom of mind. It may also have the connotation of the supremacy of feelings. The latter are sometimes able to solve problems and to answer questions if one refers to transcendentalism. This psychological situation is superbly illustrated by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) by "Le Coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point" (as cited in Lagarde & Michard, 1961, p.169), i.e., The heart has its rights, that the reason ignores. In this Pascal's philosophical aphorism from *Les Pensées* (1670), the purposes of the Reason are utterly different from the goals of Heart.

Furthermore, the Brontës being themselves natives of the moors had 'their lot been cast in a town,' doubtless, their writings, if they had written at all, 'would have possessed another character.' Garrod (as cited in Brontë, 1972: viii) manages to summarize everything in this short passage:

The wild moors of the North of England, the language, the manners, the very dwellings and the household customs of the scattered inhabitants of those districts must be to such readers in a considerable measure unintelligible, and-where intelligible-repulsive-men and women who, perhaps naturally very calm, and with feelings moderate in degree, will hardly know what to make of the rough, sharp utterance.

The Universal tragedy

Trying to be able to choose the 'right road' to follow in our fixed itinerary is quite a utopia, since man is at the same time free and imprisoned when confronted with many directions in his ephemeral journey. Robert Frost's poem (1991), "The road not taken," reflects precisely this painful dilemma where one finds himself unable to travel both roads, if not more. Hence, how disturbing his 'and sorry I could not travel both' is! The same feeling with a melancholy mood of a life that one had not lived is felt when Catherine Earnshaw (in *Wuthering Heights*) finds it hard

to make her final choice upon which her whole life will depend. Who has she to marry, Heathcliff? And it would 'degrade' her; she is torn between her love for him and her desire to become a gentlewoman if she decides to marry Edgar Linton.

Moreover, when she regrets being an adult, she probably would like to go back the whole path already chosen; thus, she laments 'I wish I were a girl again, half-savage and hardy, and free'... This could symbolize a life that one has not enjoyed to the full, things not experienced, or perhaps just a 'word' that has not been 'said.' The whole tragedy lies in the fact that Catherine and Heathcliff went from 'Innocence to Experience,' if I may borrow William Blake's vision, and this is the lot of any other human being. They lose that world of paradise to enter the thorny one. Likely, the notion of Adam and Eve thrown from heaven to the earth is omnipresent, and that eternal regret for childhood takes on the obsessive nostalgia.

One may try perhaps to analyze the link between the Brontës as readers, and these authors as writers. Bunyan, Shakespeare, Milton, Schiller, Scott and Byron have influenced them. Some critics said that Byron might write some parts of *Wuthering Heights* or perhaps they are written about him. On these matters, we may cite Holker (1986,) who emphasized that

the theme of the human soul struggling to find righteousness and eventual peace is an echo of Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* in which everyman makes his way through the world and all its troubles, encountering temptation on the way, yet managing to stick to the winding and thorny path of goodness. (p.94)

When using this vivid image, Holker (1986) wants to tell us about the real human condition. She also adds a comparison with King Lear, "batling against the storm, a storm symbolizing the cruelty of man." (p.95) At this point, the researcher is not so satisfied with the phrase 'cruelty of man.' She prefers to say the frailty and vulnerability of Man.

On the other hand, throughout Emily Brontë's novel a combination of light and darkness, storm and tranquillity pervades the atmosphere. The latter is sometimes expressed with an exceptional silence such as in the following passage in chapter 11; the narrator, Nelly Dean passed the old gate, on a journey to Gimmerton (a hamlet in the Yorkshire). It was "a bright frosty afternoon; the ground bare, and the road hard and dry." Suddenly she remembers when she was a little girl:

I came to a stone where the highway branches off on to the moor at your left hand; a rough sand pillar, with the letters W.H. cut on its north side, on the east, G., and on the South-west, T.G. It serves as guide-post to the Grange, the Heights and village. The sun shone yellow on its grey head, reminding me of summer; and I cannot say why, but all at once, a gush of a child's sensations flowed into my heart. Hindley and I held it a favorite spot twenty years before. I gazed long at the weather-worn block and, stooping down, perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles, which we were fond of storing there with more perishable things; and, as fresh as reality, it appeared that I

beheld my early playmate seated on the withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate. 'Poor Hindley!' I exclaimed involuntarily. (Brontë, 1983, p.94)

Although Hindley's son, Hareton, is walking hand in hand with Nelly, he is far away from the events taking place in her mind. This kind of silence, where no utterance is heard, is capable of speaking volumes of the passing of time. Hence, the shells and pebbles are still there, and they function as a 'homely reminder of lost childhood' when one cannot forget the crucial fact that Hindley was Nelly's playmate twenty years ago. She even had a vision: "the child lifted its face and stared straight into mine! It vanished in a twinkling." (Brontë, 1983, p.94)

Even the characters' memory becomes active over time. In this sense, Nelly's consciousness is put in motion to assert this sweet, painful impact of childhood. The Past is ironically whispering to Brontë as well as her characters that it will never fade away. Here the researcher is wondering about which is the winner? Is it the imagination and its expansive freedom or the reality with its restricted limits? Such questions, the researcher thinks, are beyond any human intelligence.

Finally, the heroine in *Wuthering Heights* goes as far as to deny the existence of the space in which she is living. She confesses to Nelly Dean: "If everything perished, and only Heathcliff remains I will continue to be; however, if everything remains and he will be demolished, the universe will become extremely strange and unknown, and I will no more be part of it." (Brontë, 1983, p.198) Besides, space is compared by Catherine to an inescapable prison which torments her, to the point that she dare to cry out in that way: "the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I am tired of being enclosed here. I am wearying to escape into that glorious world and to be always there." (Brontë, 1972, p.198). At the limit of despair, she was tired to be enclosed and aspires a better world; a glorious world she is the only one to see, neither through the tears nor through the wall of a broken heart but really in her. Here we have the impression that she wishes a kind of fusion of the whole Nature perhaps more potent than the Deism where probably, instead of finding freedom, she will be condemned to remorse, indeed, to roaming in the infinity and the damnation which engulfs her forever.

Conclusion

The Brontës' childhood was a rough one, especially when the disease was prevalent. Besides, Emily Brontë, the writer, has grown up in an oral tradition of the ballades sung by Tabby; this governess' influence is crucial, and the brain is here to make it rise again at the most appropriate moment. For Brontë, the representation of places generates a flagrant similitude between fiction and reality; this accounts for the fact that when the researcher is visiting Haworth, this so overthrowing place, a total confusion arises in her brain. And she confirms that *Wuthering Heights* and *Gondal Poems* are so profoundly rooted in Haworth. The influence of the author's background is so powerful that she succeeded in creating an immense confusion between 'Past and Present.'

Some writers often affirmed that the West Yorkshire wild moors are linked to ‘Scott’s Highlands, Cooper’s forests or Melville’s sea.’ Indeed, Haworth wild moors were vital for Emily Brontë, not only because they exist in the Yorkshire, but also especially she has been able to reproduce them in her writing with those alarming hills, weltering in dreadful loneliness. Consequently, this paper concludes that the author’s background goes hand in hand with her book and resonates loudly throughout it. This result is probably the next issue that one may venture to analyze in this unique novel.

About the author:

Khadidja Layadi - Mouffak, associate professor at the University of Oran 2, received her Doctorate (Es-Sciences) in Sociolinguistics. She has been teaching Literatures, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Language and Literature, Didactics, Discourse Analysis, to Licence, Master, and Doctorate students. She is a member of LOAPL Labo. Her research interests are related to the above fields. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8785-302X>

References

- Brontë, E. (1972). *Wuthering Heights*. Oxford University Press.
- Brontë, E. (1975). *Wuthering Heights*. (ed. David Daiches). Penguin Books. The Chaucer Press. G.B.
- Brontë, E. (1983). *Wuthering Heights and Poems*. (ed. Philip Henderson). London Everyman’s Library.
- Brontë, E. (2000). *Wuthering Heights*. Wordsworth Classics,
- Brontë, E. (2012). *Wuthering Heights*. Wordsworth Classics. Hertfordshire. G.B.
- Brontë, E. (2015). *Wuthering Heights*, Bantam Books, New York.
- Coote, S. (1986). *Emily Brontë Wuthering Heights*. Penguin Passnotes. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth Middlesex England
- Frost, R. & Untermeyer, L. (1991). *The Road Not Taken: a Selection of Robert Frost’s Poems*. New York: H. Holt & company.
- Gérin, W. (1979). *Emily Brontë , A Biography*. Oxford University Press.
- Holker, A. (1986). *Charlotte Brontë Jane Eyre*. Penguin Passnotes. The Chaucer Press. G.B.
- Kant, E. (1933). *Critique of Pure Reason, ‘Transcendental Aesthetic.’* Section II, ‘Time’. p.77 para.6, section C. London: Macmillan.
- Lagarde, A. & Michard, L. (1961). *XVIIe Siècle. Collection Littéraire*. Presse de L’Imprimerie Chaix. Bordas: Paris.
- SparkNotes Editors. (2002). SparkNotes on Songs of Innocence and Experience. Retrieved February 8, 2020. from <http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/blake/>
- Stoneman, P. (2002). *The Brontë Myth*. Cambridge University Press.
- Whitley, J. (2000). In *Wuthering Heights* (2000). Wordsworth Edition. G.B. Clays Ltd.
- Youngquist, P. (1989). *Madness and Blake’s Myth*. The Pennsylvania State University Press. University Park, PA.

www.coursehero.com/File/1p/References-Frost-R-Unthermeyer-L-Frost-R-1991-The-road-not-taken-A-selection-of/
www.sparknotes.com/poetry/blake/

Appendix A

Here is Emily Brontë's poem "No Coward soul is mine," written on 2nd January 1846

NO COWARD soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere!
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And Faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty ever-present Deity!
Life, that in me hast rest,
As I, Undying Life, have power in thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To weaken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and moon were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And thou wert left alone,
Every Existence would exist in thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.
(Brontë, 1983, p.360-61)