

SOME ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN EMILY BRONTE'S VERSE

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Two of the main characteristics of the Romantic Movement were a growth of interest in Nature and an awakened sensibility and imagination. Nature was the source of inspiration for the poet : he saw Nature and reality as they were and he tried to make his poetry «the image of man and nature». (1) With his developed sensitive imagination, however, he saw an unseen world beyond this reality and experienced a vision that to him expressed some eternal truth.

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour (2).

«A poem», said Shelley, «is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth». (3) As Wordsworth declared in *Tintern Abbey*, his recollections of the «beauteous forms» of Nature led him often, while in lonely rooms amid the din of towns and cities, into a «serene and blessed mood»,

Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things. (4)

(1) William Wordsworth, «Poetry and Poetic Diction», being the Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, in *English Critical Essays : XIX Century* (London : Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 16.

(2) William Blake, «Auguries of Innocence».

(3) P.B. Shelley, «A Defence of Poetry» (1821), in *English Critical Essays : XIX Century*, p. 128.

(4) William Wordsworth, «Tintern Abbey».

Coleridge, too, was aware of his search for some symbolic significance beyond the reality of concrete objects.

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have an obscure feeling, as if that phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner nature. — It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol : (5)

Nature, imagination and that hidden truth or vision were then three of the dominant terms of the Romantic Movement, but these naturally stemmed from the personal and subjective qualities of the poet himself. Thus, each Romantic poet approached nature differently, each projected his imagination in his own way, and each found the symbols with which he could express his own vision.

It is from these three aspects of Romanticism that we shall deal with Emily Brontë's verse : we shall first see the part played by nature in her poems, then the importance of the imagination to her inner life and, finally, the visions themselves.

Living as she did on the Yorkshire moors, in a locality often isolated owing to the climate and difficulties of transport, Emily Brontë developed a love for the countryside which was constantly a part of her life. «My sister Emily loved the moors», wrote Charlotte to Mrs. Gaskell, (6) and to her friend James Taylor,

..... there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight, and when I look round, she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon. In the hill-country silence, their poetry comes by lines and stanzas into my mind : once I loved it ; now I dare not read it, and am driven often to wish I could

(5) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, «Statesman's Manual», April 14, 1805, quoted in F.W. Bateson, *A Guide to English Literature* (London : Longmans, 1966), p. 145.

(6) Elizabeth C. Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London : Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 109.

taste one draft of oblivion, and forget much that, while mind remains, I shall never forget. (7)

Even in her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, one cannot help but feel the presence of nature and the moors, for Emily intricately wove the external world into the world of action and emotion. The night when Heathcliff was brought as a child to «Wuthering Heights» or the one on which Mr. Earnshaw died, the storm on the evening when Heathcliff disappeared for some years, the day when Catherine died, the quarrel between young Catherine and Linton, the rain that drove in through the window on the face and throat of Heathcliff as he lay dead in bed — these are only a few of the innumerable scenes in which nature plays a part as important as the characters. On that last warm autumn day of the novel, the moths fluttering among the heath and the hare-bells and the soft wind breathing through the grass are as much a part of the graves of Edgar, Catherine and Heathcliff as the sleepers in the quiet earth.

Emily Brontë has been credited with about 192 poems and, of these, thirty-one have no references to nature. Of these last, nine are fragments of two to eight lines, thus leaving only twenty-two that do not deal with nature. Of the rest of her poems — over 160 — only a very few are entirely devoted to descriptions of nature and many of these are fragmentary and probably lines of verse jotted down for later use.

In «How still, how happy ! Those are words», she speaks of her love for nature and how, at one time, she

..... loved the plashing of the surge,
The changing heaven, the breezy weather,
More than smooth seas and cloudless skies
And solemn, soothing, softened airs
That in the forest woke no sighs
And from the green spray shook no tears.

But now she loves the silence more and invites us to sit on this sunny stone — «Tis wintry light o'er flowerless moors» — and think of Spring's budding wreaths when

(7) Charlotta Brontë, Letter to James Taylor, May 22, 1850, quoted in Ruth. H. Blackburn, *The Brontë Sisters* (Boston ; D.C. Heath & Co., 1964), p. 68.

The violet's eye might shyly flash
And young leaves shoot among the fern.
This is, however, but a thought, for the snow will clothe those hills
for many a night

And storms shall add a drearier blight
And winds shall wage a wilder war,

Before the lark may herald in
Fresh foliage twined with blossoms fair
And summer days again begin
Their glory-haloed crown to wear.

Yet my heart loves December's smile
As much as July's golden beam ;
Then let us sit and watch the while
The blue ice curdling on the stream.⁽⁸⁾

More often, however, nature was used in her verse as an echo to her mood, and her moods were often sad and melancholy. Eleven days after writing the last poem, she declared that the blue-bell was the sweetest flower and that she knew the spell that the violet and the purple heath could cast on her, but now the trees were bare and the sun cold and the «distant hills and valleys seem / In frozen mist arrayed». She concluded in a different mood from the previous poem :

How do I yearn, how do I pine
For the time of flowers to come ... ⁽⁹⁾

On another evening, her sorrowful feelings gathered fast upon her «Like vultures round their prey». She was sadly wishing that she could buy oblivion for her woes and that by the death of her dearest treasures her deadliest pains would die. On such an evening as this, the wind outside was

..... sighing
With Autumn's saddest sound :
Withered leaves as thick are lying
As spring-flowers on the ground. ⁽¹⁰⁾

(8) *The Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*, edited from the manuscripts by C.W. Hatfield (New York : Columbia University Press, 1952), No. 93, pp. 96—97, dated Dec. 7, 1838.

(9) *Ibid.*, No. 94, pp. 97—99, dated Dec. 18, 1838.

(10) *Ibid.*, No. 120, pp. 129—130.

Another poem that reflected her mood of sadness was written on another gloomy evening :

I have sat lonely all the day
Watching the drizzly mist descend
And first conceal the hills in grey
And then along the valleys wend.
And I have sat and watched the trees
And the sad flowers — how drear they blow :
Those flowers were formed to feel the breeze
Wave their light leaves in summer's glow.
Yet their lives passed in gloomy woe
And hopeless comes its dark decline,
And I lament, because I know
That cold departure pictures mine. (11)

Nature's harmony with her mood is seen in poem after poem. «Winds sigh», she says, «as you are sighing ; / And Winter pours its grief in snow / Where Autumn's leaves are lying». (12)
In another poem, she tells us not to mourn him

..... whose doom
Heaven itself is mourning.
Look how in sable gloom
The clouds are earthward sweeping,
And earth receives them home,
Even darker clouds returning. (13)

Even in her Gondal poems, where she is dealing with a make-belief world and heroic characters, she still loves to «form my mood to nature's mood». (14) The morning of a battle is stormy, (15) or the story of Douglas's ride is told while the night-wind wails and the wild gusts «Blend with a song of troubled times» (16). On the night of a funeral, a storm blows so loudly around the Hall that «Pillar and roof and granite wall / Rock like a cradle in its roar» and the giant elm-tree crashes to the ground. (17) On the night when Fernando de Samara is dying, he says that «Cold blows on my breast the northwind's

(11) *Ibid.*, No. 145, p. 162.

(12) *Ibid.*, No. 122, pp. 131—32.

(13) *Ibid.*, No. 111, pp. 120—21.

(14) *Ibid.*, No. 154, pp. 175—79.

(15) *Ibid.*, No. 40, pp. 58—59.

(16) *Ibid.*, No. 75, pp. 77—80.

(17) *Ibid.*, No. 52, pp. 65—66.

bitter sigh» and that the desert moor is dark and there is tempest in the air.

How gloomy grows the night : 'Tis Gondal's wind that blows ;
I shall not tread again the deep glens where it rose (18)

The first two opening verses of another Gondal poem cannot be equalled for their sense of grimness and sombre melancholy.

Heavy hangs the raindrop
From the burdened spray ;
Heavy broods the damp mist
On uplands far away ;
Heavy looms the dull sky,
Heavy rolls the sea —
And heavy beats the young heart
Beneath that lonely tree. (19)

Moods of melancholy were typical of many Romantic poets : «..... when the melancholy fit shall fall / Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud», said Keats, (20) and, in this respect, Emily Brontë was a Romantic. Often, when there were days of extreme beauty in summer, she found that her mood was in contrast with the joy and beauty of nature. Again, like Keats, she felt that «in the very temple of Delight / Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.» (21)

May flowers are opening
And leaves unfolding free ;
There are bees in every blossom
And birds on every tree.
The sun is gladly shining,
The stream sings merrily,
And I only am pining
And all is dark to me.
O cold, cold is my heart :
It will not, cannot rise ;
It feels no sympathy
With those refulgent skies.
Dead, dead is my joy,
I long to be at rest ;

(18) *Ibid.*, No. 85, pp. 85—87.

(19) *Ibid.*, No. 186, pp. 228—31.

(20) Keats, «Ode to Melancholy».

(21) *Ibid.*

I wish the damp earth covered
This desolate breast. (22)

In her Gondal poems too, nature is often in dramatic contrast with the scene. The fall of Zalona, for example, took place on a morn « All bright and blue, in glorious light » (23); and in one of her fragments, the full sweep of sky and mountains and moors are in contrast to the dark prison :

I paused on the threshold, I turned to the sky ;
I looked on the heaven and the dark mountains round ;
The full moon sailed bright through that Ocean on high,
And the wind murmured past with a wild eerie sound ;

And I entered the walls of my dark prison-house ;
Mysterious it rose from the billowy moor.

In the last poem of her collection, dated a few months before her death, Emily contrasts the inhumanity of man with nature and describes how «It was the autumn of the year / When the grain grows yellow in the ear» and how the August sun blazed as bright as June. No one, however, reaped the corn or bound the sheaves for

Our corn was garnered months before,
Threshed out and kneaded-up with gore ;
Ground when the ears were milky sweet
With furious toil of hoofs and feet (25)

Like Keats, however, it was death that was often the reason for her sadness : «She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die ;... (26) As she contemplated the trees and the flowers in one of the poems quoted above and saw the «bees in every blossom / And birds on every tree», she thinks of their inevitable death and their cold departure pictured hers.

Alas : as lightning withers
The young and aged tree,
Both they and I shall fall beneath
The fate we cannot flee. (27)

(22) Emily Brontë, *Poems*, No. 101, pp. 107—108.

(23) *Ibid.*, No. 156, pp. 181—84.

(24) *Ibid.*, No. 83, p. 85.

(25) *Ibid.*, No. 193, pp. 252—53.

(26) Keats, «Ode to Melancholy»,

(27) Emily Brontë, *Poems*, op. cit., 101, pp. 107—108.

Augusta, the heroine of the Gondal epic, calls out in her lament for Alexander, Lord of Elbë,

O Day : He cannot die
When thou so fair art shining ;
O sun : in such a glorious sky
So tranquilly declining,
«He cannot leave thee now
While fresh west-winds are blowing,
And all around his youthful brow
The cheerful light is glowing. (28)

In an earlier poem, Augusta is mourning A.S., another Gondal character, and her lament is in striking contrast to the day :

The still May morn is warm and bright,
Young flowers look fresh and grass is green ;
And in the haze of glorious light
Our long, low hills are scarcely seen.
The woods — even now their small leaves hide
The blackbird and the stockdove well ;
And high in heaven, so blue and wide,
A thousand strains of music swell.

.....
Call Death — yes, Death, he is thine own ; (29)

Speaking of someone's grave and of the friends that have deserted her, Emily Brontë contrasts the beauty of nature with what lies under the earth :

The linnet in the rocky dells,
The moor-lark in the air,
The bee among the heather-bells
That hide my lady fair :
The wild deer browse above her breast ;
The wild birds raise their brood ;
And they, her smiles of love caressed,
Have left her solitude. (30)

As she writes in another poem :

Upon the earth in sunlight
Spring grass grows green and fair ;

(28) *Ibid.*, No. 180, pp. 217—19.

(29) *Ibid.*, No. 61, pp. 70—71.

(30) *Ibid.*, No. 173, pp. 204—205.

But beneath the earth is midnight,
Eternal midnight there. (31)

It will be seen that we have made no distinction between poems that are purely personal and those that belong to the Gondal epic. It is impossible to do so for they all, without distinction, contain references to nature. Furthermore, many of the poems that rightly belong to the Gondal cycle suddenly change in tone from the heroic to an expression of feelings that is obviously personal and subjective.

In one of her most famous poems said to be addressed by Rosina Alcona to Julius Brenzaida, the most Byronic of all her Gondal characters, the lament is so poignant that it has a ring of sincerity.

Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee !
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave !
Have I forgot, my Only love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-wearing wave ?
Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains on Angora's shore ;
Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
That noble heart for ever, ever more ?
Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild Decembers
From those brown hills have melted into spring —
Faithful indeed is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering ! (32)

Here, as elsewhere, the landscape — the mountains of Angora under whose snow and heath and fern-leaves lies the body of her beloved — is a fitting background to her anguish and despair.

As Phyllis Bentley has pointed out, her «lines have no bright glitter of epithet ; they achieve, however, a wonderful verbal heather-bloom by the never-failing simplicity, strength and exactness of their expressions» (33). One would like to add that her expressions are perhaps rendered vivid not only by their simplicity and exactness but also by the feeling that each aspect of nature is personified : that the distant hills and valleys, the icy water of the stream, and the drizzling mist are not only details of landscape and a background to her emotions, but a living part of her poem.

(31) *Ibid.*, No. 158, pp. 186—87.

(32) *Ibid.*, No. 182, pp. 222—23.

(33) Phyllis Bentley, *The Brontës* (London : European Novelists Series, (1966), p. 84.

And that wood flower that hides so shy
Beneath its mossy stone
Its balmy scent and dewy eye : ... (34)

Or, again :

The violet's eye might shyly flash
And young leaves shoot among the fern. (35)

And again :

I've seen the purple heather-bell
Look out by many a storm-worn stone ; ... (36)

Or the rainy day when

The damp stands in the long, green grass
As thick as morning's tears. (37)

Of all her nature poems, perhaps the most impressive are those that deal with the moors. One of the earliest of her poems (in which she speaks for the first time of man sending his spirit out of his earthly dungeon), is very effective with its dactylic rhythm that gives us the urgency and the sound of the storm.

High waving heather, 'neath stormy blasts bending,
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars ;
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending,
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending,
Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending,
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars.

All down the mountain sides, wild forests lending
One mighty voice to the life-giving wind ;
Rivers their banks in the jubilee rending,
Fast through the valleys a reckless course wending,
Wider and deeper their waters extending,
Leaving a desolate desert behind. (38)

This is obviously not the work of new-fledged beginner : the rhythm, the perfect rhyme scheme, the alliteration, the well-chosen epithets, and the combination of caesuras and overlapping lines (both

(34) Emily Brontë, *Poems*, No. 94, pp. 96—99.

(35) *Ibid.*, No. 93, pp. 96—97.

(36) *Ibid.* No. 108, pp. 114—15.

(37) *Ibid.*, No. 113, pp. 122—23.

(38) *Ibid.*, No. 5' p. 31.

in the first and third stanzas) leave one with an exciting picture of the movement of wind and storm down the mountainside.

Expressing her love for the moors through her Gondal characters, Emily Brontë makes a young man declare that he would not change his beloved for a woman of greater beauty, just as the mountain peasant would not change his heath for the richest plain below : «He would not give one moorland wild/For all the fields that ever smiled» (39). In another Gondal poem, she compares the beauty of «Ula's bowers», her tropic flowers and southern seas with «Gondal's mists and moorlands drear, / And sleet and frozen gloom». And yet, she adds, there are brave ships floating back to Gondal's stormy sea and the voyagers' hearts beat to feel the frostwind blow :

It brings them home, that thundering gale,
Home to their journey's end ; ... (40)

In yet a third poem, a father says to his daughter that, although he is sitting before the fire's cheerful glow, yet

I think of deep glens, blocked with snow ;
I dream of moor, and misty hill,
Where evening gathers, dark and chill, ... (41)

The most beautiful of all moorland poems, perhaps, is that of the exile who on a stormy night listens to the words of an old song and these unlock the fountains of his memory.

Awaken on all my dear moorlands
The wind in its glory and pride !
O call me from valleys and highlands
To walk by the hill-river's side !

In the cold winter, there are no blue-bells and the rocks are icy cold —

But lovelier than corn-fields all waving
In emerald and scarlet and gold
Are the slopes where the north-wind is raving,
And the glens where I wandered of old.

He also remembered the time when he was happy and free, when he crossed the moors at sunrise on a summer's day :

(39) *Ibid.*, No. 33, pp. 53—54.

(40) *Ibid.*, No. 166, pp. 193—94.

(41) *Ibid.*, No. 177, pp. 209—11.

For the moors, for the moors where the short grass
Like velvet beneath us should lie !
For the moors, for the moors where each high pass
Rose sunny against the clear sky !

For the moors where the linnet was trilling
Its song on the old granite stone ;
Where the lark — the wild skylark was filling
Every breast with delight like its own.

What language can utter the feeling
That rose when, in exile afar,
On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling
I saw the brown heath growing there. (42)

Although Emily Brontë's verse gives an effect of simplicity, her imagery, however, is always subtle and apt — and nearly always taken from nature. Virtue is compared to a distant star, (43) her beloved to a Sun, to a Star, (44) and Death, she says,

... has stolen our company
As sunshine steals the dew, ... (45)

Then, wondering if human love can remain true, she asks :

Can Friendship's flower droop on for years,
And then revive anew ?
No ; though the soil he wet with tears,
How fair soe'er it grew ;
The vital sap once perishèd
Will never flow again ; (46)

She speaks of «the verdure of the heart», (47) of despair as a desert, (48) of Truth rudely trampling down «The flowers of Fancy newly blown», (49) and the thousand creeds that move men's hearts as «Worthless as withered weeds». (50) In one of her visionary moments, she compares the sweetness of her Comforter to

..... a soft air above a sea
Tossed by the tempest's stir —
A thaw-wind melting quietly
The snowdrift on some wintery lea ; (51)

(42) *Ibid.*, No. 91, pp. 90—93.

(43) *Ibid.*, No. 112, pp. 121—22.

(44) *Ibid.*, No. 182, pp. 222-23.

(45) *Ibid.*, No. 172, pp. 203—204.

(46) *Ibid.*

(47) *Ibid.*, No. 153, pp. 173—75.

(48) *Ibid.*, No. 185, pp. 227—28.

(49) *Ibid.*, No. 174, pp. 205—207.

(50) *Ibid.*, No. 191, pp. 243—44.

(51) *Ibid.*, No. 168, pp. 195—97.

In one of her first poems, she compares the past to an autumn soft and mild, «With a wind that sighs mournfully», the present to a green and flowery spray, and the future to

«A sea beneath a cloudless sun ;
A mighty, glorious, dazzling sea
Stretching into infinity.» (52)

This method of using several images to define a feeling more explicitly is again used when Augusta is addressing her guitar and comparing the memories it arouses, first, to the warm sunlight in some deep glen although the sun has set and night has fallen, and second, to the image of the willows in the brook although the woodsmen has cut down their gleaming hair many years ago. (53)

A metaphor is often extended throughout a lyric, as in «Love and Friendship», in which she compares love to a wild rose-briar and friendship to a holly tree : the rose is sweet-smelling in spring but it is in December that the holly remains green. (54)

This extended metaphor can be found in one of Emily Brontë's most well-known poems and one to which we shall return later : «Death, that struck when I was most confiding». (55) The whole poem is built on the image that Time is a tree with its roots in Eternity. The leaves were growing brightly, full of sap and dew, the birds gathered nightly in its shelter and the wild bees daily flew round its flowers. Sorrow, however, plucked the blossom and Guilt stripped its foliage, yet Hope laughed her out of her sadness —

And behold, with tenfold increase blessing
Spring adorned the beauty-burdened spray ;
Wind and rain and fervent heat caressing
Lavished glory on its second May.

It rose so high neither grief nor sin could touch it : Love and its own life kept it from every «blight» except that of heartless Death. But Death struck just at the moment when she had great faith in future joy, and now the morning sunshine mocks her anguish and, for her, Time can never blossom any more. However,

Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish
Where that perished sapling used to be ;

(52) *Ibid.*, No. 3, p. 30.

(53) *Ibid.*, No. 76, pp. 80—81.

(54) *Ibid.*, No. 121, pp. 130—31.

(55) *Ibid.*, No. 183, pp. 224—25.

Thus, at least, its mouldering corpse will nourish
That from which it sprung — Eternity.

The construction of this poem is not only dependent on the clear exposition of ideas but on the inner structural unity which the poem achieves through its harmony of imagery. As a result, it remains one of Emily Brontë's finest poems. Furthermore, it is an example of her later poems in which the imagery becomes more complicated and is used to express ideas that are more abstract and visionary.

It is curious to see that, although Emily Brontë spent most of her life with the heath and the moors in view and must have had little experience of the sea, yet she used much imagery taken from the sea. Admittedly, this imagery is not always original and one can often find a parallel for it in earlier poetry, such as in Elizabethan and 17th century verse, yet here, too, because her image is apt, exact and simple, it seems to acquire originality and freshness.

Since her make-belief Gondal was an island set in the north seas where winds and storms were a regular feature of nature, much of her Gondal poetry was set with the sea as background. She speaks of the «sullen surging swell», (56) of the waves that «Dash in among the echoing caves», (57) of «the shock / Of rock with wave, and wave with rock», (58) and how «Soft falls the moonlight on the sea / Whose wild waves play at liberty». (59) Her characters are sometimes exiled in other lands, and many of them often cross the «boundless», (60) «desert», (61) or the «billowy» (62) sea. The Child of Delight with the sunbright hair is vividly described with his «sea-blue, seadeep eyes». (63) ...Even when describing the moors, she often speaks of the wind sighing «o'er the heathy sea» (64) and the pathways «winding o'er billowy swell» (65) and «billowy hill». (66) «The full moon sailed bright through that Ocean on high» and the dark prison house rose mysteriously from the «hillowy moor». (67)

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- (56) *Ibid.*, No. 141, pp. 148—49.
(57) *Ibid.*, No. 143, pp. 150—61, 1. 136.
(58) *Ibid.*, No. 177, pp. 209—11.
(59) *Ibid.*, No. 125, p. 134.
(60) *Ibid.*, No. 42, pp. 60—62.
(61) *Ibid.*, No. 118, p. 128.
(62) *Ibid.*, No. 177, pp. 209—212.
(63) *Ibid.*, No. 187, p. 230.
(64) *Ibid.*, No. 21, p. 46.
(65) *Ibid.*, No. 92, pp. 93—96.
(66) *Ibid.*, No. 95, pp. 99—101.
(67) *Ibid.*, No. 83 p. 85.

Her sea imagery was also used to express her feelings on life, death and the life beyond death. In one of the earliest poems as we have seen, she speaks of the future as a sea, «A mighty, glorious, dazzling sea / Stretching into infinity». (68) But life was not always a calm sea : it was often a «dark Ocean, sailing drear, / With storms around and fears before / And no kind light to point the shore». (69) Again, sleep brings no hope or strength to her, for in her sleep «I only sail a wilder sea, / A darker wave». (70)

When speaking of Augusta, she says that the first impulse of the gale that urged life's wave for her was fresh, pure and free, but

Why did the pilot, too confiding,
Dream o'er that Ocean's foam,
And trust in Pleasure's careless guiding
To bring his vessel home ?

For well he knew what dangers frowned,
What mists would gather dim ;
What rocks and shelves and sands lay round
Between his port and him.

The very brightness of the sun,
The splendour of the main,
The wind that bore him wildly on
Should not have warned in vain.

An anxious gazer from the shore,
I marked the whitening wave,
And wept above thy fate the more
Because I could not save. (71)

Another image is that of Time as an «all-wearing wave» and, in the same poem, of the world as a tide that bears her along and tries to make her forget her beloved. (72) Sometimes, too, the image is that of the body being a vessel, a wandering bark, that is lost by crime and sorrow, (73) and he who dies,

..... he who slumbers there,
His bark will strive no more
Across the waters of despair
To reach that glorious shore. (74)

(68) *Ibid.*, No. 3, p. 30.

(69) *Ibid.*, No. 41, pp. 59—60.

(70) *Ibid.*, No. 34, pp. 54—55.

(71) *Ibid.*, No. 171, pp. 201—203.

(72) *Ibid.*, No. 182, pp. 222—23.

(73) *Ibid.*, No. 112, pp. 121—22.

(74) *Ibid.*, No. 111, pp. 120—21.

The most persistent image, however, is that of death as a sea and life beyond as that «glorious shore», a harbour, a haven.

In a Gondal poem, Augusta begs the dying Alexander of Elbë to delay his crossing of «the eternal sea» by one hour :

«I hear its billows roar,
I see them foaming high,
But no glimpse of a further shore
Has blessed my straining eye.
«Believe not what they urge
Of Eden isles beyond ;
Turn back, from that tempestuous surge,
To thy own native land ; (75)

Another Gondal character expresses a contrasting belief : a daughter reminds her father of what he had once taught her about death and how it was as unwise to mourn the dead as to mourn the seed that fell in fertile earth, struck deep its roots and lifted its boughs to the sky.

I know there is a blessed shore
Opening its ports for me and mine ;
And, gazing Time's wide waters o'er,
I weary for that land divine, ...

The father replies that his child has spoken well :
And coming tempests, raging wild,
Shall strengthen thy desire —
Thy fervent hope, through storm and foam,
Through wind and Ocean's roar,
To reach, at last, the eternal home —
The steadfast, changeless shore ! » (76)

I die, she says in one of her poems, but weep not :
... think that I have past
Before thee o'er a sea of gloom,
Have anchored safe, and rest at last
Where tears and mourning cannot come.
Tis I should weep to leave thee here,
On that dark Ocean, sailing drear,

(75) *Ibid.*, No. 180, pp. 217—19.

(76) *Ibid.*, No. 177, pp. 209—12.

With storms around and fears before
And no kind light to point the shore. (77)

O death, she says elsewhere, so many spirits have driven through this false world that would have given their all «To win the everlasting haven». (78)

In another poem, she declares that she has not chased the fleeting treacheries of life but has gazed beyond the sands that «the waves efface / To the enduring seas». As she has cast her «anchor of Desire / Deep in unknown Eternity», then why should she not brave unawed the darkness of the grave, «Nay, smile to hear Death's billows rave ?» (79) Elsewhere, as she sits alone in the evening, she wonders whether she is glad to seek repose, «glad to leave the sea, / And anchor all thy weary woes / In calm eternity». (80)

Her own personal beliefs seem to be best expressed in «No coward soul is mine»: the thousand creeds of man are unutterably vain, she says,

Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main
To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality (81)

* * *

From the few autobiographical and biographical extracts that are extant, Emily Brontë seems to have been a busy and practical person, trained by her aunt to look after the house and, as she herself says, «seldom or never troubled with nothing to do». (82) As a contrast to this everyday life, she seems to have had another world into which she could retire, a world of dreams and visions created by her imagination — that «synthetic and magical power», as Coleridge called it. (83)

From her earliest poems she speaks of Man's spirit rising out of its «drear dongeon» and «Bursting the fetters and breaking the

(77) *Ibid.*, No. 41, pp. 59—60.

(78) *Ibid.*, No. 185, pp. 227—28.

(79) *Ibid.*, No. 188, pp. 231—33.

(80) *Ibid.*, No. 155, pp. 179—81.

(81) *Ibid.*, No. 191, pp. 243—44.

(82) Ruth H. Blackburn, *op. cit.*, p. 102, from Emily Brontë's Diary Paper dated July 30th, 1845.

(83) S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, xiv.

bars», (84) and this imagination, or Fancy as she called it, was essential to her not only to create her Gondal world but this other world into which her spirit soared and through which she was able to find a meaning for this earthly one.

In «A Day Dream», although she has been dreaming and is now returning to reality, although

..... the noonday Dream

Like dream of night withdrew,

yet she admits the strength of the imagination, for

Fancy still will sometimes deem

Her fond creation true. (85)

It was often in «evening's pensive hour» that her dreams would come to her, the hour that

Hushes the bird and shuts the flower

And gives to Fancy magic power

O'er each familiar tone. (86)

It is on another such night, when the moon is shining, that Heaven and Earth whisper to her to dream ;

Yes, Fancy, come, my Fairy love !

These throbbing temples, softly kiss ;

And bend my lonely couch above

And bring me rest and bring me bliss.

The world is going — Dark world, adieu !

Grim world, go hide thee till the day ;

The heart thou canst not all subdue

Must still resist if thou delay ! (87)

It is in a poem which she entitled «To Imagination» that she expressed herself most clearly on this faculty that she called a «true friend». Without it she could not endure the day's care and earth's pain. «So hopeless is the world without, / The world within I doubly prize», so what did it matter if danger and grief and darkness lay around her,

If but within our bosom's bound

We hold a bright unsullied sky,

Warm with ten thousand mingled rays

Of suns that know no winter days ?

(84) Emily Brontë, Poems, No. 5, p. 31.

(85) *Ibid.*, No. 170, pp. 193—201.

(86) *Ibid.*, No. 154, pp. 175—79.

(87) *Ibid.*, No. 157, pp. 184—85.

Reason indeed may oft complain
For Nature's sad reality,
And tell the suffering heart how vain
Its cherished dreams must always be ;
And Truth may rudely trample down
The flowers of Fancy newly blown.

But thou art ever there to bring
The hovering visions back and breathe
New glories o'er the blighted spring
And call a lovelier life from death,
And whisper with a voice divine
Of real worlds as bright as thine. (88)

There cannot be a more Romantic conception than this. As C.M. Bowra has declared, the five great Romantic poets «despite many differences, agreed on one vital point : that the creative imagination is closely connected with a peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things». (89) The movement arose, he adds, from the prevailing longing for something more complete and more satisfying than the familiar world, and yet, although it insisted upon the use of the poet's imagination and on his intensity of feelings, it still demanded that his outlook should be related to truth and reality. (90)

In the case of Emily Brontë, all these conditions are amply fulfilled. Here we have a poet whose conception of life was based on nature, who believed firmly in the power of the imagination, and who had a vision of some ulterior truth that was based on the reality of nature. We have seen how nature — that is, the world around her of hills and moors, of trees and flowers — formed an integral part of her emotions and thoughts ; we have seen how it echoed or contrasted with her happiness and sorrow and how it formed the background of all action ; even in her make-belief Gondal world. We have also seen how important the imagination and the «world within» were to her, and how it did not matter whether there were danger, grief and darkness around her,

If but within our bosom's bound
We hold a bright unsullied sky.

(88) *Ibid.*, No. 174, pp. 205—207.

(89) C.M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 271. The five are Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats : Byron denied the importance of the imagination although he shared many of their tastes.

(90) *Ibid.*, p. 272.

Warm with ten thousand mingled rays
Of suns that know no winter days ? (91)

It is then left to us to see what was Emily Brontë's metaphysical vision, this «unseen order behind visible things», and to find out in what way she expressed it.

First of all, we find that the beauty of nature was often a source of comfort to her and, in one of her poems, she symbolises the spirit of the earth and makes Nature say to her :

Thy mind is ever moving
In regions dark to thee ;
Recall its useless roving ——
Come back and dwell with me.

I know my mountain breezes
Enchant and soothe thee still ——
I know my sunshine pleases
Despite thy wayward will.

.....
I've watched thee every hour ;
I know my mighty sway,
I know my magic power
To drive thy griefs away.

Few hearts to mortals given
On earth so wildly pine ;
Yet none would ask a Heaven
More like this Earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee ;
Thy comrade let me be ——
Since nought beside can bless thee,
Return and dwell with me. (92)

This personification of Earth is expressed in several poems. «Forgive, me», she says one evening, «if I've shunned so long / Your gentle greeting, earth and air ! » (93)

Nature, however, is equally a source of sorrow to her for she sees beauty dying and this reminds her of her own death. The flowers which were «Formed to feel the breeze / Wave their light leaves in summer's glow» will die and she laments that their cold departure

(91) Emily Brontë, *Poems*, No. 174, pp. 205—207.

(92) *Ibid.*, No. 147, pp. 163—64.

(93) *Ibid.*, No. 103, pp. 110.

must picture hers. (94) Just as «the summer's glory / Must always end in gloom», so the happiest story closes with the tomb. (95) Life and beauty must be followed by death — and «Death never yields back his victims again». (96) Death means a tomb

Beneath the turf, beneath the mould —
Forever dark, forever cold. (97)

While grass is growing green and fair in spring sunshine ;
..... beneath the earth is midnight,
Eternal midnight there. (98)

She makes innumerable references to «the grave's dark wall», (99) «that dwelling dread, / The narrow dungeon of the dead», (100) «the silent tomb», (101) a «dwelling dank and cold». (102)

Moreover, life is full of pain and care and the earth is a «plague-fen» from which rose «poison-tainted air». (103) Man was born pure — since he comes from heaven (104) — and

If thou hast sinned in this world of care,
Twas but the dust of thy drear abode —
Thy soul was pure when it entered here,
And pure it will go again to God. (105)

Speaking to a child, she says that bliss like his is bought with years of torment and tears ; now he is «all divine»,

All full of God thy features shine.

.....
Too heavenly now, but doomed to be
Hell-like in heart and misery. (106)

All human minds are doomed to sin and mourn and their bark is often wrecked and lost by crime and sorrow.

(94) Ibid., No. 145, p. 162.

(95) Ibid., No. 136, p. 142.

(96) Ibid., No. 16, pp. 43—44.

(97) Ibid., No. 149, pp. 166—67.

(98) Ibid., No. 158, pp. 186—87.

(99) Ibid., No. 173, pp. 204—205.

(100) Ibid., No. 172, pp. 203—204.

(101) Ibid., No. 102, pp. 109—10.

(102) Ibid., No. 50, p. 65.

(103) Ibid., Ni. 143, pp. 150—61, 11. 69—70.

(104) Ibid., No. 150, pp. 168—69, 11. 25—28 and 47—48.

(105) Ibid., No. 61, pp. 70—71.

106) Ibid., No. 112, pp. 121—22.

Childhood is a period of joy and happiness and if day breathes such beauty over the earth and and sky, it is to lure the mourner from his «woe-worn mind», to

Re-give him shadowy gleams of infancy,
And draw his tired gaze from futurity. (107).

One night, Emily Brontë let her imagination run away from this dark, grim world and gazed at the stars in that «stormless sea» of a sky ; she dreamt that all the woe in creation was to be found here on this earth and that

..... the heaven of glorious spheres
Is rolling on its course of light
In endless bliss through endless years ;

I'll think there's not one world above,
Far as these straining eyes can see,
Where wisdom ever laughed at Love,
Or Virtue crouched to Infamy ;

.....
Where Pleasure still will lead to wrong,
And helpless Reason warn in vain ;
And Truth is weak and Treachery strong,
And Joy the shortest path to Pain ;

And Peace, the lethargy of grief ;
And Hope, a phantom of the soul ;
And Life, a labour void and brief ;
And Death, the despot of the whole ! (108)

The earth held many different kinds of sorrow and one had to face not only one's own death but that of those dearest to us. In the two poems, «Cold in the earth» and «Death, that struck when I was most confiding», written in 1840 within five weeks of each other, she mourns one in whose grave all her life's bliss was lying. Through her despair she had to learn «how existence could be cherished / Strengthened and fed without the aid of joy». (109) Another sorrow felt by man was that of a sense of guilt for sins committed. Men are «All doomed alike to sin and mourn», (110) and even if there is

(107) *Ibid.*, No. 114, pp. 123—24. This conception is so reminiscent of Wordsworth's «Ode on Intimations of Immortality» that it is worth comparing a few lines :
«But trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home : /

Heaven lies about as in our infancy ! » And later he speaks of «those first affections, / Those shadowy recollections, ... »

(108) *Ibid.*, No. 157, pp. 184—85.

(109) *Ibid.*, No. 182 and 183, pp. 222—225. They were dated March 3rd and April 10th, 1845.

(110) *Ibid.*, No. 112, pp. 121—22.

no remorse, «crime can make the heart grow old». (111) In one of her poems which appears to be sincerely personal but a little obscure, she calls out in despair :

There let thy bleeding branch atone
For every torturing tear :
Shall my young sins, my sins alone,
Be everlasting here ? (112)

If life, then, is all sorrow, pain at the loss of one's friends, tyranny, guilt and sin, it is therefore not surprising that at times Emily Brontë herself sought death. In one of her earlier lyrics, she declares that Sleep has brought neither joy nor hope, neither strength nor friend to her :

Sleep brings no wish to knit
My harassed heart beneath ;
My only wish is to forget
In sleep of death. (113)

And later :

And who would dread eternal rest
When labour's hire was agony ? (114)

Elsewhere she says :

Dead, dead is my joy ;
I long to be at rest ;
I wish the damp earth covered
This desolate breast. (115)

In the following dialogue between two people, she extols the advantages of the grave :

In the earth, the earth, thou shalt be laid,
A grey stone standing over thee ;
Black mould beneath thee spread
And black mould to cover thee.

«Well, there is rest there,
So fast come thy prophecy ;
The time when my sunny hair
Shall with grass roots twinèd be».

(111) *Ibid.*, No. 99, pp. 104—106.

(112) *Ibid.*, No. 142, p. 150.

(113) *Ibid.*, No. 34, pp. 54—55.

(114) *Ibid.*, No. 167, pp. 194—95.

(115) *Ibid.*, No. 101, pp. 107—108.

But cold, cold is that resting-place,
Shut out from Joy and Liberty,
And all who loved thy living face
Will shrink from its gloom and thee.

«Not so : *here* the world is chill,
And sworn friends fall from me ;
But *there*, they'll own me still
And prize my memory». (116)

In another poem she says that she is weary of the anguish and the dead despair that increases with the years,
So, if a tear, when thou art dying,
Should haply fall from me,
It is but that my soul is sighing
To go and rest with thee. (117)

In spite of this feeling of sadness, Emily Brontë's verse does not leave one with the impression of desolation and black despair. This can perhaps be explained by her conception of life and death and by her faith which seems to be a compound built partly on orthodox belief and partly on her own visions.

To her, death was inevitable, «the fate we cannot flee», (118) and, as the bluebells said to her, they would rather die in the summer sun than under winter's ruthless sky : they advised her to dry her tears for it is with the lengthened years that sorrow comes. (119) As she says when walking through a graveyard :

What though our path be o'er the dead ?
They slumber soundly in the tomb ;
And why should mortals fear to tread
The pathway to their future home ? (120)

In the grave there is rest and one should not be afraid of what there is beyond death, for surely these long and agonising years will not be punished by eternal tears ?

No ; *that* I feel can never be ;
A God of *hate* could hardly bear
To watch through all eternity
His own creations dread despair !

(116) *Ibid.*, No. 163, pp. 190—91.

(117) *Ibid.*, No. 136, p. 142.

(118) *Ibid.*, No. 101, pp. 107—108.

(119) *Ibid.*, No. 100, pp. 106—107.

(120) *Ibid.*, No. 126, pp. 134—35.

The pangs that wring my mortal breast,
Must claim from Justice lasting rest ;
Enough, that this departing breath
Will pass in anguish worse than death.

If I have sinned, long, long ago,
That sin was purified by woe :
I've suffered on through night and day ;
I've trod a dark and frightful way. (121)

The merciful quality of God is stressed in the next poem in which she urges (in a dream) the shade of one who died many years ago not to grieve nor be afraid for «God is not like human-kind»,

Vengeance will never torture thee,
Nor hunt thy soul eternally.

.....
O do not think that God can leave,
Forget, forsake, refuse to hear ! (122)

Augusta also declares her belief in the purity of the soul :

I know our souls are all divine ;
I know that when we die,
What seems the vilest, even like thine
A part of God himself shall shine
In perfect purity. (123)

Furthermore, death releases the soul from the body and it thus becomes «Eternally, entirely Free», (124)

Thus truly when that breast is cold
Thy prisoned soul shall rise,
The dungeon mingle with the mould —
The captive with the skies. (125)

She believes that the grave is one's last and strongest foe and that the the fight with death will end in our defeat, but this defeat should be serenely borne for «Thine eventide may still be sweet, / Thy night a glorious morn». (126) After death, there is an eternity in which the soul becomes free and pure and draws close to God.

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- (121) *Ibid.*, No. 133, pp. 137—40.
(122) *Ibid.*, No. 134, pp. 140—41.
(123) *Ibid.*, No. 137, pp. 143—44.
(124) *Ibid.*, No. 144, pp. 161—62.
(125) *Ibid.*, No. 148, pp. 165—66.
(126) *Ibid.*, No. 155, pp. 179—81.

In a poem full of a symbolism that reminds us of the Metaphysical poets, she speaks of the land of rest which the traveller tries to reach. Here, again, she expresses herself with symbols taken from nature :

Far away is the land of rest,
Thousand miles are stretched between,
Many a mountain's stormy crest,
Many a desert void of green.

Wasted, worn is the traveller ;
Dark his heart and dim his eye ;
Without hope or comforter,
Faltering, faint, and ready to die.
Often he looks to the ruthless sky,
Often he looks o'er his dreary road,
Often he wishes down to lie
And render up life's tiresome load.

But yet faint not, mournful man ;
Leagues on leagues are left behind
Since your sunless course began ;
Then go on to toil resigned.

If you still despair control,
Hush its whispers in your breast,
You shall reach the final goal,
You shall win the land of rest. (127)

This Eternity, Heaven, or land beyond death is her consolation for earthly sorrow and for the death of all earthly things. In «A Day Dream», she described the lovely summer afternoon, «the marriage-time of May / With her young lover, June». All Nature was happy and gay and she was the only sullen guest there. Her feeling of sadness was due to the fact she thought of the winter when all these bright things would vanish, and the birds, that were now happily singing, would be only the poor spectres of a vanished spring. In her dream, the world was suddenly wreathed in a celestial light and she heard spirits singing to her.

O mortal, mortal, let them die ;
Let Time and Tears destroy,
Let Grief distract the sufferer's breast,
And Night obscure his way ;

They hasten him to endless rest,
And everlasting day.

«To thee the world is like a tomb ;
A desert's naked shore ;
To us, in unimagined bloom,
It brightens more and more.

«And could we lift the veil and give
One brief glimpse to thine eye
Thou would'st rejoice for those that live,
Because they live to die». (128)

When asked once how it was that she still could find youth's delight in nature when she herself was past her youth and nearing her prime, she answered that she had learnt to cast her «anchor of Desire / Deep in unknown Eternity». It was Hope that glorified all Nature's «million mysteries», that soothed her in her griefs and her pain for others' woe,

And makes me strong to undergo
What I am born to bear.
«Glad Comforter, will I not brave
Unawed the darkness of the grave ?
Nay, smile to hear Death's billows rave,
My Guide, sustained by thee ?
The more unjust seems present fate
The more my Spirit springs elate
Strong in thy strength, to anticipate
Rewarding Destiny ! (129)

Her belief in a deity and in undying life is best expressed in «No coward soul is mine», one of her last and finest poems. The passion of her faith is so finely woven with her thought that the exposition of her creed — her belief in a God within her heart, in «the steadfast rock of Immortality», in an «Almighty ever-present Deity» whose spirit «animates eternal years» with wide-embracing love — are reminiscent of some of the finest Metaphysical poetry of the 17th century.

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

(128) *Ibid.*, No. 170, pp. 198—201.

(129) *Ibid.*, No. 188, pp. 231—33.

.....
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. (130)

Such beliefs in God and eternity differ in no way from that of an orthodox church faith, but where, however, Emily Brontë became a typical Romantic, was in her individual approach to this faith. (131) She did not perhaps accept the traditional belief in eternity or heaven simply because the church had taught her to believe in a life after death, but because she herself had come — in her own way and through her own spiritual experiences — to the conclusion that there was something beyond this earthly life. Nature was the source of her inspiration, and if Nature could renew itself year after year, then Man, being part of Nature, had a hope of something brighter and more beautiful after death.

As wise to mourn the seed which grow
Unnoticed on its parent tree,
«Because it fell in fertile earth
And sprang up to a glorious birth —
Struck deep its roots, and lifted high
Its green boughs in the breezy sky ! (132)

This attitude could only arise through her love for the world in which she lived. «..... I broke my heart with weeping» ; said Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, «to come back to earth ; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle

(130) *Ibid.*, No. 191, pp. 243—44.

(131) *Bowra*, *op. cit.*, pp. 282—83. Here he points out that the Romantics had their own kind of faith and sense of the holy, but that the emotions that they arouse are not what we associate with religious devotion. The reason for this is that the Romantics are concerned with a mystery which belongs not to faith but to the imagination. Even when they feel themselves in the presence of «eternity», it is not entirely external but has many connections with their own selves.

(132) Emily Brontë, *Poems*, No. 177, pp. 209—212, pp. 47—52.

of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where I woke sobbing for joy». (133)

One «summer's mellow midnight», the night wind whispered to her that «Heaven was glorious, / And sleeping Earth was fair», (134) and in a similar poem in which the spirit of earth is speaking to the poet, it says :

Few hearts to mortals given
On earth so wildly pine ;
Yet none would ask a Heaven
More like this earth than thine. (135)

Her love of earth is again seen in «I see around me tombstones grey» in which Emily Brontë says that those in heaven know nothing of our despair nor can they tell what lies in our hearts - «What tenants haunt each mortal cell». Earth itself would not wish that any other sphere should taste her sufferings. Then, addressing the earth, the poet says :

Ah mother, what shall comfort thee
In all this boundless misery ?
To cheer our eager eyes a while
We see thee smile ; how fondly smile ! ...
Indeed, no dazzling land above
Can cheat thee of thy children's love. ...
We would not leave our native home
For *any* world beyond the Tomb.
No — rather on thy kindly breast
Let us be laid in lasting rest ;
Or waken but to share with thee
A mutual immortality. (136)

One comes to the conclusion then that it was because of her love for Nature that she could use the latter not only to express her moods and feelings but her most philosophical thoughts and her deepest beliefs. «Death, that struck when I was most confiding» is perhaps the poem that most epitomises Emily Brontë's life, her happiness, her despair caused by death and, finally, her hopes of eternity — all these built on the imagery of a tree with its branches and blossom, sap and beauty-burdened spray. It is in the final paradox, again worthy of

(133) Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Chap. 9.
(134) Emily Brontë *Poems*, No. 140, pp. 146—47.
(135) *Ibid.*, No. 147, pp. 163—64.
(136) *Ibid.*, No. 149, pp. 166—67.
(136) *Ibid.*, No. 183, pp. 224—25.

a Metaphysical poet, that she expresses her faith :

Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish
Where that perished sapling used to be ;
Thus, at least, its mouldering corpse will nourish
That from which it sprung — Eternity.

When speaking of the Romantic poets, C.M. Bowra declared that not only did they bring into poetry «surprise and wonder and vision» but something else even more characteristically their own.

In their vivid perception of visible sensible things, they were able almost in the same moment to have a vision of another world, and this illuminates and gives significance to sensible things in such a way that we can hardly distinguish them from the mysteries they have opened and with which they are inextricably connected. (137)

When applied to Emily Brontë, this meant not only a vision in the sense of a thing seen with imaginative insight but an actual mystical experience. She is considered as one of the finest mystical poets in the English language, a judgment based on some of her later poetry.

Admittedly, she makes many references to ghosts and spirits in her work — Catherine Earnshaw's ghost is important throughout the novel — and much of this in her verse is due to the Gondalian heroic atmosphere. She sees at twilight the phantom of the first chief of Aspin, (138) and in another poem she sees the forms of a man and a woman whom she had seen many springs ago and who were now dead (139). Once, just «at the time of eve/When parted ghosts might come», she saw a shadowy thing with a fearful face that left her with a feeling of horror (140). In one of her fragments, she asks, «What shadow is it/That ever moves before my eyes ? / It has a brow of of ghostly whiteness (141) Again, she speaks to the spirit of one who has lain dead for many years in a foreign country and «whose phantom face is dark with woe», : « ... come, thou shade, commune with me (142).

She conjures up other spirits but these are the spirits of the mountains, of the night-wind, of the earth — personifications of some phase of nature. There is the spirit of the mountains, for example, with «wavy hair, on her shoulders bare, / It shone like soft clouds

(137) Bowra, pp. 289—290.

(138) Emily Brontë Poems., No. 154, pp. 175—79.

(139) Ibid., No. 153, pp. 173—75.

(140) Ibid., No. 12, pp. 37—38.

(141) Ibid., No. 124, p. 133.

(142) Ibid., No. 134, pp. 140—41.

around the moon», who helps men and animals when they are lost or given up for dead on the mountain side (143). In «A Day Dream», there are spirits that sing to her of that other world of «unimagined bloom» (144). The Night-Wind tells her that the thick leaves are rustling «And all their myriad voices/Instinct with spirit seem» (145).

It is mainly, however, in Man's spirit or soul that she was interested, especially in «Man's spirit away from its drear dongeon sending» (146). The prisoner can often escape from his prison walls, as man from his body :

His soul has left the storm below,
And reached a realm of sunless snow ;
The region of unchanging woe ;
Made voiceless by despair (147).

« ... I am sure the soul is free / To leave its clay a little while», said an exile. « ... Yet if the soul can thus return / I need not and I will not mourn (148).

In another poem, she declares that she holds riches, love and fame in light esteem but all that she begs for is

Through life and death, a chainless soul
With courage to endure (149).

Some of the conjectures that one makes about this mystic quality in Emily Brontë's verse can only remain conjectures since we have neither biographical data nor personal information to verify them. It is early in her verse, however, that one begins to have the feeling of someone who wishes to free his soul, one who has dreams revealed to him but «not a dream of sleep», (150) and one who can say :

I'm happiest when most away
I can bear my soul from its home of clay
On a windy night when the moon is bright
And the eye can wander through worlds of light —

When I am not and none beside —
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky —

(143) *Ibid.*, No. 95, pp. 99—101.

(144) *Ibid.*, No. 170, pp. 198—201.

(145) *Ibid.*, No. 140, pp. 146—47.

(146) *Ibid.*, No. 5, p. 31.

(147) *Ibid.*, No. 125, p. 134. See also «Gleneden's Dream», No. 63, pp. 72—74, where the prisoner foresees future events in his country in a vision.

(148) *Ibid.*, No. 102, pp. 109—110.

(149) *Ibid.*, No. 146, p. 163.

(150) *Ibid.*, No. 47, pp. 64—65.

But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity. (151)

In the following poem there is no indication to whom the poem is addressed but the impression (especially in the last verse) is that it is to some visionary spirit.

I'll come when thou art saddest,
Laid alone in the darkened room ;
When the mad day's mirth has vanished,
And the smile of joy is banished
From evening's chilly gloom.

I'll come when the heart's real feeling
Has entire, unbiassed sway,
And my influence o'er thee stealing,
Grief deepening, joy congealing,
Shall bear thy soul away.

Listen, 'tis just the hour,
The awful time for thee ;
Dost thou not feel upon thy soul
A flood of strange sensations roll,
Forerunners of a sterner power,
Heralds of me ? (152)

In another poem, «Aye, there it is ! there it is ! It wakes to-night», probably written much later, there is again doubt to whom it is addressed. The whole poem is obscure but again it leaves one with the impression of being addressed to some visionary spirit. It is night-time and there is a wind that «Has swept the world aside» ...

And thou art now a spirit pouring
Thy presence into all ...

A universal influence
From Thine own influence free ;
A principle of life, intense,
Lost to mortality.

Thus truly when that breast is cold
Thy prisoned soul shall rise,
The dungeon mingle with the mould ——
The captive with the skies. (153)

(151) *Ibid.*, No. 44, p. 63.

(152) *Ibid.*, No. 37, pp. 56—57.

(153) *Ibid.*, No. 148, pp. 165—66.

Except in the poem, «A Day Dream», all her moments of vision seem to have taken place either in the evening or at night, especially when the moon is shining and the winds are blowing across the land :

On a windy night the moon is bright

And the eye can wander through worlds of light. « ... (154)
In her earliest verse, she praises the moon, the «Vision of glory — Dream of light ! / Holy as heaven — undimmed and pure, / Looking down on the lonely moor» (155). She even prefers it to sun : «If light at all is given, / O give me Cynthia's shine (156). And later she exclaims :

I gazed upon the cloudless moon
And loved her all the night ... (157)

It is on a clear night beneath the moon's silvery light that she has a vision of that other world rolling «on its course of light / In endless bliss through endless years»(158). On another night, in reply to someone who is telling her to go to sleep since it is past midnight and cold and the wind is «bleakly sweeping / Round the walls», she says :

«No : let me linger ; leave me, let me be
A little longer in this reverie.
I'm happy now, and would you tear away
My blissful dream, that never comes with day ;
A vision dear, though false, for well my mind
Knows what a bitter waking waits behind ? » (159)

In «To Imagination», she again speaks of «evening's quiet hour» in which she welcomes the imagination, (160) and in «Ah ! why, because the dazzling sun», she describes how the dazzling sun has chased away her visions. Like Shelley, she loved the night and the moon :

I was at peace and drank your beams
As they were life to me
And revelled in my changeful dreams
Like petrel on the sea.
Thought followed thought — star followed star
Through boundless regions on,
While one sweet influence, near and far,
Thrilled through and proved us one. (161)

(154) *Ibid.*, No. 44, p. 63.

(155) *Ibid.*, No. 9, pp. 33—35.

(156) *Ibid.*, No. 24, p. 47.

(157) *Ibid.*, No. 110, pp. 117—120.

(158) *Ibid.*, No. 157, pp. 184—85.

(159) *Ibid.*, No. 114, pp. 123—24.

(160) *Ibid.*, No. 174, pp. 205—208.

(161) *Ibid.*, No. 184, pp. 225—27.

But the sun rose blood-red and his beams struck her brow, and although Nature became elated, her own soul sank sad and low. She closed her lids but could still see the sun blazing and the whole world glowing with sunshine :

O Stars and Dreams and Gentle Night ;
O Night and Stars return !
And hide me from that hostile light
That does not warm, but burn ——
That drains the blood of suffering men ;
Drinks tears, instead of dew ;
Let me sleep through his blinding reign,
And only wake with you !

Dreams have always encircled her, she says, from childhood and visions were fed by an ardent fancy «Since life was in its morning prime». (162)

In one of her later poems, «Plead for Me», Reason is sitting in judgment on her for casting the world away and she, addressing the «God of Visions», begs him to plead for her and explain to Reason why she has chosen him.

Thee, ever present, phantom thing ——
My slave, my comrade, and my King !
A slave, because I rule thee still ;
Incline thee to my changeful will
And make thy influence good or ill ——
A comrade, for by day and night
Thou art my intimate delight ——
My Darling Pain that wounds and sears
And wrings a blessing out from tears
By deadening me to real cares ;
And yet, a king —— though prudence well
Have taught thy subject to rebel.
And am I wrong to worship where
Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair
Since my own soul can grant my prayer ?
Speak, God of Visions, plead for me
And tell why I have chosen thee ! (163)

It is, however, in a very early fragment that we find what may have been her first attempt at a description of an actual mystic experience. Again, one can only conjecture and, by comparing this

(162) Ibid., No. 27, pp. 48—49.

(163) Ibid., No. 176, pp. 208—209.

fragment with a much later poem, «The Prisoner», draw the parallels that exist between the two : the sadness, the tears or strong emotion followed by calm, and finally the throb and the heavenly brightness all around her.

And first an hour of mournful musing,
And then a gush of bitter tears,
And then a dreary calm diffusing
Its deadly mist o'er joys and cares ;

And then a throb, and then a lightening,
And then a breathing from above,
And then a star in heaven brightening —
The star, the glorious star of love. (164)

The next poem which deals with a vision is «The philosopher» : here she describes how she saw a Spirit standing at a place where three rivers — a golden, a blood-red and a sapphire one — meet and tumble into an inky sea. When the Spirit bends his gaze on the ocean's darkness, the sea suddenly blazes and sparkles with a light.

White as the sun ; far, far more fair
Than the divided sources were ! »

— And even for that Spirit, Seer,
I've watched and sought my lifetime long ;
Sought Him in Heaven, Hell, Earth and Air,
An endless search — and always wrong !

Had I but seen his glorious eye
Once light the clouds that 'wilder me,
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
To cease to think and cease to be —

I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
Nor stretching eager hands to Death
Implored to change for lifeless rest
This sentient soul, this living breath. (165)

It is in one of her last poems, «The Prisoner», that Emily Brontë is most explicit about her mystic experiences. The poem begins in the heroic style of the Gondal cycle : there is a house warm with fires while the snow falls outside. Lord Julian goes down into the dungeon crypts and the scene is typically Gondal — a stern warder, a «jailer grim» who laughs hoarsely, hinges of heavy doors that turn harshly,

(164) *Ibid.*, No. 23, pp. 46—47.

(165) *Ibid.*, No. 181, pp. 220—222.

darkness below and damp flagstones, and a beautiful prisoner whose face is soft and mild and sweet and whose long hair sweeps down to the ground. She turns out to have been Julian's playmate in childhood but is now his prisoner and is forsaken by all her former friends.

Suddenly the tone of the poem changes to one of great sincerity — the artificial Byronic atmosphere of a Gothic tale becomes the description of a deep-felt mystic vision.

«Yet, tell them, Julian, all, I am not doomed to wear
Year after year in gloom and desolate despair ;
A messenger of Hope comes every night to me,
And offers, for short life, eternal liberty.

He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs,
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars ;
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
And visions rise and change which kill me with desire —

«Desire for nothing known in my maturer years
When joy grew mad with awe at counting future tears ;
When, if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunderstorm ;

«But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends ;
The struggle of distress and fierce impatience ends ;
Mute music soothes my breast — unuttered harmony
That I could never dream till earth was lost to me.

«Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals ;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence falls —
Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found ;
Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final bound !

«Oh, dreadful is the check — intense the agony
When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see ;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,
The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain !

«Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less ;
The more that anguish racks the earlier it will bless ;
And robed in fires of Hell, or bright with heavenly shine,
If it but herald Death, the vision is divine». (166)

Apart from the Romantic elements that we have mentioned —

(166) *Ibid.*, No. 190, pp. 236—42, 11, 65—92.

her love of nature, the importance of the imagination and her vision of a brighter, mystic world — there were other elements in Emily Brontë's verse that also belonged to the Romantic Movement. Some of these we have seen in the course of this essay — such as her preoccupation with death and especially of death associated with youth and beauty, her melancholy, her love of night and her love of solitude. Others, too, appear in her poetry, such as her love of liberty and, above all, her compassionate understanding of human frailties. It is, perhaps in her simplicity, however, of outlook, expression and technique, that she was, above all, a Romantic.

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