Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre: Deadly Versus Healing Fantasy in the Lives and Works of the Brontes

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the article's first paragraph.

Dreams and fantasies provide humans with a means of escape from everyday reality. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams carry one "off into another world" (Strachey, 1900, 7). Their aim is to free us from our everyday life (Burdach, 1838, 499) and to provide us with the opportunity to fantasize about how we would like our lives to be or to imagine our lives as worse than they are so that we can cope with our current situation. Dreams can also serve as wish-fulfillments, or the embodiments of fear (Strachey, 1900, 123). However, not all dreams occur in the unconscious; some occur in the conscious state as fantasies. The level of distraction individuals maintain between fantasy and reality can vary considerably. Sometimes, a person loses the ability to discern between reality and fantasy. Such a person may find their fantasies more appealing than their reality and begin to assign more significance to their fantasy lives than their immediate external realities. The fantasies of such imaginative escape artists often take various pieces of their lives and re-synthesize them in a way that helps them to deal with their problems. Branwell, Emily, and Charlotte Bronte all utilized this method; their literary imaginations became, for them, a means of escape to a better life. Their writings represent fantasies that have entered the conscious and have been expressed in a literary form. The fantasies of all three Brontes center on the theme of a great love lost due to circumstances beyond one's control. They had varying degrees of success with this method. Branwell and Emily lost touch with reality and became immersed in their fantasies; they died as a result of their inability to handle reality. Charlotte, on the other hand, was able to cope successfully with her experiences and used her fantasy as a healthy means of expressing her inner feelings.
Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre: Deadly Versus Healing Fantasy in the Lives and Works of the Brontes

by

Jeanne Moose

Yet do not urge me too fast reader. It is no easy thing to dismiss from my imagination the images which have filled it so long. They were my friends and my intimate acquaintance, and I could with little labour describe to you the faces, the voices, the actions of those who peopled my thoughts by day and not seldom stole strangely even into my dreams by night. "Farewell to Angria," Charlotte Bronte

Dreams and fantasies provide humans with a means of escape from everyday reality. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams carry one "off into another world" (Strachey, 1900, 7). Their aim is to free us from our everyday life (Burdach, 1838, 499) and to provide us with the opportunity to fantasize about how we would like our lives to be or to imagine our lives as worse than they are so that we can cope with our current situation. Dreams can also serve as wish-fulfillments, or the embodiments of fear (Strachey, 1900, 123). However, not all dreams occur in the unconscious; some occur in the conscious state as fantasies. The level of distraction individuals maintain between fantasy and reality can vary considerably. Sometimes, a person loses the ability to discern between reality and fantasy. Such a person may find their fantasies more appealing than their reality and begin to assign more significance to their fantasy lives than their immediate external realities. The fantasies of such imaginative escape artists often take various pieces of their lives and re-synthesize them in a way that helps them to deal with their problems. Branwell, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë all utilized this method; their literary imaginations became, for them, a means of escape to a better life. Their writings represent fantasies that have entered the conscious and have been expressed in a literary form. The fantasies of all three Brontës center on the theme of a great love lost due to circumstances beyond one’s control. They had varying degrees of success with this method. Branwell and Emily lost touch with reality and became immersed in their fantasies; they died as a result of their inability to handle reality. Charlotte, on the other hand, was able to cope successfully with her experiences and used her fantasy as a healthy means of expressing her inner feelings.

The Brontës’ family life at the Haworth parsonage was wrought with tragedy and despair. Their father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë, was a poor Irish clergyman; his wife, Maria Branwell Brontë, bore six children before her early death on September 15, 1821, at the age of thirty-eight. Maria was born in 1813, Elizabeth in 1814, Charlotte on April 21, 1816, Branwell in 1817, Emily on July 30, 1818, and Anne on January 17, 1820.
Following her death, Maria's sister Elizabeth came to help out with the six children and the maintenance of the household. However, she was "aloof, fault-finding, and tyrannical, and the real mothering the younger ones had was from the oldest child, Maria, then only seven" (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936, 74). The children lacked a significant mother figure; neither Elizabeth nor Maria could adequately replace the nurturance of a mother in their young lives.

In 1824, Patrick Bronte realized that his children would benefit from formal schooling. The four eldest Bronte daughters were sent to the Cowan Bridge School for Clergymen's Daughters in the hopes that they would one day be able to provide for themselves. Cowan Bridge was designed specifically to assist the daughters of poor clergymen to achieve financial independence. However, the school was certainly not one of the best private schools in England at the time, nor was it a good option for the Brontës, whose fragile physical and mental health were adversely affected while at the school. It was directed by the tyrannical Reverend Carus Wilson, who was primarily interested in indoctrinating the girls in his religious beliefs and in making as much money as possible while doing so. This resulted in miserable conditions for the students.

...the cook was dirty, careless, and extravagant; the house was damp, the dormitories were ill-ventilated. The church (where Mr. Carus Wilson himself preached) was more than two miles' walk from the school, and was unwarmed in winter. The children were afraid to complain to the teachers; the teachers were afraid to complain to Mr. Carus Wilson. (Masson, 22-23)

The school was oppressive, adhering to strict religious and educational principles. The girls were expected to rigidly conform to school policies and to the "fire and brimstone" religion that they were taught. The girls were miserable there, but there was little they could do to change their situation. The girls had been there for less than one year when, as often happened at such institutions during this time period, an epidemic spread throughout the school, resulting in the deaths of Charlotte and Emily's older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth Bronte. Charlotte and Emily left the school shortly thereafter, but not without sustaining lifelong impacts on their physical and mental health.

They returned to Haworth in the summer of 1825 to join their two remaining siblings, Branwell and Anne, and their father, whose great love of literature had a profound influence on them. The children began making up stories to occupy their time and their vivid imaginations. The most well-known of these stories are the chronicles of Gondal and Angria, fantasies based on Branwell's set of toy soldiers that were elaborated into tales of "fair-haired queens and dark heroes, political wars and private love affairs" (Peterson, 1992, 6). In these tales began the love of writing that led to the novels that the three of them would later publish.

Although their present existence was better than at the Cowan Bridge School, life on the moors of Haworth had its drawbacks. The children grew up with a lack of polite social interaction. They were not instructed in middle-class manners and social skills because of their poor background and country environment. They did, however,
experience "a sense of freedom and independence, of which most other girls of their time were deprived" (Gérin, 1982, 113). Unrestricted by the expectations of society, the children were free to develop as individuals with their own views the world. Thus, they developed an "absolute freedom from conventional moral inhibitions" (Gérin, 1982, 109). Later in adulthood, this would come back to haunt them, as they were unable to understand the sophisticated world of higher society. They were unable to successfully negotiate the differences in social attitudes and behaviors which they saw when they left the moors; they failed to understand the intricate workings of society because they had never been exposed to them. This lack of connection to society would shape their lives, as none of them would ever really leave the environs of Haworth for an extended period of time.

In January 1831, Charlotte entered the Roe Head School, where she met her lifelong friend, Ellen Nussey. She and Charlotte were brought together by a "mutual sense of being new and out of place" (Barker, 1994, 172). The two helped each other to feel at home in their new school. They quickly became close friends and often visited each other after they left Roe Head. Ellen was Charlotte’s confidante; she shared many of her life’s events with her and often asked for her advice. Ellen seemed to understand Charlotte’s difficulties with her life. Charlotte would continue to turn to Ellen for advice even after their departure from Roe Head.

After Charlotte returned from Roe Head, she and Emily attended the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels, through the funding of their aunt, in order to acquire the education necessary to open a school of their own. The regimented schedule was too much for Emily and she soon returned to her beloved freedom on the moors. Charlotte, however, remained at the school and became enamored with the married headmaster, Monsieur Heger. In Charlotte's words, he was "a man of power, as to mind, ...but of a very choleric and irritable temperament" (Masson, 54-55). "For the first time in her secluded life she found herself in the society of a man between whom and herself there was strong intellectual sympathy" (Masson, 55). With Monsieur Heger, Charlotte envisioned a relationship of equality and of love; it was the relationship of her fantasies. However, he was not interested in the "small, homely, badly dressed English Miss" (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936, 75). Her unrequited love eventually forced her to return to Haworth, as it was beginning to cause some difficulties for her at the school. She kept in contact with Monsieur Heger, however, sending letters describing the "spiritual starvation she suffer[ed] when deprived of his friendship" (Gérin, 1982, 139).

Monsieur [she wrote in the penultimate letter of the series], the poor have not need of much to sustain them - they ask only for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. But if they are refused the crumbs, they die of hunger. Nor do I, either, need much affection from those I love. ... you showed me of yore a little interest, when I was your pupil in Brussels, and I hold on to the maintenance of that little interest - I hold on to it as I would hold on to life (letter of 9 January 1845). (Gérin, 1982, 139)
Charlotte eventually realized that her hopes of a relationship with Heger were futile and resigned herself to having lost the man she loved.

While she was maintaining hope for a future with Heger, however, Charlotte received a marriage proposal from her friend Ellen Nussey's brother, the Reverend Henry Nussey. It came in the form of a letter in 1839 in which he explained that he wanted to take pupils at his curacy in Donnington, and "that in these circumstances he should want a wife to take care of the pupils, and he asked her to be that wife" (Masson, 48). However, Charlotte refused him, explaining that they were not meant for each other. She wrote to his sister: "And if he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world, weighed in the balance against his smallest wish should be light as air" (Masson, 48). Charlotte would also refuse other men in her quest for a marriage of equality and of love.

Of the two sisters, Emily was the more independent and courageous. Charlotte described her sister's need for freedom as absolute, reflecting: "liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it, she perished" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, 736). Emily loved the freedom that she had on the moors in Haworth and would never leave her home there for an extended period of time. She would literally become ill if she was away for too long. "Emily developed that almost-mania against restraint, that agony under regimentation, which made schools and governess' positions alike, torture and imprisonment to her thereafter" (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936, 76). She needed the freedom which she had on the moors in order to survive.

Emily also had difficulty fitting into society due to her childhood of freedom on the moors. She defied convention and insisted on being her own person. Her personality and lifestyle were criticized by many who saw her as an outsider to society and as a deviant from the feminine norms of the period. Some modern critics made rather damaging remarks.

Emily Brontë is an almost indescribable person. No labels fit her. One may say that she was fiercely reserved and taciturn, wholly introverted, suffering damnably all her life long for the love she could not give or attract, diabolically proud, the grimmest of stoics... (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936, 77)

Unlike Charlotte, Emily had no one outside of her family with whom she could discuss her thoughts. She lacked a significant connection to the world beyond her own home.

Emily spent most of her life in relative isolation from the outside world. She kept to herself and loved to wander the moors alone; they seemed to provide a sort of therapy for her. Her seclusion from society fostered the development of an active imagination which provided her with a rich inner world. This inner world protected her from the outside world in which she felt no part. Her ability to move from the world of reality to the world of imagination is remarkable. One typical entry in her journal significantly demonstrates the ease with which Emily made the transition from the world of reality to her fictional world of Gondal. She "juxtaposes a plea for culinary help from the parsonage housekeeper, Tabby - 'Come Anne pilloputate' - with 'The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine' and 'Sally Mosely is washing in the back kitchen" (Ratchford, 186 as found in Gilbert & Gubar, 1984, 257). These lines revealed that there was little difference
in Emily's thought process between the realms of reality and imagination; she appeared to have been relatively indifferent to the distinctions between the two. This might have been the result of her seclusion and her desire to escape from her actual life. Her fantasies appear to have become real for her, and she seems to have lost the ability to separate the fantasy from the real, especially since the fantasy was so much more appealing than her real life.

Emily and Charlotte had plenty at home from which to want to escape. Branwell was falling deeper into the pit of drug and alcohol abuse that would eventually kill him. He shifted from one job to another and was undependable; he never pursued one goal for very long. When Anne got him a position as a tutor, he became convinced that the lady of the house was passionately in love with him and was attempting to leave her husband for him. This delusion resulted in his dismissal. He became a burden on the family. The physical effects of his lifestyle were apparent to those around him. He was described by a visitor to the parsonage in the following astonishing passage:

'Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great gaunt forehead, the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness... (Leyland, 1886 as found in Masson, 70)

Masson goes on to describe a letter that Branwell sent to John Brown, the sexton at Haworth, as revealing his variable nature. "It is certainly a silly letter, full of pose and swagger, but it is vicious, hypocritical, and unutterably selfish" (52). The family, however, remained devoted to him, even paying off his debts when necessary so that he would not be taken away from them. Patrick had Branwell sleep in his room so that he could keep watch over him and prevent him from harming himself in the night. Emily cared for him, lovingly overlooking his faults; his death apparently devastated her.

At this point, the Bronte sisters had long ago taken to writing as a means of escape. They used their literary imaginations to escape from their everyday life and to fulfill their longing for a better or different life; it was a means of fulfilling their fantasies. They re-synthesized events and people from their lives in their writings, thus building a bridge between reality and fantasy. According to Winifred Gérin's biography (1982), the novels of the Brontes were the expression of a strong personal compulsion, of a need for compensation for loss - loss of liberty, loss of companionship, loss of love. They were written as an outlet for fervent imaginations and wounded feelings, in isolation and among inimical surroundings, as a refuge from the limitations of their lot. (134)
The Brontës' own emotions and thoughts came through in their writing as a natural expression of their dissatisfaction with their lives. This reflects the dreaming process as described by Freud and Hildebrandt:

> whatever dreams may offer, they derive their material from reality and from the intellectual life that revolves around that reality. .. Whatever strange results they may achieve, they can never in fact get free from the real world; and their most sublime as well as their most ridiculous structures must always borrow their basic material either from what has passed before our eyes in the world of the senses or from what has already found a place somewhere in the course of our waking thoughts - in other words from what we have already experienced either externally or internally. (Hildebrandt, 1875, 10 as found in Strachey, 1900, 10)

The Brontës took pieces of their own reality and fantasies and worked them into their novels as a means of dealing with their troubled lives; their writings released their pent-up emotions and troubled thoughts in an acceptable form. This process satisfied them much as a profound dream satisfies the dreamer.

They focused on the aspects of their lives which most affected them, both the good and the bad. This is what fantasies do; they pick up meaningful bits and pieces of our lives and re-synthesize them in the imagination. Freud cited the philosopher J.G.E. Maass in his attempt to define how this process works.

>'Experience confirms our view that we dream most frequently of the things on which our warmest passions are centered. And this shows that our passions must have an influence on the production of our dreams. The ambitious man dreams of the laurels he has won (or imagines he has won) or of those he has still to win; while the lover is busied in his dreams with the object of his sweet hopes. .. All the sensual desires and repulsions that slumber in the heart can, if anything sets them in motion, cause a dream to arise from the ideas that are associated with them or cause those ideas to intervene in a dream that is already present.' (1805, 1, 168, & 173 as found in Winterstein, 1912 as found in Strachey, 1900, 8)

Those pieces of life that the Brontës chose to include in their novels are those which meant the most to them and which had the greatest impact on their lives. Both good and bad, these people and life experiences had made them who they were. Their fantasies reflected their desire to escape from their realities into a realm where they were better able to express themselves.

However, these fantasies could get out of control if not handled properly. Branwell's life was an example of this loss of control. In his Northangerland stories, Branwell created a beautiful love story between his main character, Northangerland, and his wife, Mary Percy. The closeness of their relationship was expressed in Branwell's
poem "The End of All," which was written on the occasion of Mary's death.

In that unpitying winter's night,
When my own wife - my Mary - died,
I, by my fire's declining light,
Sat comfortless, and silent sighed.
While burst unchecked, grief's bitter tide,
As I, methought, when she was gone,
Not hours, but years like this must bide,
And wake, and weep, and watch alone...

I could not bear the thoughts which rose,
Of what had been and what must be,
But still the dark night would disclose
Its sorrow-pictured prophecy:
Still saw I - miserable me,
Long - long nights else - in lonely gloom,
With time-bleached locks and trembling knee,
Walk aidless - hopeless - to my tomb.

(Barker, 1994, 524)

'Northangerland was heartbroken over his wife's death and only foresaw a life of misery without her. Their love was so great that he could not survive after her death.

This fantasy which Branwell created soon took over his life. He began to lose touch with reality as he became obsessed with living out his fantasy. It seemed as if he desired to find a love as great as the one he imagined Northangerland and Mary had. This fantasy crossed into his reality when he became enamored with Mrs. Robinson, whose children he was tutoring. He was so completely obsessed that he believed she was willing to leave her husband and her children for him. When Branwell's passion was revealed, he was dismissed from his post. However, he was unable to put it behind him. He took to drinking and to drugs as a means of escape from the painful reality of his unrequited love. He had lived for so long in the fantasy that he was unable to live in the reality. This inability led to his early death.

In contrast to her brother, Emily Brontë wrote out her fantasies as a result of her disillusionment with her reality. Her novel, Wuthering Heights, has been called a "Bible of Hell" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984). Drawn from her life experiences, it tells the story of the ultimately dysfunctional family.

Emily creates a narrative which "introduces us to a world where men battle for the favors of apparently high-spirited and independent women" (Schorer as found in Sale, 1972, 376 as found in Gilbert & Gubar, 1984, 249). Wuthering Heights has been interpreted as Emily's attempt to prove to Charlotte that the woman "is the dominant factor in romantic love," not the man (Ratchford, 1955, 22 as found in Gilbert & Gubar, 1984, 256). Her heroine, Catherine, is the central figure in the novel around which all of
the conflict revolves. She controls the men in her life and refuses to relinquish the power which she has over them.

In Catherine, Emily's love of freedom and sense of independence recur in a character who is passionately loved by all around her. However, the two sides of Catherine's personality - the acquiescent side that wants to be loved and the rebellious side that wants to control everything and everyone - are constantly at war and she is never able to reconcile them; she dies as a result of trying to express both sides at the same time. According to Terry Eagleton's (1992) Marxist study of the novel:

Wuthering Heights... confronts the tragic truth that the passion and society it presents are not fundamentally reconcilable - that there remains at the deepest level an ineradicable contradiction between them which refuses to be unlocked, which obtrudes itself as the very stuff and secret of experience. (400)

This contradiction is embodied in the character of Catherine, who is caught between two worlds and does not know which way to turn. Just as Emily "eluded those who sought to pin her down or hold her" (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936, 77), Catherine resists any attempts to restrain her independence and strength. Catherine's childhood desire for a whip represents her defiance of the wishes of others around her; she wants to be in control of her own life and to prevent anyone else from attempting to take that control away from her. Emily described her own philosophy of life in words that could easily have been Catherine's. "I'll walk where my own nature would be leading: /It vexes me to choose another guide" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, 738). This is the philosophy that both Emily and Catherine follow. Neither one wants to submit to the rules of others. They need to be able to express their independence and their strength in order to survive. Emily is able to utilize Catherine as her means of expressing this, as she is unable to do so in her own life. However, they are both unable to successfully assimilate into a culture outside of the moors in which they were raised.

This inability to integrate themselves into society is related to their lack of a significant mother figure in their lives. After her mother dies, Catherine has no one to turn to except Nelly Dean and Heathcliff. As a servant girl close to her own age, Nelly cannot provide the guidance and nurturance that Catherine needs. However, she is the novel's "most important mother figure" (Wion, 1992, 328), as she serves as a mother figure for the children of the second generation in the novel. In his psychoanalytic approach to the novel, Philip K. Wion (1992) analyzes Nelly's role. "As such, she may represent, in part, an attempt by Emily Brontë to come to terms with the loss of her own mother, by becoming, in fantasy, a kind of mother to herself" (328).

Heathcliff is too much in love with Catherine to serve as a role model; he is too willing to submit to her control. However, he, too, acts as a mother figure for her, in a sense. According to Philip K. Wion (1992):

Emotionally, Heathcliff is the world to Catherine, just as the mother is the world to the symbiotic child: "If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger." (318)
Catherine's filial attachment to Heathcliff represents the attachment between a mother and child. Heathcliff cannot, however, provide the guidance and nurturance that Catherine needs in order to be properly socialized. If anything, the socialization which he helps her to achieve is the exact opposite of what she needed. He encourages her anti-social behaviors by allowing her to control him. He is the obstacle to her socialization into the world of Thrushcross Grange because he will not allow her to let go of their relationship. Their relationship is so powerful for her that it will not completely release her into society.

Thus, she grows up without the guidance that she needs to become properly socialized into her world. While she does not resist Mrs. Linton's efforts to feminize her during her recovery at Thrushcross Grange, she does not visibly retain what she has learned. She soon returns to her headstrong and rebelliously independent ways because she had no constant reinforcement of how a lady was supposed to act in society. This lack will repeatedly come back to haunt her, as it did Emily. Catherine, however, is not Wuthering Heights' only orphan. In her recent reinterpretation of the Brontës' lives based on recently discovered texts, Juliet Barker (1994) speaks of the novel's orphans:

Emily... seems to have created an orphan world. Virtually every child, including Heathcliff, Catherine and Hindley in the first generation and Linton, the young Catherine and Hareton in the second, loses at least one parent, usually the mother.

... The relationship between the two cousins, Linton and Catherine, particularly, is essentially that of a mother surrogate and her child. (139)

All of these children are affected by the loss of their mothers. There is an overwhelming absence of mothers in the novel as a whole, which leads to the improper socialization of the children and to the attraction which rebellion, strength, and independence hold for them.

This image of rebellion also echoes Emily's experiences with her brother. Branwell recurs as Heathcliff in her novel. Both men are destructive to their families and often only consider themselves. Catherine's love for Heathcliff can be interpreted as Emily's love for her brother. She was the one who was consistently patient with him and who nursed him through his episodes of drug and alcohol abuse. Once he died, Emily felt as though she had little reason to live, for she had lost one of her best friends. This attachment is reflected in her novel.

Wuthering Heights reads like the dream of an opium-eater; and there is little doubt that, while the atmosphere of the book was her very own - the pure, wild, rainswept atmosphere of her beloved, purple-black moors - the ugly human drama - the story of Heathcliff and Catherine - was Emily Bronte's weird and powerful interpretation of the ravings of her drug-sodden brother. (Masson, 74)

The impact which Branwell's decline had on Emily is apparent in the novel. Her feelings for him also come through. No matter how awful he became, she still loved him. This appears as Catherine's unconditional love for Heathcliff.
Critics have noted similarities between Branwell's feelings for his female employer and Heathcliff's feelings for Catherine. Branwell became so obsessed with his fantasy relationship with Mrs. Robinson that he was forced to leave his position as tutor of her children; it was one of the destructive forces of his life. Similarly, Heathcliff is obsessed with Catherine, especially after he discovers that she has married Edgar Linton instead of him. This sends him into a state of both rage and despair in which he, like Branwell, compares himself to his lady's husband, who cannot possibly satisfy her in the same ways that he can. In 1883, A. Mary F. Robinson outlined this connection. The extent of Branwell's obsession is apparent in his anguishing comment:

'My own life without her will be hell. What can the so-called love of her wretched sickly husband be to her compared with mine?' (Peterson, 1992, 293)

These words are echoed by Heathcliff when he speaks of his beloved Catherine's marriage to Edgar Linton:

'Two words would comprehend my future death and hell; existence after losing her would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love in eighty years as much as I could in a day.' (Peterson, 1992, 293)

Their obsessions become their lives. They truly believe that these women really only love them because they could not possibly love another. They need these women to survive. Just as Emily could not live after Branwell's death, so Heathcliff cannot survive after Catherine's death. He is completely distraught and is overwhelmed by his grief. It takes over his life. The grief which Branwell's poem "The End of All" described can be found in Emily's description of Heathcliff's grief. He still feels Catherine's presence and maintains his emotional ties to her. This grief becomes a destructive force in his life, just as Branwell's grief over the loss of Mrs. Robinson destroyed his life. He thinks only of her and spends the remainder of his life destroying those who destroyed her. When he finally dies, he asks to be buried beside her so that they may be together in eternity, as they were intended to be.

Heathcliff has also been interpreted as representative of Emily's own hidden self (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936). Her family's pent-up emotions and lack of love deeply affected her, although she never revealed the extent of the emotional baggage that she carried. She released this hidden self through her writing, as it was the only socially acceptable way to do so. This hidden self casts a shadow over the novel through the character of Heathcliff. He performs a function for Catherine which Emily was lacking in her own life. Catherine expresses her hidden self through Heathcliff and her desire to control everyone. She asks for a whip and also receives Heathcliff, another object which she can control and manipulate to control others. In Gilbert & Gubar's (1984) view, "as Catherine's whip he is (and she herself recognizes this) an alternative self or double for
her, a complementary addition to her being who fleshes out all her lacks the way a bandage might staunch a wound" (265). Through Heathcliff, Catherine can express her "other" self, thus also providing a medium for Emily to express her "other" self.

This tremendous release of emotions and the revelation of her hidden self has been viewed as extremely traumatic for Emily. She had finally acknowledged the side of herself that she had buried deep within and perhaps not realized was present within her until she wrote the novel. Some modern critics have said that her early death was related to this release of her hidden self.

One cannot even say that she died too soon to complete her work; her work was already completed and she died of its completion. Her death is next door to suicide. She had given birth to the most awful exposition of a hidden self that ever found its way into words, and life after that profound shattering of a terrible lifelong secrecy was no longer possible. From her childhood Emily never spoke her secret thoughts. When the iron repression broke and she spoke them at last, she died of the cataclysmic shattering. (Kunitz & Haycraft 1936, 78)

The image of dying as a result of childbirth is also present in the text of the novel itself. Both childbirth scenes which Emily presents result in the death of the new mother not long after the birth. Frances gave birth to Hareton and then died, having given life to the next generation of this dysfunctional family. Catherine dies after giving birth to her namesake daughter; she had brought a new version of herself into the world and thus could no longer exist. As soon as Catherine is born, her mother is referred to as simply her mother; she has lost her personhood. "About twelve o'clock, that night, was born the Catherine you saw at Wuthering Heights, a puny, seven months' child; and two hours after the mother died..." (E. Brontë, 1990, 127). This resembles Emily's death after having given birth to her hidden inner self by means of her novel; her escape from reality was complete as she had completely immersed herself in the world of her imagination. She no longer belonged to the world of reality; she was a part of the fantasy which she had created. According to Winifred Gérin (1982):

Wuthering Heights was the natural outcome of Emily's withdrawn and unworldly existence, first at Law Hill and then in her father's parsonage on the Yorkshire moors, the culmination of years of intense spiritual experience in which the visionary world of her daydreams became as present to her imagination as the material one did to her eyes. (134)

Wuthering Heights is Emily's fantasy, yet it still incorporates her reality. There are enough ties to her reality to make it a novel which reflects her own upbringing in the isolation of the moors. Her sister Charlotte reminded critics of these elements of Emily's upbringing and validated Emily's representation of their home environment. According to Charlotte, Emily "accurately reproduced the rough, strong utterance, the harshly manifested passions, the unbridled aversions, and headlong partialities" of the area in which they grew up (Peterson, 1992, 291). Emily based her fantasy on the world which
she knew. Thus, it is a coarse and rugged story, yet those very characteristics lend the novel a unique character as an expression of Emily herself.

Charlotte's unique character comes through in her work as well. Her novel, *Jane Eyre*, was criticized soon after its publication as "the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit" (Elizabeth Rigney, 1848 as found in Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, 347). In 1853, Anne Mosley stated that the novel seemed "to have been written by 'an alien... from society [who was] amenable to none of its laws" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, 347). This recognition of the spirit of the author is still discussed in the present day by Gilbert and Gubar (1985) who stated that Charlotte's protagonist, Jane, speaks with "surprising authority about a woman's desire for liberty -- 'for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer" (350). Often viewed as autobiographical in some respects, *Jane Eyre* faithfully represents various pieces of Charlotte's life as she attempts to sort them out and deal with them in her own mind. Events and people from Charlotte's life are easily traced in her novel; they have, however, been re-synthesized to enact Charlotte's fantasy of her life.

The character of Jane represents Charlotte's good side, the side that most people saw. Jane is Charlotte, both as she is and as she would like to be, and she was created to be just that. An early anonymous critic stated: "in *Jane Eyre*, the heroine of the piece, we have, in some measure, a portrait of the writer" (Lewes & Lady Eastlake, 1968, 14). In response to her sisters' belief that heroines must always be beautiful in order to be interesting, Charlotte replied: "I will prove to you that you are wrong. I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours" (Masson, 66).

Charlotte's inner self also, however, comes through in the character of Bertha, Mr. Rochester's mad first wife. Bertha is the embodiment of Charlotte's pent-up emotions and inner turmoil which she had suppressed over the years. According to Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation (1984), Jane's confrontation with Bertha is "an encounter... with her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage'" (339). Jane and Charlotte must both confront their "other" selves in order to be successful. Bertha represents Charlotte's "other" self which she repressed from view; she is the antithesis of Jane. She serves as the medium which acts out Jane's secret fantasies. Gilbert and Gubar (1984) analyze this by looking at connections between Jane's feelings and Bertha's actions. "Specifically, every one of Bertha's appearances - or, more accurately, her manifestations - has been associated with an experience (or repression) on Jane's part" (360). For example, Jane's hidden fears about her marriage are manifested in Bertha's action of destroying her wedding veil. She violently accomplishes what Jane secretly desires.

Like Charlotte and Jane, Bertha is unacceptable in society because of her rebellious nature. Mr. Rochester must hide her from sight in order to prevent people from discovering her and her insanity, much as Charlotte must keep her own "other" self hidden from view for fear of being outcast even further from society. She must repress her emotions and her love of Heger in order to remain acceptable in society. Jane must also repress her emotions in order to belong.

This feeling of not belonging can be traced to Jane's lack of a significant and supportive mother figure. The impact that this had on Charlotte is revealed through the impact that it has on Jane. She lacks guidance and is forever searching for someone in whom she can confide. While Charlotte finds her sisters and her friends, such as Ellen
Nussey, Jane finds Helen Burns, Miss Temple, and the Rivers sisters. Both turn to literature as another means of escape and comfort: Charlotte creates it, while Jane reads it and listens to Bessie’s tales with enthusiasm. Due to their lack of a mother figure, both Charlotte and Jane grow up without appropriate training to fulfill their role in society. They both experience difficulty in "fitting in" among those around them, unless they are in work situations where their roles are clearly defined. As a result, both harbor radical notions about life; both desire a marriage of equality, not of convenience, and both reveal a desire for financial independence.

Charlotte and Jane both have expectations above their births. They become governess as a means of supporting themselves, even though neither is truly happy in that situation. It is a demanding and little recognized job which places them in a subordinate position. This role forces them to repress their independence and feelings in order to keep their positions. Through Jane's experiences, Charlotte expresses her feelings about the difficulties that a governess often experiences, such as the ambiguity of her place in the family, and the strain that this places on the governess.

Charlotte's experiences at the Cowan Bridge School recur in Jane Eyre as the Lowood School. The significance of Lowood can be found by dissecting its name. In Middle English, "wood" meant "mad" or "insane." With her extensive literary background, Charlotte may well have been aware of this connection and thus intentionally included it in her novel. In this respect, the name of the school serves as a symbol of the madness that is apparent throughout the novel. Moreover, "Lowood" teaches girls of low social status how to rigidly conform to society's expectations. The students are not allowed to express any creativity or originality, especially that which goes against religious doctrines. Due to the importance Charlotte places on religion, she grows to "resent intensely the false image of it presented... at the Clergy Daughters' School by the tyrants and hypocrites who administered the school" (Gérin, 1982, 139). As they were at Cowan Bridge, the girls at Lowood are underfed, poorly clothed, and live in rooms with no heat. Jane is miserable there; she quickly learns that she must conform or be punished. She has little control over her situation.

The school is run by the tyrannical and imposing Reverend Brocklehurst. A transposition of Mr. Carus Wilson, he similarly cows teachers into subordinance. Miss Temple, for instance, is afraid to speak out against these deplorable conditions for fear of what will happen if she does. Reverend Brocklehurst is a miser and uses his power to subject the girls to strict authority; if they do not submit to his will, he takes more away from them and saves more money for himself. Meals that are inedible still must be eaten and heat must be conserved; girls are made to dress in the freezing cold and attend Sunday church services in a church with no heat. As is typical of such schools, disease spreads like wildfire among the students at Lowood. Jane loses her best friend and confidante, Helen Burns, and many of her classmates during an epidemic. This echoes Charlotte's experience of the deaths of her two sisters at the Cowan Bridge School.

**I would like to thank Dr. Margot Backus for this interpretation.
Helen Burns is characterized as an idealized version of Charlotte's sister Maria, who also died as a result of the Cowan Bridge epidemic. Helen is Jane's closest friend at Lowood and she represents a type of surrogate mother for her, as she is older than Jane. She, like Jane and the Bronte's, is consistently ill-treated by the faculty at the school; yet, she remains saintly and pure until the end. Helen has been criticized as being almost "too good to be true." She is a Christ figure in that she is a martyr for the girls at the school, and for Jane. She believes in God and follows his teachings.

'Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how he acts; make his word your rule, and his conduct your example.... Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you.' (C. Brontë, 1987, 50)

Helen teaches Jane, just as Christ teaches his followers, to love everyone, no matter how they treat you. She peacefully encounters her death, which echoes Maria Branwell's death. "I rely implicitly on his power, and confide wholly in his goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to him, reveal him to me" (C. Brontë, 1987, 71). Secure in her faith that she is going to a better place, she is almost serene. She serves as Jane's role model, just as Maria Brontë served as a role model for her younger sisters.

Charlotte's experiences with romantic love also shape her novel and the conditions of Jane's love experiences. Henry Nussey's proposal resurfaces in St. John Rivers' proposal to Jane. He is leaving to become a missionary in India and wishes Jane to accompany him to assist him in his work. However, he insists that they must be married first. Jane knows that to accept him would be to accept a loveless marriage of convenience and unhappiness. She would be miserable in such a life.

...he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock... He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all... Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love... and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. (C. Brontë, 1987, 356)

Despite the opportunity for a new life, Jane refuses him with the same reasoning that Charlotte uses to refuse Henry Nussey. Neither woman could bear to be trapped in a loveless marriage. They desire a marriage of love and equality where they can express their independence without fear of rejection.

Charlotte's ideal marriage of equality is represented in her life by her infatuation with M. Heger and, in her novel, by Jane's love for Mr. Rochester. While Mr. Rochester is not incredibly physically attractive, Jane is attracted to his mind and his person; she sees beyond his physical appearance to the person beneath the surface. She knows that he can be tender and loving and that a marriage with him would ensure these emotions. He also
respects her as an equal; he does not treat her as an inferior or a servant. "My bride is here, he said, again drawing me to him, 'because my equal is here, and my likeness" (C. Brontë, 1987, 223). Rochester's proposal to Jane reflects his need for a marriage of equality as well. He loves Jane because she is so like him and he knows that; because of this, they will be happy together.

Jane’s relationship with Mr. Rochester is the idealized version of Charlotte's relationship with M. Heger. Unlike Charlotte, however, Jane gets her man in the end. After all of the difficulties with Bertha, Jane and Rochester find their way back to one another and live a life of blissful happiness together. This is Charlotte's fantasy of her projected life with Monsieur Heger. She hoped that they would be happy together if his wife were no longer in the picture. Thus, in her novel, she effectively removed Jane's obstacle to a happy marriage, Bertha; Jane got her man once that obstacle was removed.

Although there is no record of Heger’s words to Charlotte when she confessed her feelings, Heger seems to have cultivated similar romantic attachments with other female students. His words and demeanor toward them led them to believe that he was in love with them. Heger's words to one of these students lend easily to this interpretation.

‘...you, with that little air, affectionate undoubtedly, but independent and resolute, firmly determined not to allow any opinion without being previously convinced, demanding to be convinced before allowing yourself to submit - in fact, just as I knew you, my dear L---, and as I have esteemed and loved you.' (Heger as found in Weir, 256-257 as found in Barker, 1994, 419)

In the novel, Mr. Rochester uses a similar tone when speaking to Jane.

'I never met your likeness, Jane: you please me, and you master me - you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart: and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced - conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win.' (C. Brontë, 1987, 229)

What innocent and lonely young girl would not fall in love with a man who spoke to her in this way? Heger and Rochester play on the girls' emotions and their sensitivity, as well as their longing to have a fulfilling romance. In Charlotte's case, she misread Heger’s words and believed that he was in love with her. She turned the tables in Jane Eyre and allowed Jane's fantasy of marrying Rochester to come true in the end.

Charlotte used Jane's character as a means of releasing her feelings for M. Heger in a socially acceptable manner. With the success of Jane’s relationship with Rochester, Charlotte proves that her fantasy relationship with Heger was not totally ill-founded. By exiling Jane to Marsh End, she punishes her for falling in love with a married man, but
ultimately she rewards her for her endurance and undying love for him. In her recent analytical biography of the Brontës, Juliet Barker (1994) states:

In the essential morality of the tale... whereby the heroine unwittingly sins by falling in love with a married man, suffers in separating from him and is redeemed and rewarded in the end - it is almost as if Charlotte was trying to prove to herself... that she had taken the right path. (510)

Jane marries Mr. Rochester in the end, which provides validation for Charlotte's dreams of a relationship with M. Heger; such a relationship was possible and Jane's success proved it for her. Although Charlotte was wrong in imagining that she had a future with Heger, such a future could have happened, the novel suggests, if his wife had been removed from the picture.

Bertha is not only a literal obstacle to Jane's happiness, but she is also a symbolic one. As Jane's "other" self, she must be destroyed before Jane can be happy. Her death represents Jane's release of the emotions which she has kept hidden inside for so long. Now that Jane has successfully let go of her past, she can look to the future with hope. The shadow of her past has been lifted. Thus, Jane succeeds in life where Charlotte has failed. She was able to remove the obstacles to her happiness with Rochester and is redeemed for her sin of loving a married man through her suffering without him. This success in the fantasy allowed Charlotte to experience happiness in her reality. She was able to successfully negotiate between the fantasy and the reality.

The fantasy process has been defined by many psychiatrists, including Sigmund Freud, as one in which a person takes pieces of their reality and re-synthesizes them into a fantasy life which allows the person to escape from reality. The Brontës used their literary imaginations to achieve this. Branwell and Emily became too dependent on their fantasy lives and lost touch with reality; their fantasies became their reality. This loss resulted in their early deaths. Charlotte, however, was able to maintain a healthy balance between fantasy and reality. Her fantasies provided an outlet for those thoughts and emotions which she could not express in reality. She was able to deal with her past and move on with her life. She was able to survive.
Works Cited


