

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR AND HER WORK

III.1 Biographical Sketch of the Author

Born on July 30, 1818, Emily Bronte was one of the six children who arrived in rapid succession in the eight years following the marriage of Patrick Bronte, a clergyman of the Church of England, and Maria Branwell in 1812. Soon after moving from Thorton to Haworth, which is also in Yorkshire, Mrs. Bronte died of cancer in September 1821 at the age of thirty-nine, leaving Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne motherless. In due time their Aunt Branwell came to take care of them.

Mr. Bronte taught his son himself, but in 1824 he sent all the girls except Anne to a school for the daughters of clergy at Cowan Bridge, fifty miles from Haworth. Due to harsh discipline, unremitting work, appalling bad food and cold, both Maria and Elizabeth fell ill and had to be sent home to die in 1825. The other two daughters were brought home by Mr. Bronte and the remaining four children stayed together at home for the next five years.

They educated themselves at home by reading whatever they could. In 1826, when they were aged six to ten, their father gave them some wooden soldiers. Their interest was stimulated and they began their career as juvenile authors writing romances about imaginary worlds - the kingdoms of Angria and Gondal. Most of Emily's poetry seems to have been written for her Gondal saga, though it may also reflect her own experience. Until her middle twenties, Emily still wrote Gondal poems and stories.

There were three occasions in which Emily was away from home: in 1835 for three months at Roe Head School; in 1837 as a teacher near Halifax; and in 1824 at Madame Heger's school in Brussels. She was seriously homesick when she stayed at Roe Head because she missed the parsonage, her preferred world. She loved her home and the surrounding moors very much. From her earliest years Emily loved to walk from home to the church and wander on the moors. During these frequent walks she must have contemplated on the harmonious cosmic order of the universe. Having seen so little of the world, she concentrated her attention on two isolated houses and a moor which became her one and only novel, **Wuthering Heights**.

Yorkshire, before the industrial revolution, was pretty well cut off from the influence of the outside world. It would have seemed as strange and foreign to us as *Wuthering Heights* to Mr. Lockwood in the novel. The people lived as primitive as those in the time of Queen Elizabeth, as simple and superstitious as Mrs. Dean, the maid, who was a local woman, was very influential to Emily's writings. She was over fifty when she came to help them, and had memories stretching back to the 1780's which is also the time of the story in *Wuthering Heights*. Tales of bygone time were able to arouse Emily's imagination.

In autumn of 1845, Charlotte discovered Emily's poems and finally overcome her reluctance to publish them. In May 1846, a selection of poems by the three sisters was published under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Meanwhile, the sisters were writing their first novels: *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily and *Agnes Grey* by Anne. When Emily began her novel, she was still writing about Gondal. What is important in the Gondal world is not the story, nor the moral sense, but the emotion. Mark Schorer says that Gondal is a world of sensibility unleashed from responsibility a world of declaiming ghosts, where passions and sufferings always

overshadow their motives (1962:185). And in this kind of world Emily Bronte lived for 20 years. Obviously her Gondal saga contributed a lot to the writing of *Wuthering Heights*.

Meanwhile, Branwell's health declined due to his addiction to drink and opium. He died in September 1848. Emily caught cold at his funeral which fatally developed into tuberculosis. Refusing medical treatment, she died stoically like Heathcliff on December 19, 1848.

III.2 Synopsis of the Novel *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights starts towards the end of the story. It opens with a date - 1801. Mr. Lockwood, a tenant at Thrushcross Grange, is paying a visit to his landlord, Mr. Heathcliff, who lives at *Wuthering Heights*. Being fascinated by this strong, gipsy-like man, although he is not welcome, Lockwood plans for another visit. On this occasion, he meets Cathy, Heathcliff's cool, disagreeable daughter-in-law; and Hareton Earnshaw, a rough, unkempt young man. Both were treated with hatred and contempt by Heathcliff.

As it begins to snow, Lockwood is forced to stay overnight. The maid takes him to a small bedroom which is not normally

used. There he finds books inscribed with the names of Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff and Catherine Linton. One of the books is Catherine's diary. It tells how as children, Catherine and Heathcliff were punished, especially Heathcliff, by Hindley, her brother.

When Lockwood eventually falls asleep, in his nightmare he hears the knocking of a branch against the window. When he puts his hand out of the window, instead of the branch, he touches the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand. A child's voice wails that she has been a waif, lost on the moors for twenty years, and begs to be let in. Lockwood's cries arouse Heathcliff, who immediately emerges into the room. Lockwood's confused explanation infuriates his host. In spite of his uncontrollable grief, Heathcliff manages to retain a superficial courtesy towards Lockwood, even accompanying him back to Thrushcross Grange. There Lockwood asks Mrs. Dean, the housekeeper, to tell him the story of his strange landlord.

With her narration the story begins, starting from a point some time before the events recorded in Catherine's diary. Mr. Earnshaw, who lives in Wuthering Heights, brings home from Liverpool a foundling boy whom he calls Heathcliff. He

tells his son Hindley and his daughter Catherine to treat Heathcliff as a brother. The girl welcomes the newcomer, except Hindley, jealous of his father's affection, bullies the little boy whenever he has the chance.

The death of Mr. Earnshaw marks the breaking up of the traditional way of life at the household. Hindley, now married, degrades Heathcliff to the position of a servant. Catherine, though fundamentally attached to Heathcliff, is attracted to marry Edgar Linton, a handsome, rich gentleman who lives at Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff runs away for three years and then return to revenge himself on them.

Meanwhile Hindley is almost insane with grief when his wife Frances dies after the birth of their son Hareton. Hindley takes to drinking and neglects his son. It becomes very easy for Heathcliff to get Hindley into his clutches, wins his property by gambling, and finally drives him to death.

Catherine, overjoyed to see Heathcliff again, persuades her husband to receive and befriend him. Isabella, Edgar's sister, however, becomes infatuated with Heathcliff. After an angry scene between Edgar and Heathcliff, Catherine locks herself in her room for three days. She falls ill with a

brain fever. In the confusion Isabella elopes with Heathcliff. Catherine never fully recovers. She dies giving birth to a seven month daughter, little Cathy. Heathcliff is overcome with grief for he is still in love with her. His grief makes him torment Isabella until she leaves him and runs to a place near London. There she bears her son, Linton Heathcliff.

Fifteen years have gone by, during which Hareton, Cathy and Linton have grown up. Trying to revenge on the second generation, Heathcliff tricks Cathy into marrying his sickly son, Linton, so that he may own both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Soon after they marry, Edgar dies and not long after that Linton dies too. Young Cathy, now a widow and penniless, receives from her father-in-law the same brutal treatment as Hareton does.

Mrs. Dean's narration stops here. Mr. Lockwood goes to Wuthering Heights again to say goodbye before he leaves for London. Meanwhile, he witnesses Cathy is mocking Hareton due to his inability to read, and overhears Heathcliff's mutter that he likes Hareton because he resembles the dead Catherine.

In 1802 Lockwood returns to visit Wuthering Heights. To his surprise, he overhears through the open window Cathy teaching her cousin Hareton to read. Heathcliff has been dead for three months and there is a gradual change in the relationship between Cathy and Hareton. They become closer to each other and plan to get married and move to Thrushcross Grange.

Mrs. Dean recounts the story of Heathcliff's death to Mr. Lockwood. Eversince Catherine's death, Heathcliff has been haunted by memories of her, and now he begins to see her ghost. He believes he has seen Catherine again and therefore longs for a closer reunion. He tells Mrs. Dean that when he dies, he must be buried beside Catherine's grave. He has bribed the sexton to loosen one side of her coffin and one side of his coffin so that his corpse could disintegrate with Catherine's. He does not want any minister at his funeral. He locks himself in Catherine's room and he starves himself to death.

Heathcliff is buried according to his wish. The young couple dwell happily at Thrushcross Grange. Some villagers declare they have seen the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine around the Heights and on the moor. As Lockwood goes home, he

passes the graves of Edgar and Heathcliff with Catherine between them. He wonders that anyone could imagine the dead not sleeping peacefully there.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS