

The Creative Soul of Emily Bronte: A Study of the Role of Self-reflective Learning Theory in the Development of a Writing Genius

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Abstract

Emily Bronte has been the subject of extensive research documenting her strength of character and independent nature as a woman and as a nineteenth-century author. Her reclusive nature captures the interests of independent learners and scholars alike. This paper adds to the current body of knowledge, investigating evidence of self-reflective learning theory as a guiding influence in Emily Bronte's every day life, leading to her ultimate writing talent. It chronicles Emily Bronte's life as a means for discovery, looking at how creative success is formed within a woman writer who has had little to no formal education. Questions considered include: "How does someone learn to write well?" and "Is there evidence that lifestyle and personality combine to produce a successfully creative individual?" Emily Bronte's early life is here examined through her few remaining letters, as well as letters of other family members and friends, journal entries, essays, and poetry to uncover how her lifestyle may have created her successful writing abilities, or at least encouraged their development, later culminating in the writing of her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*.

Introduction

Many Bronte researchers have tried to put their own interpretations upon the Bronte novels, characters, settings, poetry, and more. This paper does not seek to interpret, but rather to discover from Emily Bronte's own words any evidence of her mastery of the art of creative writing. The goal is not to interpret upon whom from her life Heathcliff might have been based, if anyone, or from what sprang her inspiration for the inter-generational story line of her only novel. Many others have already attempted this, some to the original author's credit and others not. This research into Emily Bronte's life, learning, and writings stems from a sincere desire to glean a greater insight into how someone so truly talented as a writer honed her skills with such little formal training. The search is for a discovery of reflection in practice by letting Emily Bronte's words speak for themselves, as much as possible, and to uncover to what extent Emily may have used self-reflection as a means for self-discovery and self-improvement.

This study also seeks to uncover whether or not Emily Bronte's self-reflective practices contributed to her writing abilities and if so, how and to what extent. As very little of Emily's original personal writings have been preserved, it is a challenge to accurately locate truthful representations of her self-reflection in practice. These do exist, however, in what remain of her letters, diary and journal papers, and essays. Even her poetry shows reflection and may perhaps reveal the most about the creative soul of this near elusive individual. The words of others concerned with the accurate representation of Emily Bronte can and will be relied upon as well, especially the words of family members. Bronte's use of reflective learning theory in practice adds a new dimension to this well researched and respected woman writer of the nineteenth century.

Definition of Self-reflection

To reflect upon something means to truly think deeply about something, to ponder over it, perhaps evaluate its worth or potential. “Reflection includes thinking about one's own actions and thoughts, taking other people's point of view, and understanding oneself” (Zuckerman 2004, 9). Self-reflection would then mean to truly think about some aspect of self. Self-reflection could mean searching for value and meaning in something one has done or something one has created. Self-reflection could also mean creating a project to express self.

Writing in a journal, for example, is an expression of self where the writer might share inner feelings about what he or she has done or not done, or the writer might share plans for the future. A second step would follow in this form of self-reflection. The writer would return to the original journal entry at an agreed-upon future time to analyze how much of what was proposed to have happened has actually taken place as planned. This activity could offer opportunity for self-analysis and self-evaluation, to judge good and bad qualities in one's self. This self-reflection would provide opportunity for looking at successes and failures with the goal of making one's future better than one's past, or even present, situation.

Expressions of creative self-reflection take many forms. For writers, going beyond journal writing and diary entries, such self-reflective expressions often include letters or forms of short informal writings including poetry and short autobiographical pieces. Short stories and novels even comprise a reflection of self for many. Visual artists express self-reflection in sketches, drawings, sculptures, paintings, or another creative medium. Self-reflection can bring about a sense of self-fulfillment for the creative individual, or become the basis for self-examination with the purpose of self-improvement, as stated in the previous paragraph. Self-reflective creations are often made in response to some particular event in one's life or as a means to express inner doubts, anxieties, or some otherwise unexpressed emotion.

The use of self-reflection as a powerful learning tool can be traced back to John Dewey, philosopher and respected leader in education. Dewey stresses the value of reflective thinking and the advancement of individual learning. He says, “Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a *con*-sequence—a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each outcome in turn leans back on, or refers to, its predecessors” (1933, 4). Another researcher of self-reflection and learning states that “critical reflection seems to be a developmental process, rooted in experience” (Taylor 2008, 11).

For this research paper, self-reflection refers to the act of creating some form of personal expression (visual art or writing) which reveals a person's [Emily Bronte's] inner self, including emotions, thoughts, or reactions, at any given point in time. It also means using writing as an expression of one's self for the purpose of self improvement. In this narrative study of Emily Bronte, the creations of self-reflection include what remains of her personal letters, journals and diary entries, and primarily her essays and her poetry.

One powerful aspect of self-reflection discussed here is its use for self-improvement, as this appears to be an important aspect of Emily Bronte's life. A writer might return to an early version of a piece of poetry or fiction, then read and reflect upon that work, and strive to make

improvements in it. In other instances, a writer might return to an item of personal writing such as a journal or diary entry with the sole purpose of finding ways to improve personally or to look for evidence that personal or professional advancement has already occurred. This seems to be one of the motives behind Emily Bronte's letters known as the "Birthday Diaries," which she wrote within an arrangement with her sister Anne. A thorough look at their content will be discussed later in this paper.

All this leads to the question: "How does someone learn to write well?" Of even greater importance here, "How did Emily Bronte learn to write well?" Walker's (1985) research into writing as reflection reveals the significance of ideas woven together through the reflective practice of writing to record personal and family life experiences. It is by reflecting upon the old and combining such reflection with new ideas that such can be integrated to produce a better understanding and reflection of one's own life and learning. Family influences and daily activities of the Bronte family combine to offer a glimpse at how Emily might have learned to write well.

Family Influences upon Emily Bronte

Much biographical research has already been written about Emily Bronte's family life. Although I do not want to merely retell this well-known history, a brief consideration of what we know about the Bronte family's life is necessary in order to better understand what influences Emily Bronte may have felt from her family, lifestyle, and customs.

Psychologist Vygotsky's research shows that children develop a strong interest in the world around them by the age of three. They are drawn to the adult influences around them as they long to become adults themselves (Kozulin 2003). One might then ask, "What happens when the primary adult in a child's life is no longer present?" Such was the situation for Emily Bronte.

At only one year and nine months old, Emily Bronte moved with her family to the rural town of Haworth. Emily's youngest sister, Anne, was not yet three months old. The Bronte family had lived in Haworth for less than a year when Emily's mother fell seriously ill. Less than a year after that time, her mother died. Emily Bronte was three years old.

The personal pain felt by each of the six Bronte children can only be imagined. It matters little that death at a young age was a common occurrence of nineteenth century rural England. Diseases such as typhus and cholera were epidemic in Haworth during the 1800s. More than forty percent of the people born in Haworth during this time period died before they were six years old. The average adult age at death was twenty-five (Whitehead 2007). Statistics concerning the sanitary conditions in Haworth at that time reveal a poor water supply and inadequate sewage disposal. According to one expert writing for the Bronte Society, "What Babbage [health inspector] exposed in Haworth, other inspectors . . . were also exposing in neighbouring industrial communities . . . conditions in Haworth were no worse than in neighbouring industrial communities" (Whitehead 2007, 185). Such knowledge, however, does

not lessen the sense of loss that must have been felt by the Bronte children and their father over the death of Maria Bronte at the young age of thirty-eight.

The Bronte children were now left to comfort one another. Their mother's sister, Elizabeth, who had come to help out when her sister had first fallen ill, stayed on to assist the Reverend Bronte with the care of his six children. She also taught the children. There was now a conflict in religious beliefs present within the Bronte household. Emily's father, Patrick Bronte, belonged to the Church of England and was part of its evangelical wing. As the town's pastor, his children were subject to his preaching, attending Sunday school, and listening to his sermons. Patrick Bronte also wrote many of his sermons, which were published. One such sermon emphasizes the need for "personal commitment to Christ," and the need for each individual "to live, as well as preach, his word" (qtd. Alexander & Smith 2006, 123). Thus Emily was taught that the only source for true happiness was religion and that sinners had to be punished. Yet Patrick Bronte followed a more middle-of-the-road outlook than some members of the Church of England, emphasizing repentance that would lead to sinners being granted eternal life, rather than dwelling upon some form of eternal punishment.

Emily was also under the influence of her Aunt Elizabeth Branwell. She appears to have taught Emily and the other Bronte children Methodist hymns and prayers, as well as short passages from Methodists magazines that she received while living with the Bronte family (Hanson 1967). Aunt Branwell's religious beliefs were different from those of Emily's father, as she was a Wesleyan Methodist. Aunt Branwell believed in hellfire and damnation, thus taking a harsher view of the future and eternity than the religious teachings of Emily's father. Patrick Bronte believed in the value of self-reflective practice. If a sinner was to be saved, he must first reflect upon his life and his actions. He would then need to take this self-reflection one step further and put self-improvement into action by repenting and making life changes. This is the nature of self-reflective learning theory: using a reflective analysis of one's self in order to bring about future changes and improvement.

Emily's first experience with school outside of her home was one filled with pain. The four oldest Bronte girls were sent to the Cowan Bridge School, first Maria and Elizabeth together, with Charlotte and Emily following a few months later. Emily was just a few months past her sixth birthday at the time. Emily also fell under the religious beliefs of the Reverend W. Carus Wilson, who founded the Cowan Bridge School where Emily was a student, along with her three elder sisters, until sickness and death brought the four young Bronte's back home. Wilson taught Calvinism, a branch of the evangelical religion of Patrick Bronte. However, Wilson seemed to have been more extreme in his "predicted hellfire for unrepentant children" (Alexander & Smith 2006, 424).

The school had been established to serve the children of poor ministers, so it was not of the highest standards. The school register describes Emily Bronte as aged six and a half. "Reads very prettily, and works a little" (qtd. in Shorter 1969, 69). Maria and Elizabeth Bronte fell seriously ill while at school, moving Emily's father to send for all of his daughters to return home, but not in time to save them all. Maria and Elizabeth returned home first. It is impossible

to imagine the sorrow and long-lasting effects upon Emily when she returned home to discover that her eldest sister, Maria, had died almost one month earlier. And the pain only deepened as Elizabeth died next, only two weeks after Emily's return to Haworth. Six years and ten months old, having survived the death of her mother and her two sisters having just died would most certainly be either devastating or terrifying to any young girl. How does one move on after such loss?

Cultural and Social Influences

It may be impossible to separate cultural and social influences from the family life considered earlier in this paper. Life in Haworth definitely did comprise the primary culture and society surrounding Emily Bronte. It is helpful to turn to the description of Haworth and its life-style as expressed by Elizabeth Gaskell in her biography of Charlotte Bronte. She uses the words of Charlotte to express a common Haworth saying of the time: "Keep a stone in thy pocket sever year; turn it, and keep it seven year longer, that it may be ever ready to thine hand when thine enemy draws near" (qtd. Gaskell 1857, 11-12). This saying shows the nature of grudge keeping and even hatred so common among the rural inhabitants of Yorkshire England in the 1800s and before. Making friends was thus difficult at best, and keeping away enemies was even harder.

General characteristics of local inhabitants are referred to as rough. Gaskell speaks of inhospitality and love of bloody sports such as cock fights being entertained by even religious leaders in days of the Brontes. She says the beliefs and habits of the rural areas could be considered "eccentric compared to the tales of positive violence and crime" (1957, 21) lingering in older folktales of Yorkshire life. Some forms of entertainment even led to death for viewers, with other viewers witnessing such deaths and being little moved to assist (Gaskell 1857, 21). Emily Bronte grew up in an area where knowledge of such accepted violence was well known. Whitehead (2007) credits the writing skills of all the Bronte children to their surroundings, including the above-mentioned violence.

The Brontë children honed their writing skills in their moorland play and when, in her preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte describes the moors as the "wild workshop," she is acknowledging the influence of that special place on Emily's, and, by extension, all of their writing careers. The moors are a local influence on the Brontës' work that has always been acknowledged—even celebrated. But the influences of other aspects of Haworth are also evident in their work—influences that are less frequently acknowledged—and never celebrated." (Whitehead 2007, 189)

Evidence of Writing Practices

Do lifestyle and personality combine to produce a successfully creative individual? This section of evidence must be combined with the earlier consideration of family life as it is within the contents of diaries and letters written by family members and friends that much is revealed about the every day activities of the Bronte household. One area of evidence cannot be separated from another. What is revealed about family life comes through the creative self-reflections of Emily Bronte as well as other members of the Bronte family. Thus looking for answers to one question

will undoubtedly lead to consideration of the same materials and examples used to analyze other areas of discussion. The only self-reflective activities that might be taken on their own merit are Emily's "Birthday Diaries," devoirs or essays from Belgium, and her poetry.

In a letter written to Elizabeth Gaskell on July 24, 1855, Patrick Bronte says of his children, "When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own" (qtd. in Hopkins 1968, 85). He adds the comment that he saw within Emily, and his other children, "signs of rising talent" (qtd. in Hopkins 1968, 85).

A week later he again wrote to Mrs. Gaskell testifying further to the fact that, even when young, his children were writers. "Sometimes also they wrote little works of fiction they called miniature novels" (qtd. in Hopkins 1968, 85). The often written about beginning of the recorded Bronte writings must include the much recorded experiences surrounding the box of toy soldiers. According to Charlotte Bronte, writing began early for all the children starting with the gift of these toy soldiers from Patrick Bronte to his only son, Branwell. This happened in 1826 when Emily would have been eight and a half years old. The twelve toy soldiers were divided amongst the children, given names, and then stories begun about each. Each child began to write about his or her men, creating countries for each and later writing cooperatively. Charlotte and Branwell wrote about Angria, while Emily and Anne wrote the Gondal sagas.

Charlotte Bronte describes a typical day at home for her, which might offer a glimpse into what could have been typical to Emily as well. Writing to her friend Ellen Nussey, Charlotte says, "In the morning from nine o'clock till half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters and draw, then we walk till dinner, after dinner I sew until tea time, and after tea I either read, write, or do a little fancy work or draw, as I please" (qtd. Bentley 1969, 41).

As the three girls began to write more seriously at home, they would reflect upon their writing, then seek feedback from one another. "When my daughters were at home they read their manuscripts to each other and gave their candid opinions of what was written" (letter of June 20, 1855, qtd. Hopkins 1968, 85).

The "Birthday Papers" of Emily, sometimes referred by researchers as "Diary Papers," were creations by and between Emily and her sister Anne. It is within these papers that we hear about their combined writing efforts in creating and continuing the "Gondal" stories. Sadly, none of the original copies of the Gondal juvenilia remain, so any information about them is related second-hand only, by both authors, as well as their sister Charlotte. The four remaining "Birthday Papers" offer the first-hand look into the lives and writing of both Emily and Anne that makes them invaluable as historical records.

A good description of Bronte home-life is provided by Emily's own words in her paper of 1841. "I am seated in the dining-room, have just concluded tidying our desk boxes, writing this document" (qtd. in Spark 1966, 90). She tells her audience that her aunt is reading *Blackwood's Magazine* to her father. One of the Bronte's neighbors, Jonas Drive, lent the Bronte family back issues of *Blackwood's Magazine* (Glen 2002, 39). This magazine provided

information about cultures and society outside of Haworth. As such a source of news and current developments, Blackwood's could have influenced Emily as she grew.

A second magazine which was read by the Bronte family was *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*. This magazine came into the Bronte household once they stopped receiving *Blackwood's Magazine*. Glen (2002) believes that both magazines, which were popular in middle class households in the 1820s and 30s, printed articles about writers that were similar to the stories or plays later written by the Bronte children (Glen 2002, 45). These periodicals placed writers and readers on the same level, encouraging readers to believe that they could become professional writers. This was contrary to many nineteenth century beliefs that only those writers who were already proven successful and were already well known in literary circles could hope for success. Both *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Fraser's* encouraged literary careers for their readers, as it was the readers who were the important market for these magazines (Glen 2002, 47).

It might be important to note that Blackwood's backed the Tories and often printed some very harsh satirical attacks on published figures and authors of the day (Glen 2002, 47). The owner and editor, William Blackwood, had to appear in court for libel on many occasions. *Fraser's* magazine was designed after the format of Blackwood's. It also personally encouraged new young authors, even taking some of them on as apprentices. This would make the possibility of becoming a professional writer something believable and attainable in the minds of Emily Bronte and her siblings (Glen 2002, 50).

After writing about *Blackwood's Magazine* being read to her father, Emily also speaks in her "Birthday Paper" of her plans to open a school and reveals her reflective thoughts for the future. "This day in four years I wonder whether we shall still be dragging on in our present condition or established to our hearts' content. Time will show" (qtd. Spark 1966, 90). Her hopes for self-improvement are clearly expressed for she, Charlotte, and Anne to be "seated" in a "pleasant seminary," and to be debt free (qtd. Spark 1966, 91).

Emily and Anne will still be writing, or reading at least, as she reflects upon she and Anne going into the garden to share in reading the very letter she is then writing. Her desires are for life to become even better than imagined or expressed in her current writing. Emily also lets the reader in on her Gondal writings, expressing some worry over their "threatening state," but adding that such writings are still continuing in 1841. All Princes and Princesses are mentioned as remaining at their Palaces of her creation (Spark 1966, 91).

Emily speaks of having "a good many books on hand," but that her progress with them is slow. She must mean books that she is writing as her words continue, saying that she has written a "new regularity paper" (qtd. Spark 1966, 92). Her letter closes with words for Anne to stay courageous.

A look into Anne's twin "Birthday Paper" is helpful here. She confirms their continued writing of the Gondal stories spoken of by Emily in her letter. Anne too expresses some doubts over the future of such stories. "How will it be when we open this paper and the one Emily has

written? I wonder whether the Gondaland will still be flourishing, and what will be their condition” (qtd. Spark 1966, 92).

Four years pass before Emily’s next “Birthday” letter, as planned by she and Anne. This 1845 letter is written shortly after she and Anne have read the previous “Birthday” note written in 1841, and Emily reflects upon the progress and set-backs of the previous four years. This is self-reflective learning theory in practice. Some might argue that any diary or journal writing uses reflection, and that is correct. That is why such personal writings are listed in this paper as one means for self-reflection and as one example of self-reflective creative projects. The Bronte plans to open a school of their own has been reflected upon, the plans dropped, and then the plans started once again. Emily says the plans were replaced one time with the educational plans that she and Charlotte took to Brussels.

Emily’s letter speaks of the Gondal stories she and Anne have been writing for several years. Emily shows her creative and imaginative side as she reflects upon and writes briefly about a trip she and Anne took to York. During their walk home, they pretended to be many of the characters from their Gondal sagas. She speaks of eight different characters [Ronald, Henry, Juliet, Rosabella, Ella, Julian, Catherine, and Cordelia]. She further shares with her reader that these characters were “escaping” from the “palaces of instruction to join the Royalists” (qtd. in Spark 1966, 121).

Two very important things are written in this letter. 1) Emily says their Gondals “flourish bright as ever.” 2) Emily also acknowledges her own writing of what she calls the “First War,” a new Gondal story she has been writing (qtd. Spark 1966, 121).

As she reminds the reader that their school plans were revived, she then acknowledges that plans did not work out despite letters being mailed and prospectuses being printed. Emily says that now she no longer “desires” to have a school (qtd. in Spark 1966, 21). Reflection enters Emily’s wants for her future as she writes of being currently content and busy, and that she is making the most of her present situation. But she longs for a future with the concern, or “fidgetiness,” that she won’t be able to do all she wished to do. She isn’t sad or discouraged, however, just wanting to make the most of her life.

Reflection of a personal note that offers little about her writing, are Emily’s details of the family animals that have come and gone during the four years since her last “Birthday” note was written. Perhaps most notable in her list of current “work on hand” is writing. Writing was an ever present activity accomplished between peeling potatoes, picking currants, and ironing clothing (qtd. Spark 1966, 122).

Anne’s companion “Birthday” note deserves attention as well as she corroborates Emily’s statements of the school plans being dropped, reconsidered, and dropped once more for good. Anne speaks of Emily’s “writing the Emperor Julius’ Life” and explains a bit more than Emily did about their Gondal stories (qtd. Spark 1966, 123). Anne tells the reader that Emily read some of the story out loud to her and most likely Charlotte too. If the girls followed their earlier custom, there was much discussion and reflection upon the piece. Anne expresses her desire to hear the rest of the story and shares news that Emily has also been writing poetry.

Emily has not shared her poetry and did not even mention such poetry writing in her own “Birthday” letter. Anne, however, says simply, “I wonder what it is about?” (qtd. Spark 1966, 123).

Anne goes on to speak of her own part in the writing of a piece from their joint Gondal project. She writes that they have not yet finished writing “our Gondal Chronicles,” started three years earlier (Spark 1966, 123). Her glimpse into the Gondals is appreciated. Whereas Emily spoke of the Gondals flourishing brightly, Anne says they are “in a sad state” (Spark 1966, 123). Perhaps she is speaking of the story’s plot and not the continuation of her and Emily’s writing project. This is derived from her continued description of the Royalists as nearly overcome by the Republicans, and the “Unique Society” being wrecked on an island (Spark 1966, 123).

Anne’s reflections upon the Brontes’ futures echo those of Emily with concern over future writing and family welfare; although Anne’s reflections do not sound of “best wishes” for all as do Emily’s. Anne merely hopes for the best, desiring that nothing will change for the worse (Spark 1966, 124). These letters of and between Emily and Anne Bronte are of great value to any Bronte scholar. They represent the largest part of what remains from Emily’s own hands, revealing personal feelings, every day writing activities, and examples of reflection over life and writing in practice.

The “Birthday Papers” are definitely evidence of self-reflection. Emily says in part, “Anne and I say I wonder what we shall be like and what we shall be and where we shall be if all goes on well in the year 1847” (qtd. Spark 1966, 92). The evidence contained within these letters closely matches Ross’s 1989 definition of reflective theory as it applies to learning and education when he stresses that reflection “involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility” (qtd. Spark 1966, 22) for any choices that an individual makes. Grabove (1997) supports this idea that self-reflective learning, or transformative learning as he refers to it, is a personal undertaking. “Transformative learning cannot be taught; it is the learner who experiences transformative learning” (Grabove 1997, 90). Both Emily and Anne hoped their lives would improve and searched for ways to bring about such improvements.

Further Education

Self improvement was important to all three Bronte women. Charlotte says of Emily’s education prior to her having been sent to Roe Head at the age of seventeen that “Her previous life, with the exception of a single half-year had been passed in the absolute retirement of a village parsonage, amongst the hills bordering Yorkshire and Lancashire” (Bronte 1850, xxi). Emily thus appears to have been primarily self-educated, in surroundings that were comfortable and familiar to her. It is clear from many of Charlotte Bronte’s letters that both she and Emily tried to find ways to improve themselves, especially as teachers and writers. One such project they both undertook was the educational trip to Brussels, mentioned in Emily’s 1841 “Birthday” diary. Charlotte speaks mostly of this experience in her letters to her friend Ellen Nussey. When Elizabeth Gaskell (1857) later wrote her biography of Charlotte Bronte, she spoke of the Belgium experience’s purpose for both Charlotte and Emily. “They wanted learning. They came

for learning. They would learn” (Gaskell 1857, 223). Emily and Charlotte became students at the Pensionnat Heger in 1842. This was a huge step for Emily Bronte, as her two previous attempts at formalized education away from home had not proven to be positive ones. Emily had lasted only three months at school when she attended Roe Head in 1835. Charlotte, who was then teaching at Roe Head, felt that her sister could not endure the set routine of school life and would die if not allowed to return home.

Both girls’ reflections upon their futures and the hopes of opening a school of their own, led them to accept the need for further learning. Charlotte writes of Emily, “After the age of twenty, having meantime studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the Continent” (qtd. Lonoff 1996, xxiii). While attending school in Belgium, both Emily and Charlotte took lessons in French, German, and music. Comments written about their work by their instructor, Monsieur Heger, would suggest that their writings “show an exceptional understanding and feeling for language” (qtd. Bentley 1969, 74). Monsieur Heger compared Emily’s mind to that of a man, a comparison that would be interpreted as a compliment at that time.

Several of Emily’s essays from Brussels are still in existence. These essays are examples of her homework and class work assignments, originally written in French for Monsieur Heger. As such, these essays, or *devoirs*, offer a glimpse at the writing and creativity of Emily Bronte at the age of twenty-three. Nine assignments have been preserved; some contain notes, and some offer additional drafts. Editor Sue Lonoff says in the preface of this collection, “nine essays make a difference to the record” (Lonoff 1996, xiv).

In order to read Emily Bronte’s essays as a means for understanding her use of self-reflective learning and as an opportunity to view her writing abilities as they progress, means relying on the translator [Lonoff] for accuracy, unless one is an expert in French. Emily was writing assignments in the beginning French language of a student. Her essay titled “The Cat” was written in May 1842. Translator Lanoff describes Emily’s writing: “The rhetorical patterns are clean and consistent: effect follows cause, examples illustrate ideas, and conclusion reflect back on openings” (Lanoff 1996, 163). Trusting that this analysis is accurate, it would mean that Emily Bronte was showing patterns of good writing five years before the publication of her novel and even in a foreign language.

A second essay called “The Butterfly” was also written in May of the same year. It appears to reflect the teaching from Aunt Branwell, who was a Wesleyan Methodist. This essay follows the pattern of a sermon by Wesley called “The General Deliverance” (Lanoff 1996, 189). Here Wesley preaches that the majority of creatures can only preserve their own lives “by destroying their fellow creatures” (qtd. in Lanoff 1996, 190). If this is the case, then Emily definitely spent time reflecting upon what Wesley taught and how such could be applied to her beliefs and to her life. In Emily’s essay she also claims that all life forms exist by causing death to other creatures. She follows with the story of the narrator who picks a beautiful flower only to find an ugly caterpillar inside it. She throws down the flower and crushes the caterpillar underfoot. A butterfly then appears from the sky. Emily creates a comparison of the ugly

caterpillar as the start or origin of the butterfly with the many griefs felt by mankind from God as the seed or origin of the eternity that would be initiated through death.

Other writing assignments include two letters and some essays that have been strongly edited by Emily's instructor. While it is thrilling to read what Emily wrote as a student, such writings offer only a limited understanding of what reflection upon her work might have contributed to Emily's writing abilities. According to her sister Charlotte, Emily was not happy during her time as a student. In her *Memoir of Emily*, published in 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte says, "She was never happy till she carried her hand-won knowledge back to the remote English village" [Haworth] (qtd. in Wise & Symington, 1989, p. xxiii). Emily Bronte's poetry offers another means for viewing her reflective practices in action.

Poetry

There were only a few reviews written publicly about the book of poetry published by the three Bronte sisters in 1846. It is quite well known that only two copies of the volume of poetry were actually sold during that year. The fact that positive reviews were printed in three different newspapers, with the first two being very positive about Emily's abilities as a writer, shows the power behind the words of even three unknown authors.

These three reviews are still in existence today and have been preserved by M. Alcott (1974) in *The Brontes: the Critical Heritage*. One anonymous review of the volume of poetry was published in the *Critic* on July 4, 1846 (6-8). The reviewer said that the poems as a whole were "genuine" and worthy to stand up to any judgment of their merits by other reviewers (Alcott 1974, 60). Emily's poems were given high praise, high enough so that the reviewer included three poems in their entirety, stating that they were expressions of "beautiful and original poetry" (Alcott 1974, 61).

The suggestion that this poetry is "good, wholesome, refreshing, vigorous poetry . . . expressed in true language of poetry" gives credit to Emily as a talented writer. The review continues offering praise: "The presence of more genius than it was supposed this utilitarian age had devoted to the loftier exercises of intellect" (Alcott 1974, 60).

A second anonymous review published July 4, 1846, in the *Athenaeum* (682) also included one of Emily's poems in its entirety. This would have been considered a compliment to the poet. The reviewer stated that "Hope was but a timid friend" shows originality and is musical in its form (Alcott 1974, 62). Emily's poetry is again praised with the words that it "rises into an inspiration" (Alcott 1974, 61). Emily's writing is also described as "quaint" and that it might contain information that men would like to hear. The conclusion is that Emily's words could one day "reach heights not here attempted" (Alcott 1974, 62). This was high praise for an unknown poet, publishing her first writings under the pseudonym Ellis Bell.

The collection of poems published by the Shakespeare Head Press in 1931 shows, among others, Emily's Gondal poems concerning several Gondal characters. This is of utmost importance as none of her juvenilia is in existence today. These Gondal poems are of interest as they show that Emily took her characters and story lines beyond her Gondal saga and developed

them further in poetic expression and description. When Charlotte Bronte edited *Wuthering Heights* and had it republished in 1850, she included some of Emily's poetry. In her preface to that edition she writes, "Usually it seems a sort of injustice to expose in print the crude thoughts of the unripe mind, the rude efforts of the unpracticed hand; yet I venture to give three little poems of my sister Emily's, written in her sixteenth year" (qtd. in Wise & Symington 1989, xxi).

The comparison of poetry written at the age of sixteen to poems written later in Emily's life, offers insight into her developing writing abilities. Perhaps it's not so much the structure of Emily Bronte's poetry, the majority of which share similar rhyming patterns, but the development of story lines and story telling in these poems that give evidence of an evolving ability to write. Emily herself wrote dates onto many of her poems as recorded in her copy of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, 1846, along with her signature and titles for several untitled pieces (Wise & Symington 1989, 6).

An example of reflection and reworking is seen in an untitled poem written on July 12, 1839. The first line of the poem, often considered to be the title when no title is present, is simply "And now the house dog stretched once more" (Wise & Symington 1989, 93). The poem then unfolds in an organized fashion, which shows Emily capable of setting the scene and telling a story even through the brevity of a poem. This poem is written as one long stanza of over forty lines. Emily does follow a pattern with every two lines rhyming, except for two lines nearly half way through the poem. Within this poem she creates an aura of unrest which settles over her host and his family, after the possible recognition of an uninvited guest. A copy of the poem in its entirety is included at the end of this paper.

There is no problem for the reader to feel and understand this feeling of uneasiness as it grows in volume throughout the poem. The atmosphere changes from the opening lines of tranquility as the dog stretches upon the floor while the children are at play. The feeling then turns to one of gloom and horror, until the strange guest turns and leaves (Wise & Symington, 1989, 93-94).

Several facsimiles of Emily's original poems in manuscript form are included in this volume edited by Wise and Symington (1989). Such manuscripts allow the reader to see Emily's tiny handwriting and her editing of several poems either to add further words or to make changes in previous wording. The manuscript of "The Philosopher," originally written in 1845, shows words which were changed in the poem as it was later published in the 1846 volume of poetry by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. The original crossed out words are too small to truly be deciphered by the reader of the facsimiles printed in the 1981 edition of *The Shakespeare Head Collection of Emily and Anne's poetry*. The reader can, however, see that the new wording differs from the original. How thrilling to view the actual handwriting of Emily Bronte and see her reflective work and changes in progress.

The first poem from her manuscripts is dated November 1838. Emily returned to transcribe this poem, with changes, in February 1844. "Land Without the Wind was Roaring" is reminiscent of Catherine and Heathcliff upon the moors and Penistone Crag of *Wuthering Heights*. Emily's returning to this poem after six years fits an earlier definition of self-reflection

in order to improve a previous piece of creative writing, a self-reflective project. This poem is clear in its feelings and the setting which the author wished to convey. It speaks of skylarks singing despite the wind and cold rain (Wise and Symington 1989, 72-74). A copy of this poem in its entirety is included at the end of this paper.

Another poem which is also evident in Emily Bronte's manuscripts is "A little while, a little while." This poem was also written in late 1838 and edition by Emily in 1844. "Fair sinks" was written a year later in the summer of 1839. The manuscript for this poem shows two stanzas crossed out by Emily when she returned to edit it in 1844. There are also word changes, and even the opening two lines have been crossed out and rewritten after five years absence. Such examples of self-reflection do offer insight into Emily Bronte's writing abilities and their evolution.

Having written over one hundred and twenty poems, which have also been preserved, shows Emily Bronte to have been a prolific writer. Most of her poetry shares the same four-lined stanza format. Most of her poems also share the same pattern of rhyme, either with every other line rhyming or every group of two lines rhyming. There are, though, longer pieces written in longer story-line format. Short poems of only six lines written in 1836 evolved into full stories such as "The Night wind," which has over fifty-two lines and was written in 1840 (Wise and Symington 1989, 113-115). "The wanderer from the fold" is thought to be Emily Bronte's last poem, written in 1848. This poem speaks of mourning the loss of a loved one and was written within months of Emily's death (Wise and Symington 1989, 180-181).

Conclusion and Call for Future Research

Critics acknowledge the writing prowess of Emily Bronte, which resulted in her writing *Wuthering Heights*. It was not the purpose of this paper to analyze *Wuthering Heights*; however, this should be covered in future research and future papers, as this is necessary in order to fully appreciate the end result of Bronte's use of self-reflection in developing her artistic nature and creative writing skills. A more detailed examination and analysis of her poetry is also needed. More than one hundred of Emily Bronte's poems have been preserved and should be researched and analyzed in greater detail than has been done in this short paper. Such research should reveal further evidence of Emily Bronte's reflection and editing of her own work. The writing style and subject matter could also point to her development as a creative writer.

Bronte critic Lord David Cecil has shown in his literary evaluation *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*, that Emily Bronte was believed to have been the greatest of all the Bronte writers. Emphasis is placed on Emily's "firm grip on the actual" shown in *Wuthering Heights* and "vivid particularity" in her use of descriptive details (Alcott 1974, 48). *Wuthering Heights* is believed by many scholars to show Emily Bronte's creative ability to combine realism and romanticism. As such, this novel deserves to be part of a future literary analysis where the novel itself reveals Emily Bronte as a self-reflective writer and scholar.

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“And Now the House-dog Stretched Once More”

And now the house-dog stretched once more
His limbs upon the glowing floor;
The children half (?) resumed their play,
Though from the warm hearth scared away.
The good-wife left her spinning-wheel,
And spread with smiles the evening mean;
The shepherd places a seat and pressed
To their poor fare his unknown guest.
And he unclasped his mantle now,
And raised the covering from his brow;
Said, ‘Voyagers by land and by sea
Were seldom feasted daintly’;
And cheered his host by adding stern (?)
He’d no refinement to unlearn.
A silence settled on the room;
The cheerful welcome sank to gloom;
But not those words, though cold or high,
So froze their hospitable joy.
No-there was something in his face,
Some nameless thing they could not trace,
And something in his voice’s tone
Which turned their blood as chill as stone.
The ringlets of his long black hair
Fell o’er a cheek most ghastly fair.
Youthful he seemed, but worn as they
Who spend too much their youthful day.
When his glance dropped (?), twas hard to quell
Unbidden feelings’ hidden swell;
And Pity scarce her tears could hide,
So sweet that brow with all its pride.
But when upraised his eye would dart
An icy shudder through his heart,
Compassion changed to horror then,
And fear to meet that gaze again.
It was not hatred’s tiger-glare,
Nor the wild anguish of despair;
It was not restless (?) misery
Which mocks at friendship’s sympathy;
No, -- lightening all unearthly shone
Deep in that dark eye’s circling zone, –
Such withering lightening as we deem
None but a spirit’s look may beam;
And glad they were when he turned away
And wrapped him in his mantle grey,
And laid (?) his head upon his arm,
And veiled from view their (sic) basilisk charm.

Emily Jane Bronte July 12, 1839.

“Loud Without the Wind was Roaring”

Loud without the wind was roaring
Through the waned autumnal sky,
Drenching wet, the cold rain pouring
Spoke of stormy winters nigh.

All too like the dreary eve
Sighed within repining grief-
Sighed at first-but signed not long,
Sweet-How softly swift it came!
Wild words of an ancient song,
Unrefined, without a name.

‘It was spring, for the skylark was singing.’
Those words they awakened a spell;
They unlocked a deep fountain whose springing
Nor absence nor distance can quell.

In the gloom of a cloudy November
They uttered the music of May;
They kindled the perishing ember
Into fervour that could not decay.

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-rivers side!

It is swelled with the first snowy weather’
The rocks they are icy and hoar,
And darker waves round the long heather,
And the fern-leaves are sunny no more.

There are not yellow-stars on the mountain;
The blue-bells have long died away
From the brink of the moss-bedded fountain,
From the side of the wintery brae—

But lovelier than cornfields 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.

‘It was morning, the bright sun was beaming.’
How sweetly that brought back to me
The time when nor labour nor dreaming
Broke the sleep of the happy and free!
But blithely we rose as the dusk heaven
Was melting to amber and blue,
And swift were the wings to our feet given
While we traversed the meadows of dew.

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 sky-lark 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.

It was scattered and stunted, and told me
That soon even that would be gone.
It whispered, 'The grim walls enfold me
I have bloomed in my last summer's sun.'

But not the loved music, whose waking
Makes the soul of the Swiss die away,
Has a spell more adored and heart-breaking
Than in its half-blighted bells lay.

The spirit that bent 'neath its power,
How it longer, how it burned to be free!
If I could have wept in that hour
Those tears had been heaven to me.

Well, well, the sad minutes are moving
Though loaded with trouble and pain,
And sometime the loved and the loving
Shall meet on the mountains again!

Emily Jane Bronte November 11, 1838

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