

Primal Inspiration
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Choosing an inspiring artist, of whatever medium, for a biographical paper has proven to be quite a daunting endeavor. As a writer, a poet at heart, it was with great thoughtful meandering that I was finally able to rein in the brain cells and at least settle on the medium. I convinced myself, for the sake of time and sanity that it should be on a writer, although the decision was not without turmoil. My true inspiration and who has propelled me to follow and realize my dreams was a lover. He was, is, my shadow, my soul mate, my adversary, my friend and archenemy. Alas, I would not be objective enough to produce any thing other than erotica, lame romance or a purely psychological case study into both our psychosis. Putting that aside, I began the self-questioning as to who gave me the desire to become a writer and to actually believe that I could? That distinction goes to only one, and that is Stephen King. His style is so very simple; his stories, while fantastic in plot, are set in normal towns with average people. Whenever I read his work I think, "I can write like this". His history tells of how he just wrote what he liked, submitted and struck gold. My reaction on learning of this was, "A normal guy. If he can, why can't I?" The extensive critique on King is that he is a cookie cutter writer, however he did not start writing for a specific market; he wrote what he loved to read and he was lucky enough that the market became popular with him at the forefront. He has never strayed from the genre; he writes his way and people either love it or hate it. Should he feel guilty? I think not.

However, if I am to be honest to true inspiration I must go back further, to the author(s) who fist pinched my spinal nerve and paralyzed me until the story was finished;

to those that transported me to strange, beautiful lands with tragically emotional yet realistic people. The ones who drove me back to the shelves for more, to search out others who do the same. The consensus is that to be a good writer you must be an avid reader, so my original, primal inspiration came from those who made me thirst and then attempted richly to quench that thirst. Hence a biographical paper on the Brontë sisters. Emily and Charlotte. Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre. I do not recall which I read first only that it led to the next, then to their poetry and then to submerge myself forever in the ecstasy of reading, where this mortal is lifted “out of ordinary reality and into a higher world” (Johnson, page vi.). Copies of both are on my bookshelves. When I realize my dream, that is astonishingly similar to Jane Eyre’s surroundings, of having a book lined mahogany library with a red velvet cushioned window seat draped in heavy velvet curtains and overlooks a lake or pond, they will be the books which that seat is christened with. When I first began my research, I knew nothing of the Brontë’s so it took me by surprise to see such vivid parallels between them and myself, which led to the contemplation of whether I was so greatly influenced by them at such a young age, or if I was only a like soul that subconsciously related. In the article titled Intuition and Creativity by A. C. Bohart he writes, “it is the tacit, intuitive, experiential picking up of new meanings that is the ultimate basis of creativity” (296) which convinces me that in reading the Brontë’s I was touched on a deeper level of my psyche thereby unconsciously conceptualizing their view of life. Whichever the case, when Julia Wallace writes in her review of The Bronte Myth of the Bronte’s that they were “self consciously steeped in a literary culture”, “small, dark and lonely”, “often unhappy” and “immersed in elaborate fantasy worlds” she could just as easily spoken of me (1).

Emily Brontë was born July 30, 1818 on the Yorkshire Moors, the fifth of six children, to Mrs. Brontë, who died just three years later, and Patrick Brontë, a preacher. There is much written about Emily, yet very little known, consequently, the extensive analysis is pure speculation. She lost two sisters and a mother within the first seven years of her life, so when she wrote of isolation and exile, even though packaged in male/female romance which she had no experience in, she wrote from deep emotion, which is also a part of experience. Critiques and perceptions of her novel Wuthering Heights abound, but one I found most interesting was that the book was about “infanticide and sadism” (qtd. in O’Neil, 95) and that she wrote of “a world where the young and weak are in constant peril” (qtd. in O’Neil, 96); I am sure that her childhood impressed her in just that way. The storyline of strong children who raise themselves and are laden with responsibility resulting in weak adults is no secret in today’s world. An earmark of a good writer and a good story is a universal theme that endures. Emily Brontë did just that in Wuthering Heights when she wrote about pain being an elementary part of life and that there is a bond in that pain through rebellion. One need only look at the impoverished youth of today to understand the constant truth in this.

Emily followed her four sisters to the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge in 1824. By mid 1825 they had all returned, but only Charlotte, Emily and Anne lived through the ordeal. They all began their writing careers in the same way – by composing elaborate fantasy worlds with dramatic characters, first as oral literature and then scrawled in tiny handwriting on hundreds of secret pages. The story is that in June of 1826, Mr. Bronte returned home with presents that included a box of wooden soldiers for

his only son Branwell. When Branwell came to the girls' bedroom to show them, they were immediately animated. Charlotte wrote:

“I snatched up one and exclaimed: ‘this is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke.’ When I said this Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came in she said one should be hers...Emily’s was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him ‘Gravey’. Anne’s was a queer thing, much like herself, and we called him ‘Waiting-Boy.’ Branwell chose his and called him Bounaparte.” (qtd. in Benvenuto, 5)

I am amazed at the critics who find this to be a sad and tragic story. What I see, as a mother, are close and loving siblings. There is no bickering or whining over whose toys they are. There is only excitement and imagination, which is a wonderful thing in childhood, and even more so in adulthood. The fact that this imaginative venture would consume the majority of them for most of their lives is possibly a sad and tragic story, but not the origination scene.

Charlotte was educated at Roe Head School and when she finished, she taught Emily and Anne. In 1835, Charlotte became a teacher at Roe Head. This position included free education for her sisters, which they had no alternative but to accept, since Mr. Brontë’s extra income was to go toward educating Branwell. However, Emily was overwhelmed with such homesickness that she became drastically ill and returned home after only three months. She accepted the household responsibilities, continued to educate herself and wrote extensively of that fantasy world they had created as children. She combined so easily scenes of daily activities with imaginary events that one wonders if she knew the difference. Personally, I am sure she knew the distinction, just chose not to

separate the two. She leaves this security in 1834 to attend school once again at Law Hill, however it did not last the year. She writes of being restricted and thoroughly oppressed, so she returns to the moors where her spirit is happy and free.

It is during this time that her creativity blossoms. Even though she is alone with her father and her brother who is now an alcoholic, dismissed from school and fired from a job for an affair with the employer's wife, she was full of "animal spirits and cheer" (Benvenuto, 18). Charlotte returns from her teaching position drained and depressed in 1836, and Emily nurses her as well. Together again, they roam the moors, cook, clean and write. Emily wrote over seventy poems and completely developed the childhood fantasy began that morning years earlier. It is at this time of what some would call burden, but what Emily received as freedom, that she began her greatest and most critiqued work, Wuthering Heights, which she completes in a few months. Charlotte completes Jane Eyre at the same time, which published first only because Charlotte is more aggressive; also, possibly because Emily wrote for no other reason than desire. They are both published under pseudonyms to detract attention and are both widely analyzed. The harsh reviews traumatize Emily, who writes no further. In 1848, her brother, whom she has become the sole friend and confidante for, dies; and at his interment, Emily catches a severe cold that will ultimately kill her. She refuses to see a doctor, whether out of obstinacy or fulfillment of a death wish, and she succumbs at the young age of thirty-five.

In her poetry, as in her "fiction" and obviously her life, she believed that peace and harmony came with death. How ironic that one of her contemporaries, Thackeray, would have written what so completely summed up Emily Bronte's life: "To endure is greater

than to dare; to tire out hostile fortune; to be daunted by no difficulty, to keep heart when all have lost it; to go through intrigue spotless; to forego even ambition when the end is gained...who can say this is not greatness.” (Thackeray, Ch. 92)

Charlotte Brontë was born 1816, the third daughter of Rev. Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria. As mentioned previously, Charlotte was the more traveled and experienced of the Brontë sisters, however not without great emotional distress. She was at her happiest, as was Emily, at home on the Yorkshire moors. Jane Eyre, as Wuthering Heights, received much criticism regarding the brutal, “crude and unwomanly” writing style. (qtd. in Wallace, 2) Reviews read: “coarse, brutal, revolting, and even anti-Christian” (Wallace, 2), which drove Charlotte to demand a preface to Wuthering Heights after Emily’s death. It stated that they were “naïve artists responding only to the dictates of nature, rather than knowing and ambitious writers who had produced consciously constructed novels.” (qtd. in Wallace, 2) Having read both novels, albeit at a very young age, yet reviewing with a semi-trained writers eye, I believe the catalyst in both was passionate inspiration. When read in youth, and reread as an adult, I encountered the exactness of love, jealousy, desire, morality and hope; all written before, and in the case of Emily, completely devoid of, the physical experience. Charlotte went on to move in literary circles after Emily’s death, and even to marry, however unsatisfying it was. Yet, she too seemingly succumbed wantonly to death at just thirty-eight.

In conclusion, I categorize Emily and Charlotte Brontë, as well as myself, as “romanticists”.

Among the characteristic attitudes of Romanticism were the following: a deepened appreciation of the beauties of nature; a general exaltation of emotion

over reason and of the senses over intellect; a turning in upon the self and a heightened examination of human personality and its moods and mental potentialities; a preoccupation with the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure in general, and a focus on his passions and inner struggles; a new view of the artist as a supremely individual creator, whose creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to formal rules and traditional procedures; an emphasis upon imagination as a gateway to transcendent experience and spiritual truth; an obsessive interest in folk culture, national and ethnic cultural origins, and the medieval era; and a predilection for the exotic, the remote, the mysterious, the weird, the occult, the monstrous, the diseased, and even the satanic.

(Piach, 1)

This definition talks to every thing the critics wrote about the Brontë sisters and it would only be natural since they grew up with the great Romantic novelists of the day, such as Sir Walter Scott and Leigh Hunt. I think they embody many of the experiential topics learned in Psychology of Creative, such as Jung's theory of the "collective consciousness", or Zweig and Wolf's Romancing the Shadow, and definitely Johnson's The Worlds of Psychology and Myth where "when a myth transcends mere storytelling and truly comes alive for us, we experience deep psychological understanding" (page x). The Brontë sisters did this in both their writing and in their life, exhibited by the bizarre yet wonderful fantasy world they created, articulated and then wrote. Whether religious or spiritual, the belief is that love transcends all and all will come together in the end, be it in a heaven or the universal atmosphere.

I had not thought much about the Brontë sisters until the need to discover, and elaborate on my true inspiration. It was a startling revelation to see the vivid image of my dream library, as mentioned previously, astonishingly similar to the perfectly painted writings of Jane Eyre. That I subconsciously or intuitively modeled what I believe serenity to be after the sad surroundings of a fictional (?) character read over forty years ago was quite a self-enlightening experience; as well as to read reviews of their work and analysis of their lives. After all the research, I have come full circle in wondering whether my embracing and obvious manifestation of their literary and cultural persona's is due to being exposed to them at such an early age, or if even then I was the tragic, Shakespearean Romantic soaking up their mystical, spiritual reverie. Either way, in just researching their biography they have pinched that spinal nerve yet again. Imbibed, yet parched I may never be sated. This is as primal and as inspiring as it gets. For my tingling spine, my passionate yearning and my love of writing, I thank Emily and Charlotte Bronte.

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